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**RENEWING
EUROPEAN
COLLECTIVE
SECURITY:
WHAT ROLE FOR
SWITZERLAND?**

Europe today faces a situation in which neither peace nor a fully functioning system of collective security can be taken for granted.

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Renewing European Collective Security: What Role for Switzerland?

Michael Ambühl/Nora Meier*

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I. Introduction

Europe's security environment has undergone a profound transformation in recent years. The return of large-scale interstate war to the European continent, most visibly since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, has challenged long-standing assumptions about stability, territorial integrity, and the durability of the post-Cold War order. At the same time, a dense network of international and regional organizations – established precisely to preserve peace and guarantee collective security – continues to exist. This raises a fundamental question: how can it be that Europe possesses an extensive institutional architecture for peace, yet finds itself confronted with war and systemic instability?

This paper addresses that tension. In chapter [II](#), we provide an overview of the principal institutions and organizations in the context of collective security in Europe (see [II.1](#)) and examine the most pressing challenges (see [II.2](#)), preliminarily concluding (see [II.3](#)) that the existing institutional framework has proven insufficient in the face of renewed great-power confrontation. While the architecture remains formally intact, its capacity to prevent or resolve conflict has been significantly weakened.

In chapter [III](#), we then turn to possible solutions. Given the breadth of the problem, our analysis focuses selectively on reform options that are, at least in principle, influenceable by a state such as Switzerland. Rather than attempting to redesign the entire security order, the paper concentrates on two institutional arenas of particular relevance: the reform of the United Nations Security Council (see [III.1](#)) and potential renewal efforts within the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) (see [III.2](#)).

In chapter [IV](#), we evaluate Switzerland's potential contribution – both at the international level (see [IV.1](#)) and through necessary adjustments to its own security policy (see [IV.2](#)). The central argument is that while Switzerland cannot determine geopolitical outcomes, it can contribute to institutional reform and normative renewal. However, such engagement requires not only diplomatic initiative abroad but also strategic clarity and credibility at home, including a conscious effort to sharpen its profile as a reliable and solid partner in international security policy.

II. The Security Policy Situation in Europe

This chapter provides an overall assessment of the current security landscape in Europe. Its purpose is to situate the subsequent analysis within the broader

institutional and geopolitical context and to identify the structural conditions under which European collective security presently operates. The chapter is divided into three parts. The first section (see 1) offers an overview of the most relevant institutions and organizations responsible for collective security in Europe. It outlines their mandates, roles, and interrelationships within the broader security architecture. The second section (see 2) turns to the most significant challenges confronting European security. In doing so, it distinguishes between systemic challenges rooted in institutional design and structural features of the security order – and non-systemic challenges arising from geopolitical developments, power politics, and shifting strategic dynamics. Finally, the third section (see 3) presents a preliminary conclusion, drawing together the main findings and assessing the overall functionality of the existing European security architecture.

i. Current Institutional and Organizational Landscape

In the following, the most important institutions and organizations relevant to collective security in Europe are briefly outlined and described in terms of their mandates and functions.

- *United Nations Security Council (UNSC)*: The UNSC is one of the core organs of the United Nations (UN), established in 1945. It is responsible for maintaining international peace and security and consists of a total of 15 UN member states. These members are distinguished by the length of their terms in the UNSC. On the one hand, there are 10 members that rotate every two years – they are thus considered “non-permanent members”. On the other hand, there are 5 so-called “permanent members” – also called P5 – that do not rotate (China, France, Russian Federation,¹ United Kingdom and the United States). They have the power to veto any decision that the UNSC can take. On the contrary to the United Nations General Assembly, the UNSC can take binding decisions.
- *North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)*: NATO is a defensive alliance of 32 countries from Europe and North America.² It was established in 1949 to ensure mutual defense among its member states in response to any external attack. NATO was originally founded to counter Soviet military power in Europe after WW II and has since evolved into a cooperative

¹ The Russian Federation has inherited the seat of the Soviet Union, which was dissolved in 1991.

² European countries that are NATO members (but not EU member states): Albania, North Macedonia, Norway, Turkey and the UK. <https://www.globe-project.eu/en/nato-eu-osce-membership-overlap_11001>.

security organization.³ Despite currently being under severe pressure, it remains a key pillar of transatlantic military cooperation. All NATO decisions are made by consensus (i.e. by common consent), after discussion and consultation among member countries.⁴

- *European Union (EU)*: The EU is a political and economic union of 27 European countries, many of which also belong to NATO.⁵ After WW II, a series of treaties were established and gradually expanded to form the European Communities (1957) and finally the European Union (1993). The period since the 1950s brought the European continent not only prosperity, but an unprecedented era of peace.⁶ In foreign policy matters, the EU makes decisions based on the principle of unanimity. De facto, this means that decisions are made by consensus among all member states. The ultimate decision-making body for the EU's foreign and security policy is the European Council, consisting of the EU country heads of states and governments.
- *Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)*: With 57 countries from Europe, Central Asia and North America, the OSCE is the world's largest regional security organization. participating states across Europe, Central Asia, and North America. The organization strives for a comprehensive and co-operative approach to security. All members have equal status and decisions are made by consensus.⁷
- *Partnership for Peace (PfP)*: The PfP is a NATO program established in 1994 to enhance cooperation and stability between all 32 NATO member states and partner countries, in particular in Europe. The partnerships are bilateral, meaning that the type and scope of the agreements are determined individually, also allowing neutral countries, such as Austria and Switzerland to join the PfP. Currently, there are 16 partner countries.⁸

³ <<https://www.nato.int/en>>.

⁴ The principle of consensus is considered a fundamental principle. It has been accepted as the sole basis for decision-making in NATO since the creation of the alliance in 1949. <<https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/introduction-to-nato/consensus-decision-making-at-nato>>

⁵ <<https://www.europa.eda.admin.ch/en/portrait-and-history-of-the-eu>> Except for Austria, Cyprus, Ireland and Malta. They belong to the EU but not to NATO.

