

Strategic overview of public security developments in the period from 2013 to 2020

Cantonal Councillor Hans-Jürg Käser, Chairman, CCJPD:

Domestic and foreign policy environment, economic trend and future of the armed forces

Ladies and Gentlemen,

guests from Finland and Switzerland.

As Chairman of the Conference of Cantonal Ministers for Justice and Police, I would like to follow that fascinating overview of security issues in Finland with a half-hour presentation of the issues we face here in Switzerland, aided by our Secretary General Roger Schneeberger.

Let me begin by looking beyond the topic of security.

We Swiss are devoting a great deal of attention to our relationship with the European Union.

Almost exactly a year ago, Swiss voters approved an initiative against mass immigration by a hair's breadth, with 50.3% voting "yes". The aim of this initiative is for Switzerland to take back control of immigration. To this end, it has mandated the Federal Council to renegotiate the bilateral agreement with the EU on the free movement of persons.

This is understandable, given that the percentage of foreign nationals living in Switzerland has grown from 9.6% to 23.8% over the past 50 years, and since Switzerland is becoming ever more densely populated and its roads and trains ever more crowded.

However, it is extremely difficult in practice as the EU has made it clear that free movement is non-negotiable. If no deal can be agreed on the free movement of persons, the free movement of goods and services hangs in the balance as well, along with all of the other bilateral agreements between Switzerland and the EU, which were concluded together as a package.

Switzerland's Schengen membership was negotiated separately, but the EU might still use it as a bargaining tool, and this would affect cooperation in the field of security.

The referendum sent shockwaves throughout Switzerland. Most people were convinced that the Swiss would vote in the national interest to uphold their international commitments, as they always have in the past. This was not the case on this occasion, and that poses some big problems for us.

Switzerland's uncertain relationship with the EU is detrimental not only to international relations, but also to the Swiss economy. Many companies are concerned about whether Switzerland will continue to be an attractive business location.

It is thus a matter of some urgency for us to clarify quickly and in detail where we stand in relation to the EU and thus to you, our Finnish guests.

We are facing a few other economic difficulties as well.

One example is the strong franc, which is making life hard for our exporters and our tourism industry. If you find yourself with some free time for shopping in St. Gallen on Friday, I am afraid you will discover that prices are some 15-20% higher than they were on your last visit in 2012, because the Swiss National Bank decided to end its policy of buying euros to maintain a minimum exchange rate of CHF 1.20 to the euro.

Added to this is an upcoming corporate tax reform caused by international pressure to change the difference in taxation applied to Swiss and foreign firms, which will also do nothing to make Switzerland a more attractive location.

Moreover, international regulation in the banking sector, which is vital to the Swiss economy, is also set to diminish our country's appeal.

All of these factors taken together make for a rather downbeat economic outlook, which in turn will squeeze the funding available for the federal, cantonal and local governments. This is not great news for those of us working in defence, justice and police, facing ever more demanding tasks with an already limited staff, especially as the field of security is fraught with uncertainty and problems.

In many cases, it is not even clear whom or what we are supposed to be fighting and how. The enemy is no longer easy to identify, and the threat landscape is broad and complex.

This is why Switzerland, like many other countries, is working to redefine what we mean by "defence" and what our armed forces are actually for.

We wanted to present to the parliament a new report on security policy by the national government and a draft law on the future of the armed forces, but this work has unfortunately been delayed. The reason is once again the unpredictability of our beloved system of direct democracy:

A referendum in May 2014 rejected the proposal to buy 22 Gripen jet fighters from Sweden – yet again by an extremely narrow margin, with 53.4% of the vote. This was the first military proposal to be rejected in 20 years, and it caused the government to rethink its plans for the security policy report and for moving the armed forces forward.

The report was postponed until 2016/17, and the proposed legislation on the future of the armed forces has only now reached the parliamentary consultation stage.

What is to become of our militia army?

Defence will remain one of its key tasks, but it will be broadly defined to encompass defending the country against non-government and terrorist threats, as well as protecting critical infrastructures and standards of living for the Swiss population.

Another task will be supporting the civilian authorities. We assume that, as rule, the latter will take charge of the response to natural disasters, terror attacks – including those on the scale recently seen in Paris and Copenhagen – and cyber attacks and will call on the armed forces for assistance.

Whether the Army takes the lead or merely assists the civilian authorities will depend on the scale and intensity of the threat and the civilian authorities' ability to cope with it.

The third focus for the armed forces will be on promoting peace and preventing conflict around the world. Its capabilities need to be increased and enhanced to a significant extent in this regard, but involvement in military action to enforce peace is still out of the question. Switzerland has a tradition of neutrality and does not belong to any defence alliance. This puts it in a better position than other countries when it comes to mediating in international conflicts and crises. Our then President Didier Burkhalter was Chairperson-in-Office of OSCE in 2014, a role in which he was called on as a mediator in the Ukraine crisis, among other things.

Our armed forces are to be downsized to 100,000 people but made more responsive.

New emergency response information will mean that the civilian authorities can expect military assistance within hours when unforeseen events occur, with as many as 35,000 soldiers mobilised in the space of 10 days.

The armed forces also want to make progress in terms of officer training and equipment. It will have CHF 5 billion a year to spend over the next few years.

We expect the reforms that concern responsiveness and better support for civilian authorities to be implemented in the next five years. However, with major defence policy decisions – affecting the Air Force, for instance – still to be made, other reforms are more likely to happen after 2020. I hope that we will meet again once or twice in the meantime so that we can keep you up to date.

Now that I have given you an overview of the domestic and foreign policy environment, the economic trend and the future of the armed forces, I would like to hand over to Roger Schneeberger. He will tell you what has been happening in internal security over the last two years and what lies ahead for the police and the Swiss Security Alliance between now and 2020.

Thank you for listening.