Summary Report | 27th SSF Security Talk: Security Policy Strategy 2026

Keynote Presentation
Joachim Adler, Head of Defence Policy, State Secretariat for Security Policy SEPOS

To begin with, Joachim Adler, Head of Defence Policy at the State Secretariat for Security Policy (SEPOS), presented the Federal Council's new Security Policy Strategy 2026 and explained the key considerations behind its development. He emphasised that this was Switzerland's first genuine security policy strategy. Whilst earlier security policy reports primarily described the situation and set out objectives, the new strategy is intended to go a step further and define concrete courses of action.

As a starting point, Adler referred to the security situation in Europe. He noted that Europe is now facing greater threats than at any time since the Second World War. These threats do not stop at national borders. Europe forms a closely interwoven network of societies, infrastructures, economic sectors and living spaces, which is why developments in Europe have a direct impact on Switzerland.

Adler identified several specific vulnerabilities in Switzerland. Its open and democratic society makes the country susceptible to disinformation, influence operations and hybrid warfare. At the same time, with its universities and research centres, Switzerland possesses internationally significant technology hubs, which also make them attractive targets for espionage and prohibited intelligence activities. Added to this is the importance of Switzerland's critical infrastructure and transport corridors, which are relevant far beyond the country's borders.

However, these threats are countered by security organisations that are inadequately resourced in several areas. This applies not only to the armed forces, but also to the police, the fire service and civil defence. The lack of resilience in the face of protracted crises or conflicts is particularly problematic. At the same time, the army does not have sufficient materiel and equipment to adequately counter modern threats. Adler also pointed out that Switzerland lacks both the financial resources and the priority within the international defence industry needed to rapidly close existing capability gaps.

Another key focus of his remarks was international cooperation. Adler noted that Switzerland is the only Western European country that neither has a right to assistance nor enters into corresponding obligations itself. At the same time, however, the country still hopes for support from partner states in the event of a crisis. He therefore asked whether this expectation is realistic, given that Switzerland itself makes only limited contributions to the common security architecture.

Adler found the contrast between the objective threat situation and public perception particularly striking. Using an SRG election barometer from 2025, he demonstrated that national defence was a low priority amongst the population, whilst at the same time being perceived as an issue that

already receives too much attention today. This also partly explains the reluctance of politicians and the Federal Council on security policy issues.

Against this backdrop, Adler outlined the core of the new strategy. Whilst previous security policy reports had primarily provided an assessment of the situation, the SIPOL Strategy 2026 is intended to additionally define concrete measures and responsibilities. The transition from analysis to action is crucial. The strategy is intended to set out who is responsible for which tasks and by when.

The strategy is based on three parallel strands: strengthening resilience, protection and defence, and defence capability. Resilience encompasses, in particular, economic security, supply chains and cyber security. The area of protection and defence focuses on internal security and combating hybrid threats such as organised crime. Defence capability relates primarily to the further development of the armed forces.

Adler emphasised on several occasions that this strategy could only work within the context of comprehensive security. Its implementation must not be limited to the Federal Administration, but must involve the cantons, the business sector, the research community and society at large. For this reason, cantonal authorities and various organisations had already been involved in the development of the strategy. Security policy, he said, is now a task for society as a whole.

In conclusion, Adler emphasised that the factor of time was particularly crucial. Unlike with a clearly defined timetable, it is impossible in security policy to predict how much time remains for necessary adjustments. That is precisely why action must be taken now.

Brief statement
Christoph Mäder, President, Economiesuisse

Christoph Mäder placed the current security situation in an international context from an economic perspective. He noted that developments in global politics had led to a significant increase in uncertainty. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the return to power-based thinking, and the increasing erosion of the rules-based international order had fundamentally altered the security situation in Europe. At the same time, protectionism was on the rise worldwide. For Switzerland, this means that its security environment has also become more unstable and uncertain.

Against this backdrop, Mäder expressly welcomed the comprehensive approach of the new security strategy. Security can no longer be viewed in isolation, he said, but requires coordinated cooperation between all relevant actors. The business community sees itself as part of a modern holistic defence system. In his view, however, the strategy is primarily a process-oriented strategy for the time being. Whilst responsibilities and procedures are defined, concrete objectives and operational measures have yet to be developed. It will be crucial whether, during the implementation phase, there is actually sufficient political will to 'put flesh on the bones'.