<<https://www.europa.eda.admin.ch/en/portrait-and-history-of-the-eu>>.

⁷ <<https://www.osce.org/>>.

⁸ Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Malta, Moldova, Serbia, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. NATO's partnerships with Belarus and the Russian Federation are currently suspended following North Atlantic Council decisions related to the security environment. <<https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/partnerships-and-cooperation/natos-partnerships>>

[Figure 1](#) provides an overview of the three institutions (NATO, EU, and OSCE) and the respective numbers of their members, including overlaps. As can be seen, 23 countries⁹ are members of all three institutions; 27 countries¹⁰ are both members of the EU and the OSCE; and 32 countries¹¹ are both members of NATO and the OSCE. This leaves 4 states that are solely members of the EU and the OSCE but not NATO (Austria, Cyprus, Ireland and Malta) and 9 states that are solely members of NATO and the OSCE but not the EU (Albania, Canada, Iceland, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Türkiye, United Kingdom and the United States). 21 states, including Switzerland, are only members of the OSCE.¹² However, of these 21, 13 states have a PfP agreement with NATO (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Serbia, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan). China is the only permanent member of the UN Security Council that belongs to neither the EU, NATO nor the OSCE.

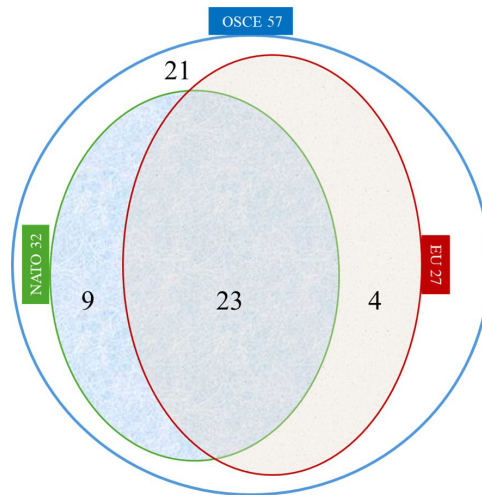


Figure 1: EU, NATO, and OSCE members. Source: own illustration.

⁹ Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and The Netherlands.

¹⁰ All EU members are also members of the OSCE.

¹¹ This includes all NATO members.

¹² In addition to Switzerland, this includes Andorra, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Holy Sea, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Liechtenstein, Moldova, Monaco, Mongolia, Russian Federation, San Marino, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

2. Challenges Facing the Collective Security in Europe

There are various challenges facing the collective security in Europe. We categorize them as *systemic* (a) and *non-systemic* (b), whereby we define ‘systemic’ as inherent to the relevant institutions and organizations, and ‘non-systemic’ as other developments that originate outside the respective systems. That being said, of course, certain interactions between the two categories exist. Furthermore, this is not an exhaustive list.

a) *Systemic Challenges*

As outlined in *section 1*, European collective security is embedded in a dense institutional framework composed of multiple organizations. Several of these institutions face significant systemic challenges that directly affect the functioning and effectiveness of security policy in Europe. Many of these challenges stem from structural features of their decision-making processes, in particular the voting procedures that govern their actions. In the following, the challenges of four of these institutions will be examined in greater detail.

aa) *UN Security Council: Veto Power of the P5*

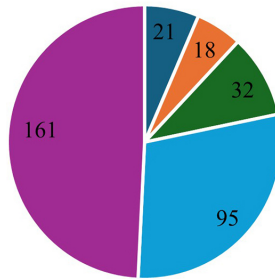
A first systemic challenge is the veto power of the five permanent members (P5) of the UNSC (China, France, Russian Federation, United Kingdom and the United States), which – except for Russia – they were granted at the founding of the UN in 1945. The veto right allows the P5 to block decisions of the body. While the veto rights are not explicitly mentioned, Art. 27 of the UN Charter¹³ refers to the voting rules of the UNSC. Accordingly, decisions *on all [other than procedural] matters* require an affirmative vote of nine members, including the concurring votes of the five permanent members.

Since 1946, a total of 327 vetoes have been exercised by the P5.¹⁴ Almost half of these vetoes (49%) were made by the USSR / Russian Federation (161 vetoes), followed by the USA (95 vetoes, 29%), the UK (32 vetoes, 10%), China (21 vetoes, 6.5%) and France (18 vetoes, 5.5%) (see [Figure 2](#)).

¹³ <<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text>>.

¹⁴ Vetoes Dashboard, DPPA United Nations. <<https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/vetoes-since-1946>>.

Total of Vetoes by Permanent Member of the UNSC (1946-2025)



■ China ■ France ■ United Kingdom ■ United States ■ USSR / Russian Federation

Figure 2: Total of vetoes by P5 1946-2025. Source: Vetoes Dashboard. DPPA UN.

Between February 25, 2022 (i.e., one day after Russia's attack on Ukraine) and September 18, 2025, there were a total of 23 vetoes, with only three of the five permanent members exercising their veto power (see Table 1).¹⁵ Russia accounted for more than half of all of these vetoes (52%) with 12 vetoes, followed by the USA (8 vetoes, 35%) and China (3 vetoes, 13%). Seven of the eight American vetoes were related to the 'Middle East, including the Palestinian question' and exercised in favor of the State of Israel.¹⁶

The 'Middle East, including the Palestinian question' was also the most blocked in the period from February 2022 to September 2025 (11 out of a total of 23 vetoes). Other topics that led to vetoes were 'non-proliferation and non-proliferation/DPRK' (4 times overall, 3 times Russia and 1 time China); 'Ukraine' (3 times overall, 3 times Russia); 'Syria' (2 times overall, 2 times Russia), 'Sudan and South Sudan' (1 time overall, 1 time Russia), 'Admission of new Members' (1 time overall, 1 time USA USA) and 'Mali' (1 time overall, 1 time Russia).

