

Press release

Thursday, June 22, 2023

The future of Swiss neutrality in a polarised world

The seventh Private Banking Day, which the ASPB and the VAV hosted in Basel today, focused on Swiss neutrality in a polarised world. Renowned exponents from politics, science and business debated the future of neutrality as an important pillar of foreign and security policy. In particular, they discussed how our country should position itself in a world that is increasingly divided militarily and economically and whether global free trade will endure in the future.

In light of the current events, Philipp Rickenbacher, President of the VAV and CEO of Julius Baer, spoke about the effects of the takeover of Credit Suisse by UBS. He welcomed the fact that with the solution found, *"Switzerland by its own efforts has ensured stability and prevented the emergence of an international financial crisis"*. At the same time, he advocated an open review of the events and emphasised that any new regulations must focus on systemically important banks. In connection with the implementation of the sanctions against Russia, he emphasised that *"Swiss banks are implementing them strictly and in an exemplary manner"*. On the other hand, he sees major challenges in overcoming the differences and contradictions of the West's sanctions regimes. *"Switzerland should therefore confidently advocate for sanctions to be better coordinated internationally, at least among like-minded countries, and to be developed further based on the rule of law,"* he demanded.

In a keynote speech, Sigmar Gabriel, former Vice-Chancellor and Foreign Minister of Germany, explained his appreciation of current geopolitical developments. He concluded that *"the Ukraine war has united the West but divided the world"*. In this context, he pointed out that the global financial system is increasingly being weaponised as a means of enforcing foreign policy interests by sanctions, which could lead to a threat to global free trade.

In a high-level panel, Simon Evenett, Professor of International Trade and Economic Development at the University of St. Gallen, Jean-Marc Rickli, Head of Global and Emerging Risks at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, Monika Rühl, Chairwoman of the Executive Board of economiesuisse, Elisabeth Schneider-Schneiter, President of the Chamber of Commerce for both Basel and National Councillor for The Centre, and Hans-Ueli Vogt, member of the committee for the popular initiative on Swiss neutrality and former National Councillor of the SVP, discussed the implications for Switzerland as a business location and for its neutrality policy. The exchange clearly showed that today's geopolitical situation poses major economic, security and neutrality policy challenges for Switzerland.

In her speech, Federal Councillor and Finance Minister Karin Keller-Sutter commented on the consequences of global developments for the Swiss financial centre and its competitiveness: *"In order to maintain the competitiveness of the Swiss financial centre in the future, the banking sector must fulfil three central tasks: anticipating international trends, ensuring financial stability and integrating digital innovations into the financial sector."*

In his closing remarks, Grégoire Bordier, President of the ASPB and partner with unlimited liability at Bordier & Cie SCmA, pointed out that Switzerland's neutrality finds itself in the realm between politics and economics. He looked at these two aspects individually and then came to talk about their link: economic sanctions. *"Switzerland should develop an independent sanction strategy and be involved in international coordination from day one. To this end, SECO's organisation and resources must be strengthened. It is even conceivable to create a Swiss body similar to the American OFAC."*

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