Mäder was particularly critical of the Swiss Army's current material situation. He described the information available to him regarding existing equipment shortfalls as 'alarming'. Security, he said, is not only a core function of the state but also a key prerequisite for economic stability and social prosperity. In this context, he spoke out clearly in favour of a revision of the War Material Act. International cooperation is essential, he argued, as states that do not contribute or withdraw from such exchanges will lose their significance in the long term. Those who do not engage in such exchanges will be cut off.

Mäder also emphasised the importance of technological innovation for a country's resilience. The war in Ukraine clearly demonstrated the central role that technological capabilities play on the battlefield today. Switzerland possesses exceptionally strong economic and technological foundations, which must be utilised strategically not only in the defence sector but also in the civilian sphere. In his view, it would be a 'catastrophic oversight' not to consistently harness this potential to strengthen national resilience.

At the same time, Mäder noted that a significant shift in awareness had taken place across broad sections of the business community. Companies are now paying greater attention to geopolitical risks, scenario planning and issues of resilience. The business community is prepared to fulfil its responsibilities as part of a comprehensive security strategy and to be involved in a spirit of partnership.

In conclusion, Mäder called for the security policy debate to be detached as far as possible from ideological disputes. He was particularly clear on the issue of military funding. He described Switzerland's struggle to provide sufficient funding for a core constitutional task as a 'scandal'. Without political leadership and clear priorities, he argued, it would not be possible to strengthen Switzerland's necessary resilience and credibility in the long term.

Brief statement
Oberst i Gst Stefan Holenstein, President of the Association of Military Societies of Switzerland (VMG / ASM)

Stefan Holenstein outlined the position of the Association of Swiss Military Societies on the 2026 Security Policy Strategy, focusing on several key 'areas of concern'. The starting point for his remarks was the geopolitical and security situation in Europe. Switzerland, he said, finds itself in the midst of an increasingly unstable and multipolar world order. The war in Europe will continue to shape the security situation for years to come. Switzerland is not unaffected by this and could also be directly affected in the future.

Holenstein expressed particular concern about the Swiss Army's current defence capability. Due to a lack of equipment, its operational capability is now very limited. According to his account, only around a third of combat units are actually operational, whilst the rest are undergoing repairs or are not fully equipped. He described it as alarming that these problems have been known for years without any substantial improvements having been made.

Even more serious, he said, is the army's insufficient funding. Holenstein emphasised that, despite the war in Ukraine having been ongoing for years, Switzerland is making virtually no adequate investment in its own security. Restoring the necessary equipment alone would require investment of around 50 billion Swiss francs by 2040. By international standards, Switzerland's defence spending remains at a low level, whilst numerous European countries have massively increased their investment.

Another key concern related to personnel trends within the militia army and civil defence. Holenstein warned that the army's active strength would decline significantly in the coming years. However, the militia army remains Switzerland's key security asset and a key distinguishing feature compared with other European states.

Despite these criticisms, Holenstein assessed the Security Strategy 2026 positively overall. In his view, the strategy's three main pillars were clearly heading in the right direction. He particularly welcomed the strategy's comprehensive approach. He also assessed the catalogue of measures as largely coherent. He further highlighted as a positive development that greater emphasis was once again being placed on the importance of the army's defence capability and that the need for international cooperation was explicitly recognised.
Holenstein did, however, note critically that the strategy sometimes lacked the necessary prioritisation. In his view, specific priorities, timeframes and binding resource and financial plans remained insufficiently clearly defined.

In conclusion, Holenstein described the strategy as a sound and important foundation for Switzerland's future security policy. At the same time, he said, swift and concrete steps towards implementation were now needed to ensure that the stated objectives could actually lead to a credible strengthening of security and defence capabilities.