¹⁵ The two European permanent Members of the Security Council (France and the UK) have not exercised their veto since 1989. Vetoes Dashboard, DPPA United Nations.

¹⁶ The topics are defined by the DPPA UN. They are based on the agenda items of the Security Council meetings. In order to determine the exact content of what was discussed at the meetings, the minutes of the meetings would have to be analyzed. This was not done for this article.

All the vetoes during this period can be classified in the context of the greatest conflicts and the greatest challenges to international peace and security of this time. For instance, 'Middle East, including Palestinian question' in connection with the outbreak of the most recent war in Gaza on October 8, 2023; 'non-proliferation and non-proliferation/DPRK' in connection with the ongoing nuclear dispute with Iran; 'Ukraine' in connection with Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine; 'Syria' with the change of power in December 2024; and 'Sudan and South Sudan' with the civil war in Sudan that broke out in April 2023 and is still ongoing, and internal tensions in South Sudan, among other things.

Topic	Veto by during 25/2/22-18/09/25					Total vetoes by topic
	CHI	FR	RU	UK	USA	
Middle East, including Palestinian question	2	0	2	0	7	11
Non-proliferation; non-proliferation/DPRK	1	0	3	0	0	4
Ukraine; Maintenance and peace and security in Ukraine; 2014 Letter from Ukraine (Ukraine)	0	0	3	0	0	3
Middle East (Syria)	0	0	2	0	0	2
Sudan and South Sudan	0	0	1	0	0	1
Admission of new UN Members	0	0	0	0	1	1
Mali	0	0	1	0	0	1
<i>Total vetoes by permanent member</i>	3	0	12	0	8	23

Table 1: Overview of vetoes made by P5 & by topic (25/2/22-18/9/25). Source: Vetoes Dashboard. DPPA UN.

In sum, the above analyzed 3.5 year time period shows that the UN Security Council is rendered largely incapable of acting by the P5 exercising their veto rights in fulfilling its main task – namely maintaining international peace and security – whenever the self-interests of these states are at stake (such as the Russian veto in connection with the war in Ukraine, which it itself triggered in violation of international law). The consequences are serious: The UN plays only a minor role, if any, in resolving some of the biggest global conflicts of our time, with direct (e.g. Ukraine, Gaza) or indirect (e.g. Iran, Sudan, Syria) impact on Europe and its collective security system.

bb) NATO: Mutual Defense, Consensus, Indirect Contributions & ‘Free-Riding’

A second set of systemic challenges arises within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). As outlined above, the alliance comprises 32 member states from both Europe and North America. While NATO remains the central pillar of European collective defense, several of its institutional and organizational features create internal challenges that affect its cohesion and effectiveness. In the following, we highlight four such challenges: (i) the mutual defense obligation under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty¹⁷; (ii) the requirement of decision-making by consensus; (iii) NATO’s financing model, which relies largely on indirect national contributions; and (iv) the risk of ‘free-riding’¹⁸ that may emerge from the interaction of these structural characteristics.

- i. At the core of NATO is the so-called *mutual defense obligation*, which commits members to a joint defense in the event of an attack on a NATO country (also known as case of alliance). An attack on one member state is thus considered an attack on the entire group. This case, regulated in Art. 5 of the NATO Treaty, has only been invoked once by a member so far, namely by the USA after the attacks of September 11, 2001. However, in the event of an attack on a NATO member, there is no automatic counterattack by the alliance. Rather, such a response would have to be decided unanimously at the political level, and each member state could decide for itself what contribution it would like to make. In addition, according to Art. 5 of the NATO Treaty, NATO would have to notify the UN Security Council of the decision taken. Accordingly, the measures taken by NATO must be discontinued as soon as the Security Council has taken the necessary steps to restore and maintain international peace and security.

To date, the mutual defense obligation has also served as a deterrent to attacks. However, it has also proved to be an obstacle to the admission of new states, mostly due to the concern over the escalation of conflicts between NATO and Russia (i.e. eastward expansion, in particular Ukraine).

¹⁷ The North Atlantic Treaty. April 4, 1949. <<https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/1949/04/04/the-north-atlantic-treaty>>.

¹⁸ The ‘free rider’ problem describes situations in which the ‘efficient production of a good by a group is jeopardized by the incentive each member of the group has not to contribute towards its production.’ Cullity, Garrett, “The Free Rider Problem”, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2025 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2025/entries/free-rider/>>. There are those that contribute and there are those who do not (the so-called ‘free-riders’), who benefit from the good without contributing to its production. The result is an inefficient production of the good. Analogous to NATO, we risk an inefficient and unstable alliance.

- ii. Decisions within NATO are taken *by consensus*. This means that all members must support a decision or at least not oppose it. The advantages of such a procedure on the one hand, are increased legitimacy of a decision; possible protection of smaller and less influential members (as same voting weight);¹⁹ strengthening of unity (i.e. promoting dialogue and willingness to compromise), and perceived stability towards the outside. The disadvantages on the other hand, lie in slow decision-making; the possibility of blockades (i.e. veto power) by individual members who might put national interests above the interests of the collective; and a weakening of decisions (i.e. lowest common denominator) – all of which can influence the security policy situation in Europe.
- iii. NATO is funded through direct and *indirect contributions* of its members, with indirect ones being the largest part of the alliance's overall funds. Indirect contributions are paid by the individual member countries and can include the latter's forces and capabilities. All members contribute using an agreed cost share formula. To that end, at the 2025 NATO Summit in The Hague, members made a commitment to investing 5% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) annually on core defense requirements and defense- and security-related spending by 2035. At least 3.5% of these 5% of GDP annually should be allocated to core defense requirements and the remaining 1.5% to the protection of i.a. critical infrastructure, ensure civil preparedness and resilience, innovate, and strengthen the defense industrial base.²⁰

Despite the combined wealth (measured in GDP) of the non-US NATO members being almost equal to that of the USA, they together spend less than half of what the USA spends on defense. The volume of US defense expenditure represents approximately two thirds of the defense spending of NATO as a whole. However, that being said, this is not the amount that the USA then contributes to the operational running of NATO as that is shared by all members according to the principle of common funding. Nevertheless, NATO relies on the USA for the provision of i.a. intelligence and surveillance. In addition to a transatlantic imbalance, there are also growing asymmetries in defense spending among European member states.²¹ All developments that may increasingly challenge European collective security in the future.

