



Factsheet: Neutrality as an instrument

Overview

The current Federal Constitution places neutrality among the competencies of the federal authorities, (Articles 173 paragraph 1 and 185 paragraph 1) and states that the Federal Council and the Federal Assembly take “measures to safeguard [...] the neutrality of Switzerland”.¹ Already when the federal state was established in 1848, neutrality was seen as an instrument, rather than an objective in itself. The Swiss Federal Diet of 1847 rejected the inclusion of neutrality in the purpose clause of the Federal Constitution, and thus as a state objective, with the reasoning that neutrality was a means to an end.² This understanding of “neutrality as an instrument” has since been upheld by the Federal Council and Parliament. Each full and partial revision of the Federal Constitution, including that of 1999, has restated this understanding and refrained from including neutrality as an intrinsic constitutional objective or from defining neutrality in the Constitution in any specific form.

Implementation in Switzerland

Switzerland has been using its neutrality for more than 150 years in order to protect its security, foreign and economic policy interests. In a constantly changing world, the Federal Council has consistently brought neutrality into line with new circumstances. In doing so it has abided by the law of neutrality and has been guided in its practical implementation by the international situation and Switzerland's interests.

Importance for Switzerland and its neutrality

Neutrality contributes to realising those values and interests that have a foreign, security or economic policy dimension. These interests are enshrined in Article 2 of the Federal Constitution:

- Independence and security: Switzerland is connected to the world through close political, economic and cultural ties. Nowadays, independence means shaping relations with other actors in a way to retain the highest-possible degree of decision-making autonomy.
- Common welfare: The common welfare of the country is attained in particular by promoting sustainable economic growth. This requires a strong and stable centre for business, finance and trade that operates within a similarly strong and stable international regulatory framework. Neutrality is a contributing factor to both. At the same time, Switzerland as a business location profits from the reputation of Switzerland as a neutral state.
- Just and peaceful international order: As a state that does not engage in power politics, Switzerland benefits especially from a just and peaceful international order. There are various ways in which it can work to maintain this order. For example, it can adopt sanctions along with other countries, offer its good offices, or engage in peacebuilding.
- Internal cohesion: Neutrality enjoys significant support among the Swiss population and is part of the Swiss identity. This is evidenced by regular surveys (such as the [annual 'Security' study](#) published jointly by the Military Academy at ETH Zurich and the Center for Security Studies (CSS)).³

¹ SR 101.

² See BBl 1994 I 153, p. 211, fn 2.

³ Annual 'Security' study, published jointly by the Military Academy at ETH Zurich and the Center for Security Studies (CSS). In German with summaries in French, Italian and English. ([css.ethz.ch > Publications > 'Security: The Trend of Opinions on Foreign, Security, and Defense Policy'](https://css.ethz.ch/Publications/Security-The-Trend-of-Opinions-on-Foreign-Security-and-Defense-Policy/)).