Brief statement
Fregattenkapitän Per Fritz Weiler, Defence Attaché of the Federal Republic of Germany in Bern

Commander Per Fritz Weiler analysed Switzerland's security policy strategy in the light of Germany's experience with its 2023 National Security Strategy. He began by explaining that Germany, too, had only adopted its first proper national security strategy a few years ago. The earlier foundational security policy documents – the so-called White Papers – had been primarily driven by the Federal Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence. The new security strategy, by contrast, was for the first time a joint product of the entire Federal Government and thus took a significantly more comprehensive approach. In addition to traditional security and defence policy issues, aspects such as economic security, supply chains, cyber security, the protection of critical infrastructure, disinformation and societal resilience were also included.

The German strategy had been developed in the wake of the Russian attack on Ukraine, but its drafting had taken around a year – partly due to political differences between ministries and questions of leadership. In retrospect, it had become apparent that its initial anchoring within the

Federal Foreign Office had not been sufficiently inclusive; it was only later that a stronger steering structure had been established with the National Security Council in the Federal Chancellery.

Weiler also criticised the fact that, whilst the two-per-cent target agreed within NATO is mentioned in the German strategy, it was formulated merely as a long-term intention and has still not been achieved to this day. On a positive note, however, he emphasised that the strategy had contributed to a significantly higher level of security awareness amongst the German public and that support for higher defence spending had risen noticeably. The greater involvement of all federal ministries also represents progress compared with earlier approaches.
At the same time, he identified key weaknesses: whilst the German strategy defines objectives, it contains hardly any concrete measures, no binding timetables and no systematic monitoring of progress. Furthermore, there is a lack of clear prioritisation of objectives, and conflicts of interest are merely alluded to without being resolved at a political level.

By comparison, Weiler assessed the Swiss SIPOL Strategy 2026 much more positively. He particularly highlighted the comprehensive approach to security, which involves not only the federal government but also the cantons, the business sector, the research community and civil society. It was precisely this federal dimension that had been largely overlooked in Germany during the strategy's development and implementation process. He also emphasised the stronger focus on implementation and binding commitments in Switzerland: With clearly defined measures, responsibilities and a steering structure headed by SEPOS, the Swiss strategy differs markedly from the German one. In his view, the planned reporting up to 2028 also represents significant progress. Overall, he commended the Swiss strategy as coherent, practical and significantly more implementation-oriented than its German counterpart.

Panel discussion

In the concluding panel discussion, moderated by Fredy Müller, Managing Director of the Swiss Security Forum, Joachim Adler, Christoph Mäder and Stefan Holenstein, together with Councillor of States Franziska Roth, Vice-Chair of the Security Policy Committee of the Council of States (SIK-S), and Martin von Muralt, Delegate for the Swiss Security Network (SSN), discussed the scope of the Security Policy Strategy 2026 and its significance for the future direction of Swiss security policy.

Fredy Müller began by referring to a quote from Defence Minister Martin Pfister, according to which geopolitical turning points and upheavals are always opportunities as well, and force a reorientation. He first asked Councillor of States Franziska Roth whether there was any awareness at all amongst the population of the changed global situation. Roth explained that this awareness was clearly evident. In conversations, she noted concerns, reservations and, in some cases, fears. She made a conscious distinction between concerns and fears, as fear is the weakest form of resilience, yet it is nonetheless part of the human condition. The public wants action to be taken. In this regard, she referred to the survey results shown earlier, according to which, whilst relations with the EU and Europe were given higher priority than national defence, people viewed the two as interlinked. The majority of the population fully understood that

Switzerland was not independent in the absolute sense, but remained dependent on good relations – and that good relations ultimately meant security.

Martin von Muralt, delegate of the Swiss Security Network, described his observations at the interface between the federal government and the cantons. Within security policy circles – such as among those responsible for the police, the military or civil defence – there is clearly an awareness of the issue. However, as soon as one moves outside these circles, for example to departments of health or education, this awareness diminishes significantly. He also found the difference between German-speaking Switzerland and French-speaking Switzerland particularly worrying. Security events take place almost exclusively in German-speaking Switzerland, and representatives from German-speaking Switzerland are also significantly more likely to be involved in working groups or security policy projects. In French-speaking Switzerland, he senses a much weaker awareness of security policy.