¹⁹ At least in theory this is the case. However, in reality, of course, smaller states, if dependent, can also be influenced by more powerful ones to vote one way or another.

²⁰ <<https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/introduction-to-nato/defence-expenditures-and-natos-5-commitment>>.

²¹ <<https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/introduction-to-nato/funding-nato>>.

iv. Finally, as a combination of the abovementioned three factors, NATO is confronted with a challenge similar to the so-called ‘free rider’ problem. On the one hand, NATO members are required to make an individual contribution to the common fund upon joining (based on a percentage of their respective GDPs). On the other hand, also upon joining, members also receive a commitment that – as part of the collective – they would be defended by the collective in the event of an attack on them (collective defense under Art. 5 of the NATO Treaty). In addition, due to the decision-making by consensus, all states have equal ‘voting’ weight.

Now, there are members who pay more than others, and at times there have even been members who did not meet the defined minimum targets for national defense spending. However, with no consequences. They all reap the same benefits in the form of a collective defense and equal voting rights.

We have seen that this can lead to frustration among members, and not just since the current US administration took office in 2025. This can be illustrated by the example of group work at university, where students receive the same grade regardless of their contribution or effort. The reward – the good grade or, in the case of NATO, the case of alliance and equal voting rights – follows either way.

That said, this article does not have the ambition to offer a solution to this problem. It can only point out that NATO will likely have to pay more attention to this issue in the future. This not only to prevent the ‘free-rider’ problem but rather, the latter’s impact on the security policy situation in Europe, as NATO itself could become more instable due to internal dependencies and resulting frustration among member states.

cc) *EU: Unanimity Requirement in Foreign and Security Policy*

A third systemic challenge presents itself within the EU, namely the unanimity requirement in the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).²² According to that rule, all EU member states must agree on decisions related to those areas.

The advantages of an unanimity requirement in foreign and security policy are – among other – the protection of national sovereignty of the member states; high political legitimacy; and a signaling effect of strength to the outside world. The disadvantages are – as in the UN Security Council and NATO –

²² EPRS European Parliamentary Research Service. August 2023. <[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2023/740243/EPRS_STU\(2023\)740243_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2023/740243/EPRS_STU(2023)740243_EN.pdf)>.

the possibility of a single member blocking decisions; slow response times and watered-down decisions (weakened positions and decisions that can appear at times more symbolic than implementation-oriented).

Overall, the EU is caught between the competing needs of its members to preserve their national sovereignty and the Union's need to assert itself as a global player in foreign and security policy. In reality, however, various national interests undermine the common strategy (e.g. lack of common arms industry). As a result, the EU is losing its credibility and appears weak. In the Gaza war, for instance, it played only a marginal role, if any. And in the Ukraine war, too, the EU has repeatedly been sidelined by other powers, most importantly, the USA and Russia.²³

dd) OSCE: Decision-Making by Consensus

Finally, a fourth systemic challenge presents itself in the OSCE, where all 57 members take part in the decision-making bodies with equal weight.²⁴ Decisions or declarations must be adopted by all 57 members. In principle, the same advantages and disadvantages of such voting rules apply here as listed for NATO and the EU. However, the consequences for the OSCE are considerable in the context of collective security in Europe. Although it is the largest regional security organization in the world, it is currently playing no significant role in the war in Ukraine. The OSCE has been blocked for years (by Russia's veto i.a.) and is therefore unable to make decisions or take action.

b) Non-systemic Challenges

After addressing the principal systemic challenges to collective security in Europe in subsection a, this subsection (b) turns to what we define as 'non-systemic' challenges. Accordingly, these are challenges that originate largely outside the formal structures of the relevant organizations. Even though in practice a strict separation is not always possible. Indeed, systemic and non-systemic factors often interact and reinforce one another. In the following, we discuss three of the major non-systemic challenges: (i) the return of large-scale interstate war on the European continent (Ukraine); (ii) the return of war in Europe's close proximity (Gaza); and (iii) recent changes in the transatlantic relationship.

²³ This must also be seen against the backdrop of years of deprioritization and reduction of investment in the defense capabilities in European countries.

²⁴ <<https://www.osce.org/decision-making>>.

- i. The European continent is witnessing the return of large-scale interstate warfare. Already with the Russian occupation of Crimea in 2014 and more so since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, Europe has had to abandon the long-standing post-1945 assumption that borders on the continent are immutable and that peace is structurally secured. The war has fundamentally altered the European security architecture and revived classical geopolitical confrontation.

Four years after the outbreak of hostilities, at the time of writing, there is no credible prospect of a cease fire or a comprehensive peace settlement for that matter. The conflict continues with devastating consequences for Ukraine and profound implications for the broader European security order.

The EU, although now the largest collective supporter of Ukraine in financial, military, and humanitarian terms,²⁵ has repeatedly demonstrated internal divisions. These divergences become visible i.a. in negotiations over sanctions packages and in debates concerning the development of a coordinated European defense-industrial base.²⁶ Furthermore, since the inauguration of Donald Trump to his second term in January 2025 as President of the United States, the EU has increasingly found itself sidelined in diplomatic initiatives involving the US and Russia, further exposing structural weaknesses in its foreign and security policy coherence. The EU's structural reliance on close cooperation with the United States in managing and supporting the Ukrainian war effort further constrains its strategic autonomy and weakens its bargaining position. This dependence limits the Union's capacity to act as an independent geopolitical actor and underscores the asymmetry within the transatlantic partnership.²⁷

By contrast, NATO has undergone significant strategic adaptation. Since the beginning of Russia's war of aggression, NATO has expanded to in-

²⁵ Trebesch et al. (2023) «The Ukraine Support Tracker», Kiel WP. <<https://www.kielinsti-tut.de/topics/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-support-tracker>>.

²⁶ Scherrer, Ch. in Spiegel Newspaper, 22.2.2026. <https://www.focus.de/politik/ausland/zusammenhalt-in-europa-droht-an-deutschem-ruestungsboom-zu-scheitern_1d91667b-f4d4-468a-b9b4-aaa8b22502ba.html>; Beechi, F. in Berliner Zeitung, 12.4.2025. <<https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/politik-gesellschaft/geopolitik/milliarden-aufruestung-spaltet-die-eu-im-norden-vereint-im-sueden-geteilt-li.2314240>>; Imwinkelried, D. in Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 28.5.2025 <<https://www.nzz.ch/international/die-eu-will-mit-150-milliarden-euro-gemeinsam-aufruesteten-ld.1886444>>.

²⁷ zdfheute, 13.12.2025. <<https://www.zdfheute.de/politik/ausland/europa-chance-verhandlung-ukraine-krieg-russland-100.html>>; Butylin, N. in Berliner Zeitung, 7.8.2025. <<https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/politik-gesellschaft/geopolitik/meinung-eu-schaut-nur-zu-russland-und-die-usa-verhandeln-ueber-frieden-in-der-ukraine-li.2347523>>.

clude Finland and Sweden, thereby extending its direct border with Russia by more than 1'000 km. In parallel, NATO has also substantially strengthened its deterrence and defense posture. Its rapid reaction forces have been significantly expanded, with more than 300'000 personnel placed at high readiness, representing a marked increase compared to pre-2022 force levels.²⁸ In addition, allied debates have increasingly focused on raising defense expenditures to levels approaching or exceeding 5% of GDP, reflecting a broader shift toward sustained rearmament and long-term deterrence.²⁹ This transformation underscores NATO's renewed centrality within the European security architecture.

Nevertheless, NATO's strategic posture also reveals a persistent structural dependence on the US. The credibility of NATO's deterrence continues to rely heavily on U.S. military capabilities, as laid out above. European NATO members remain compelled to maintain political cohesion with Washington, even amid internal disagreements.

At the same time, NATO has demonstrated a clear reluctance to be drawn into a direct military confrontation with Russia. This cautious approach makes Ukrainian membership in NATO in the near term highly unlikely, despite the fact that such membership would constitute the strongest possible security guarantee for Kyiv in negotiations with Moscow. In the absence of NATO accession and despite a considerable increase in European support, Ukraine remains largely dependent on the US as its primary external security guarantor. This dependence weakens Ukraine's negotiating leverage and, by extension, that of the EU. While Western support has been sufficient to prevent Ukraine's defeat, it has thus far not been structured in a manner that would decisively enable a Ukrainian military victory, reflecting a strategy calibrated to avoid escalation rather than to secure outright success.³⁰

The UN has likewise remained politically constrained in its capacity to facilitate a resolution of the conflict. While UN agencies play an important technical and humanitarian role, the organization has been unable to act

²⁸ Bayer, L. in Politico, 27.6.2022. <<https://www.politico.eu/article/nato-increase-high-readiness-force-300000/>>.

²⁹ The Hague Summit Declaration. Nato. <<https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2025/06/25/the-hague-summit-declaration>>.

³⁰ See Ambühl, M. & Meier N., The War in Ukraine and Europe: A Situational Analysis and Negotiation Perspectives, in European Integration Perspectives in Times of Global Crises. EIZ Publishing, 2023.

decisively at the political level. This limitation stems primarily from Russia's veto power within the UNSC, which has prevented the adoption of binding measures addressing the conflict.

More broadly, the war in Ukraine has accelerated a global trend toward rearmament. Defense expenditures have risen significantly across Europe and beyond, reflecting a renewed prioritization of conventional military capabilities, deterrence, and resilience. The cumulative effect of these developments suggests that Europe has entered a new era of strategic competition in which multilateral institutions face structural constraints, alliance politics have regained prominence, and military power has re-emerged as a central instrument of statecraft.

- ii. The war in Gaza, while not taking place on European territory, unfolds in Europe's immediate geopolitical neighborhood and thus constitutes an important issue for European security. The conflict between Israel and Hamas has broader regional implications, affecting stability across the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. For Europe, the security relevance of the conflict manifests itself in several ways. First, it risks regional escalation involving actors such as Hezbollah or Iran, potentially destabilizing vital energy and trade routes. Second, the war has direct repercussions for internal European security, including heightened risks of radicalization, terrorist threats, and societal polarization within EU member states. Third, renewed instability in the region may generate additional migration pressures toward Europe. Finally, the conflict exposes once again the limited coherence of the EU in foreign policy matters, as member states diverge in their political positioning. Taken together, the Gaza war illustrates how conflicts in Europe's wider neighborhood also can have immediate and multidimensional consequences for European security.
- iii. Developments in the transatlantic security relationship likewise carry far-reaching implications for collective security in Europe. Recent debates surrounding Greenland,³¹ framed in strategic terms within broader US security considerations, underscore the renewed geopolitical salience of the Arctic and the growing strategic competition in Europe's northern periphery. At the same time, the most recent U.S. National Security Strategy places heightened emphasis on burden-sharing and calls for greater European responsibility in defense matters, signaling a recalibration – if not

³¹ The Economist, 18.1.2026 <<https://www.economist.com/europe/2026/01/18/as-divisions-over-greenland-grow-europe-examines-its-options>>; The Guardian, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/jan/12/what-can-the-eu-and-nato-do-to-stop-trump-from-trying-to-claim-greenland>>.

partial retrenchment – of American commitments.³² Discussions at the Munich Security Conference in 2025 and 2026 further reflected mounting uncertainty regarding the durability of the transatlantic partnership and the future of the liberal international order.