Switzerland's critical infrastructure is of importance to the whole of Europe

Fredy Müller then steered the discussion towards Switzerland's vulnerability as a European infrastructure hub. Stefan Holenstein welcomed the fact that this vulnerability is now clearly recognised. He cited the 'Star of Laufenburg' as a prominent example of critical infrastructure of European significance. An attack on it would affect not only Switzerland but large parts of Europe. It is important that such threats are now being taken more seriously, both politically and socially. At the same time, however, concrete investment and swift action are now needed.

Franziska Roth then took up the image of the 'preserving jar'. Switzerland often behaves as if it were sealing itself away in such a jar. The lid is opened briefly, for instance when critical infrastructure is discussed, but afterwards the country closes itself off again, falling back on old reflexes centred on neutrality and isolation. Switzerland's role in Europe remains unclear, which is why it must find a way out of this 'preserving jar'.

Political leadership is urgently needed

Christoph Mäder then strongly rejected the view that the Federal Council should merely be guided by the public's priorities. Particularly on matters of security policy, he argued, the government must assume leadership responsibility and must not merely react to public sentiment polls. It is the duty of political leadership to proactively address fundamental problems facing society. If companies were run in a similar way to how security policy is currently being managed, those responsible would rightly be held to account. His criticism was therefore clear: the government was standing by and watching rather than leading.

Joachim Adler responded by saying that a distinction must be made between the responsibilities of the Federal Council and those of Parliament. The allocation of resources is primarily a matter for the legislature and, methodologically speaking, does not belong in a security strategy. At the same time, he pointed out that the discussion was taking place within a security policy 'bubble' or 'typical echo chamber'. For many people, issues such as migration, asylum or health insurance

premiums remain a greater priority than defence policy. With this strategy, the Federal Council had presented what fell within its remit, including a funding proposal based on VAT. Simply attacking the Federal Council was therefore too simplistic.

Stefan Holenstein then endorsed the criticism of the Federal Council's lack of leadership, but also directed his appeal to Parliament. For four years, he said, no viable solution had been found for the financing of the armed forces. He found it particularly troubling that security policy issues were repeatedly delegated to the Finance Committee. Security policy, however, should not be treated exclusively as a financial issue.

Security policy strategy requires a clear order of priorities

Franziska Roth stated that she was certainly prepared to compromise, but once again emphasised the Federal Council's failure to set priorities. Only once it was clear which threats needed to be addressed as a priority could Parliament allocate the necessary funds. Setting priorities also meant making sacrifices. There needed to be an open discussion about which capabilities were actually a priority and where, if necessary, systems would have to be dispensed with. She cited the protection of critical infrastructure and drone defence as examples.

Joachim Adler confirmed that the call for clearer prioritisation, which had emerged from the consultation process, had already been acknowledged and would be incorporated into the revision of the strategy. At the same time, he warned against narrowing the discussion down to traditional heavy systems such as tanks or artillery. In terms of communication, it is much easier to secure majority support for protection against airborne threats or hybrid attacks than for traditional artillery systems. Today, the primary focus is on threats from a distance and hybrid warfare.

Martin von Muralt pointed out that comprehensive security is necessarily a joint endeavour. Many security policy responses lie with the cantons. Hybrid threats, in particular, first become apparent at cantonal level. At the same time, however, there is no uniform 'cantonal consensus', as all 26 cantons operate differently. One of the biggest unresolved issues is therefore the question of command responsibility in the event of a crisis: who is in charge and when? When do the cantons take responsibility, when does the Confederation, and when does the army? This question has not yet been adequately clarified.

Franziska Roth added that comprehensive security extends far beyond the military. Clear command structures are needed, particularly in the healthcare sector and in disaster medicine. The armed forces must be able to provide rapid support on a subsidiary basis, which is why prioritisation is once again necessary.

Stefan Holenstein, however, pointed out that the army must be prepared not only for subsidiary operations but also for an actual defence scenario. The slides shown on equipment stocks were crucial for highlighting the enormous backlog that needs to be addressed. Providing soldiers and officers with a full complement of equipment was a matter of showing them due respect.

No «either-or thinking» when it comes to security

When Fredy Müller asked how young artillerymen should be explained that their branch of the armed forces was supposedly no longer important, Holenstein spoke out against «either-or thinking» . Security policy, he said, was always a matter of «both-and». The war in Ukraine clearly demonstrated that, alongside cyber warfare and drone warfare, conventional means were still needed. Franziska Roth then asked provocatively against whom Switzerland actually intended to defend itself on its own. Security, she argued, was ultimately embedded within a European framework, and Switzerland must finally clarify its role in Europe. The real security problem, she said, was Switzerland's lack of reliability towards its European partners, for example regarding the War Material Act or the debate on neutrality.