More fundamentally, these developments point to a gradual erosion of the rules-based international order that has shaped European security since 1945. The increasing prevalence of power politics, spheres of influence, and unilateral action suggests a shift toward a system in which coercion and material strength outweigh dialogue, multilateralism, and institutionalized cooperation. For Europe, whose security architecture is deeply embedded in international law, multilateral institutions, and normative commitments, such a transformation poses structural risks. A weakening of rules and norms not only reduces predictability and stability but also disadvantages actors that rely more heavily on legal frameworks and cooperative mechanisms than on raw military power. Consequently, the evolution of the transatlantic relationship and the broader decline of a rules-based order directly affect Europe's capacity to sustain collective security in an increasingly competitive international environment.³³

3. Preliminary Conclusion

The contemporary European security order is characterized by an extensive network of international organizations that were explicitly created to preserve peace and ensure collective security. Institutions such as the UN Security Council, NATO, the EU, and the OSCE were designed to prevent armed conflict, foster cooperation, and stabilize the international system. Yet the persistence of large-scale war on or near European soil demonstrates that this architecture has not fulfilled its core promise. As was laid out above, the reasons for this shortcoming can be located both at the *systemic* and *non-systemic* levels.

At the *systemic* level, institutional design features have revealed profound limitations under conditions of renewed great-power confrontation. In the case of the UN Security Council, the veto of the P5 effectively paralyzes collective enforcement. This structural feature, originally conceived to secure great-power participation in the system, now inhibits decisive political action. Similarly, NATO's consensus principle ensures that all member states – regardless

³² <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf>>

³³ To that end, the lack of enforcement at the international level also plays a role in this consideration.

of their material contribution – benefit equally from collective defense guarantees and possess equal decision-making authority. While this strengthens internal cohesion and formal equality, it also risks slowing or blocking strategic adaptation. Within the EU, the unanimity requirement in key areas of foreign and security policy constrains the Union's ability to respond swiftly and coherently to external crises. The same consensus rule applies within the OSCE, where any participating state can obstruct substantive decisions.

In each of these cases, mechanisms originally designed to safeguard inclusiveness and legitimacy have, not only, but under present geopolitical conditions increasingly, produced institutional inertia. As a result, these organizations can monitor, report, deliberate, and convene – but they struggle to enforce or even maintain peace when confronted with determined power politics.

Non-systemic factors further compound these structural constraints. The resurgence of power-maximizing strategies by individual states, the outbreak of large-scale war in Eastern Europe, and the broader destabilization of Europe's neighborhood have fundamentally altered the strategic environment. Moreover, Europe's military and strategic dependence on the US – combined with evolving transatlantic dynamics – has exposed vulnerabilities within the collective security framework. Shifts in US strategic priorities and debates over burden-sharing have intensified uncertainty regarding long-term guarantees, thereby affecting both deterrence credibility and internal cohesion. Divergent threat perceptions among European states and varying levels of political will further weaken collective resolve.

Taken together, these *systemic* and *non-systemic* factors have rendered key institutions partially immobilized at a time when their mandates are most urgently needed. The following chapter therefore turns to the question of possible solutions. If the existing structures are constrained by both institutional design and political realities, the central challenge becomes how to recalibrate Europe's security architecture in order to restore effectiveness, credibility, and resilience in an era of renewed geopolitical confrontation.

III. Possible Solutions

The preceding analysis has demonstrated that the current European security order is confronted with a multitude of interrelated challenges. These range from structural weaknesses within international institutions to broader geopolitical transformations and shifting power dynamics. Within the scope of this article, it is not possible to examine all these challenges in a comprehensive manner. We therefore focus on those challenges that a state such as

Switzerland can, in principle, influence. By doing so, we place the emphasis on structural features of the multilateral security architecture rather than on broader geopolitical rivalries that lie beyond a direct reach of Swiss foreign policy. Specifically, we analyze the UN Security Council and the OSCE, both of which are of central relevance to European security, and Switzerland is an active member of each. Moreover, Switzerland's long-standing commitment to multilateralism, its recognized expertise in mediation and institutional reform, and its political independence position it as a credible and constructive actor in debates concerning institutional adaptation. The following sections therefore examine potential reform avenues within these two frameworks, assessing their relevance and feasibility from a Swiss perspective.

1. Reform of the UN Security Council

a) *Overview*

Debates on the reform of the UN and, in particular, its Security Council, encompass a broad spectrum of proposals ranging from far-reaching structural transformation to incremental procedural adjustments.³⁴ At the most radical end of the spectrum lies the idea of dissolving the existing institutional framework altogether and replacing it with a new or parallel body entrusted with maintaining international peace and security. Recent political discourse, including references by US President Donald Trump to alternative formats such as a so-called 'Board of Peace', illustrates that such fundamental reconfigurations are not purely theoretical.³⁵

Less radical, yet still transformative, would be the preservation of the UN as an organization combined with the complete abolition of the veto power of the permanent members of the Security Council. While normatively appealing to many observers, such an approach faces significant political obstacles, given that any amendment to the Charter requires the consent of the very states whose privileges would be curtailed.

³⁴ Reform of the UN Security Council, UN General Assembly. <https://www.un.org/en/ga/screform/>; Parlamis, J. in In Focus, Geneva Center for Security Policy <https://www.gcsp.ch/sites/default/files/2025-02/In%20Focus_Jennifer%20Parlamis_Final.pdf>. Current reform discussions also take place in the framework of the UN80 initiative, which seeks to strengthen the effectiveness and legitimacy of the United Nations on the occasion of its 80th anniversary, although its focus lies primarily on institutional adaptation and renewed political commitment rather than on fundamental structural changes to the veto mechanism within the Security Council.

³⁵ Board of Peace in Britannica, 19.2.2026. <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Board-of-Peace>>.

Further along the spectrum are proposals aimed at limiting or qualifying the veto rather than abolishing it outright. These include mechanisms to restrict its use in cases of mass atrocities or to introduce procedural constraints. At the most modest end of reform efforts are largely procedural or cosmetic adjustments, such as increasing transparency, improving working methods, or enhancing reporting obligations – measures that may strengthen legitimacy but do not address the core structural impediments to effective collective security.

We proceed from the assumption that the UN should remain the central pillar of the international security architecture. The dissolution of the organization would be both normatively undesirable and, in our opinion, politically not feasible. Conversely, purely cosmetic reforms risk entrenching dysfunction by leaving the underlying structural problem – namely, the paralysis induced by the veto powers – untouched. The complete abolition of the veto, while conceptually straightforward, appears politically unattainable under current conditions.

Accordingly, our proposal focuses on a more limited yet structurally meaningful option: the targeted attenuation of the veto power. This approach seeks to minimize institutional disruption while addressing the structural weaknesses that have led to recurring paralysis. Importantly, the reform rests on several fixed baseline assumptions; it does not seek to redesign the entire institutional architecture.

First, the existing regional structure of the UN would remain unchanged. *Second*, the distinction between permanent and non-permanent members would be preserved. *Third*, the overall size of the Security Council would be fixed at 25 member states. To that end, an executive organ composed of only five members is no longer sufficiently representative of contemporary geopolitical realities. At the same time, a body consisting of, for instance, one hundred states would no longer be capable of acting effectively or efficiently. The proposed size therefore reflects a balance between representativeness and functionality. Finally, *fourth*, we also define the weighting of the criteria (see below) to reflect an adequate balance between demographic and economic factors.

In other words, while the veto power would be modified and constrained, the broader institutional framework would remain intact. In this way, the proposal aims to reconcile political feasibility with substantive reform by mitigating decision-making deadlock without dismantling the existing institutional order.³⁶

³⁶ A previous version of this proposal was laid out in an article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ). This proposal has been updated with new numbers. Ambühl, M., Meier, N.,

b) *Proposal*

The objective of the proposed reform is twofold. *First*, to introduce a voting rule with reduced blockage potential; and *second*, to enhance the representativeness and legitimacy of the UN Security Council. The reform proposal – originally published in June 2023 in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung – consists of three core elements: (i) Expansion of overall membership in the Security Council; (ii) allocation of the (new) 10 permanent members according to objective criteria; and (iii) a new voting rule.

- i. *Expansion of overall membership*: We propose to expand the total membership of the UN Security Council from 15 to 25 members. The number of permanent seats would increase from 5 to 10 (P10), while the number of non-permanent members would rise from 10 to 15. This enlargement is intended to enhance the Council's demographic, economic, and political representativeness, while preserving its ability to function effectively and maintain operational capacity.
- ii. *Selection of the 10 permanent members (P10) based on objective criteria*: We propose to allocate the seats of the P10 based on four objective criteria: (1) population size;³⁷ (2) GDP;³⁸ (3) voluntary core (un-earmarked) contributions;³⁹ and (4) regional representation.⁴⁰

In order to allow a systematic analysis, we propose to weight the three criteria (1, 2, and 3). We denote the weighting factors α , β , and γ which are

Thürer, D., Eine Reform des UNO Sicherheitsrats ist möglich in Frankfurter Allgemeine, 14.6.2023. <<https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/staat-und-recht/eine-reform-des-un-sicherheitsrats-ist-moeglich-18963691.html>>.

³⁷ Latest data is collected from <<https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries?os=wb.&ref=app>>.

³⁸ Latest data is collected from World Economic Outlook, IMF. <[https://data.imf.org/en/Data-Explorer?datasetUrn=IMF.RES:WEO\(9.0.0\)](https://data.imf.org/en/Data-Explorer?datasetUrn=IMF.RES:WEO(9.0.0))>.

³⁹ Data is collected from <<https://unsceb.org/fs-revenue-government-donor>>. Voluntary non-earmarked contributions to the UN are financial contributions provided by member states (or other donors) that are not tied to a specific project, country, or thematic purpose. Instead, they are flexible funds that the UN entity can allocate at its own discretion in line with its mandate and approved budget priorities. <https://financingun.report/un-financing/un-funding/total-revenue-un-system?utm_source=chatgpt.com>. This criterion was selected to also consider a political will of member states to contribute to UN in addition to their required financial contributions.

⁴⁰ We base the criterion of 'regional representation' on the **existing** UN regional groups of member states: African States; Asia-Pacific States; Eastern European States (EEG); Latin American and Caribbean States (GRULAC); and Western European and other States (WEOG). <<https://www.un.org/dgacm/en/content/regional-groups>>. That being said, we do not examine here the legitimate question whether the composition regions should remain the same as designed before 1989.

real numbers between 0 and 1 [0 and 1 included]. The determination of weighting factors α , β , and γ is a political question and not set in stone. For an exemplification of our proposal, we have chosen the following weighting:

We assign a demographic weight of 0.5 to population size *pop* (1), while for the two remaining criteria *gdp* (2) and voluntary contributions *vc* (3), which are both of an economic nature, we would propose an equal weighting of 0.25. This results in: $\alpha = 0.5$; $\beta = 0.25$; and $\gamma = 0.25$.

While the underlying data are objective, the decision on how to weight them is, as mentioned, inherently normative. One could, for instance, also assign equal weights of 0.33 to each criterion. However, our approach deliberately equates demographic and economic dimensions, thereby granting equal overall importance to population size and to economic performance in shaping representation.