Holenstein countered that, given the poor condition of its military equipment, Switzerland had itself become a security risk for Europe. Roth, in turn, argued that it was the neutrality initiative in particular that made Switzerland a security risk. Joachim Adler then attempted to mediate, noting that the positions were not as far apart as the heated exchange might suggest. Prioritisation is inevitable given limited financial resources and scarce availability on the defence market. If a choice had to be made between heavy systems for recapturing territory and air defence, the latter would take priority.

Christoph Mäder finally raised the discussion to a fundamental political level. He argued that Switzerland had generally lost the ability to set priorities – not only in security policy, but also in health, financial and European policy. Important issues had been put on hold for years. If the political system was no longer capable of setting priorities and remaining effective, a discussion of the system itself would even have to be held in the long term.

Informing and raising awareness amongst the public as a key task

During the ensuing discussion, the moderator asked how public awareness of comprehensive security could be raised. Franziska Roth began by highlighting the importance of communication and, in particular, the regulation of major communication platforms in the fight against disinformation. At the same time, Joachim Adler warned of the fine line between raising awareness and state interference in the formation of public opinion. Martin von Muralt, however, maintained that public perception was ultimately of secondary importance. Security policy measures were primarily the responsibility of the federal government, the cantons and the business sector. By the time the first drone struck Switzerland, public awareness would be there anyway.

Christoph Mäder then referred to examples such as Poland and Scandinavia, where political leaders and society had responded jointly to the new threat landscape. Ultimately, he argued, what matters most are individuals who take responsibility and explain the security policy 'narrative' coherently. Martin von Muralt added that Switzerland as a whole lacked coherence between its security, foreign and economic policies. Franziska Roth concluded by noting that many security policy issues – from the bilateral agreements and neutrality to civilian service –

were ultimately interlinked. The public expects answers and a Federal Council that takes clear leadership in this regard.

A robust federal system makes «Maduro-style-actions» impossible in Switzerland

To conclude the discussion, Martin von Muralt emphasised that Switzerland is, in principle, highly resilient thanks to its federal system. He argued that this strength must be utilised in a targeted manner, with a greater focus on existing resources and capabilities. Fredy Müller picked up on this with a humorous analogy: In Switzerland, due to its decentralised nature, it is simply not enough to 'just kidnap Mr Maduro'; rather, several key figures would have to be neutralised simultaneously in order to paralyse the system.

Christoph Mäder described it as a major achievement of the strategy that the concept of networked thinking and the integrated understanding of security had been so clearly articulated. It is now crucial, he said, to place greater emphasis once again on cooperation and collaboration.

Franziska Roth noted that the discussion had once again shown that the focus was still too heavily on Switzerland itself and not enough on non-aligned cooperation with Europe. The security policy report must therefore define Switzerland's role in Europe more clearly. Similarly, clarity was needed regarding the division of responsibilities between the federal government, the cantons and other stakeholders. Ultimately, the key question is: 'What is Switzerland's stance on Europe?' This also includes taking a clear position on Ukraine and a willingness to resolve existing contradictions – such as those in the Ukraine Ordinance.

In conclusion, Stefan Holenstein once again emphasised the complexity of security and national defence, but nevertheless expressed confidence. Switzerland possesses great strengths – in particular its federal system and its social and political connections. Viable solutions are not far off, provided that cooperation and coordination function effectively at all levels.

Joachim Adler concluded by pointing out that, ultimately, all stakeholders are needed. Admittedly, it is in the nature of politics and the spirit of the times to emphasise what divides us rather than what unites us. However, particularly in security policy, the focus must be on what unites us. The discussion had shown that, despite differing priorities, a common foundation exists.

Fredy Müller concluded by noting that the discussion had demonstrated how important it is to de-ideologise the security policy debate. Incidentally, this process has only just begun. Today's constructive exchange gives cause for confidence that we are, at the very least, on a shared path.