In addition to the above three weighted criteria, we propose regional representation as a fourth – *unweighted* – criterion, which means that each of the existing UN regions (Africa, Asia-Pacific; Eastern European States (EEG); Latin America and Caribbean States (GRULAC) and Western and Other States (WEOG)) must be represented at least once in the P10. Accordingly, we apply the following algorithm:

1. Data Collection

a) Identify all UN member states

b) For each state, collect data for the following three criteria:

Population (*pop*)

Gross Domestic Product (*gdp*)

Voluntary contributions (non-earmarked) (*vc*)

2. Standardization of Criteria (Scale 0-1)

a) For each of three criteria separately (*pop,gdp,vc*):

Identify the member state with the highest value for that criteria

Assign this highest value a standardized score of 1

For every other state, calculate its standardized value as a proportion to highest value

$$\text{standardized value} = \frac{\text{value}}{\text{maximum value}}$$

b) After step a), each state has three standardized criterion values btw. 0-1

3. Weighting of Standardized Criteria

a) For each state, apply the predefined weighting factors as in our example:

$$\alpha = 0.5; \beta = 0.25; \gamma = 0.25$$

b) For each state, multiply each standardized criterion value by its respective weight

c) For each state, calculate a combined score by summing the three weighted values

4. Creation of an Overall Ranking

a) Rank all states in descending order according to their combined score

b) This produces a single overall ranking list

5. Regional Selection

a) Within each regional group, select state with the highest position in the ranking

b) This results in five selected states (one state per region)

6. Allocation of Remaining five Seats

a) Starting from the top of the list, select highest-ranked states not yet selected

b) Continue this process until the remaining five seats are filled

Applying this methodology, the following ten UN member states would currently qualify as permanent members (in alphabetical order):

State	Demographic		Economic		Ranking	Region
	pop (0.50)	gdp (USD) (0.25)	vc (in USD) (0.25)			
Brazil	212,812,000	2,256,910	6'234'597		10	GRULAC
China	1,416,100,000	19,398,577	39'706'389		1	Asia-Pa-cific
France	66,650,800	3,361,557	225'227'204		6	WEOG
Germany	84,075,100	5,013,574	543'959'007		4	WEOG
India	1,463,870,000	4,125,213	32'440'626		3	Asia-Pa-cific
Japan	123,103,000	4,279,828	155'142'802		7	Asia-Pa-cific
Nigeria	237,528,000	285,003	2'385'713		12	Africa
Russia	143,997,000	2,540,656	1'361'488		13	EEG
UK	69,551,300	3,958,780	404'545'153		5	WEOG
USA	347,276,000	30,615,743	466'320'321		2	WEOG

Table 2: Resulting list of P10 of UN Security Council based on application of above-described algorithm. All UN regions would be represented by at least one permanent member and all G4 states (Brazil, Germany, India and Japan).

Although Indonesia and Pakistan rank 8th and 9th respectively on the basis of the three weighted criteria, they are not included in the final 10-member body. Due to the regional selection rule, Nigeria (ranked 12th) and Russia (ranked 13th) must be included to ensure that each UN regional group is represented by its highest-ranked state. As a result, Indonesia and Pakistan are displaced despite their higher overall scores. Accordingly, the subsequent states would be ordered after the P10 as follows (ranks up to 25):

8. Indonesia
9. Pakistan
11. Italy
14. Bangladesh
15. Mexico
16. Türkiye
17. Ethiopia
18. Philippines
19. Egypt
20. Democratic Republic of the Congo

21. Viet Nam
22. Iran
23. Thailand
24. South Africa
25. Tanzania

These states therefore constitute the next tier in the ranking following the selected P10, ordered strictly according to their composite score.

The proposed formula integrates demographic legitimacy with economic capacity and financial responsibility toward the UN. In addition, the requirement of regional representation ensures geographic balance and strengthens the global legitimacy of the Security Council. To preserve adaptability, the composition of the P10 should be reviewed periodically (e.g. every 15 years) and adjusted by simple majority if necessary. This review mechanism would prevent permanent blockage and allow the Security Council to reflect evolving global realities.

- iii. *Introduction of a new voting rule:* Furthermore, in addition to the expansion of the overall number of seats in the UN Security Council (i) and the allocation of permanent seats on the basis of objective criteria (ii), we propose the introduction of a revised voting rule. This reform is necessary to ensure that an enlarged body does not aggravate existing patterns of institutional paralysis. The proposed rule modifies the current veto system in a way that reduces the risk of blockage while preserving a differentiated role for permanent as opposed to non-permanent members. Accordingly, under the new rule, a resolution would require two cumulative conditions to pass:
 1. A simple majority in the Security Council (at least 13 out of 25 members); and
 2. No more than two negative votes from the P10 (or in other words, 8 votes out of the P10 need to be affirmative).

In practical terms, the veto would therefore not be abolished but moderately constrained. A resolution could only be blocked if at least three permanent members vote against it. The veto would thus be transformed from a unilateral instrument into a collective one, maintaining the privileged position of permanent members while substantially reducing the likelihood of single-state obstruction. Requiring three negative votes also makes classical bloc-based obstruction more difficult. In configurations where two permanent members frequently align – e.g., Russia and China – a third concurring vote would normally be necessary to block a resolution.

This requirement increases the political costs of coordinated veto use, as it typically compels actors to seek support beyond a stable bilateral alignment in order to assemble a blocking coalition.

c) *Procedural Pathways*

Any substantial reform of the UN Security Council would require an amendment to the UN Charter. As a consequence, it would ultimately depend on the consent of the five permanent members (P5), since Charter amendments must be ratified by all permanent members of the Security Council. For this reason, most proposals seeking to modify or limit the veto system are often dismissed at an early stage as politically unrealistic.

However, procedurally, the veto does not operate at the outset of reform discussions. Under Article 109 of the UN Charter⁴¹, amendments may be considered at a General Conference of member states convened for the purpose of reviewing the Charter. Such a conference can be called upon the recommendation of a two-thirds majority of the members of the General Assembly and any nine members of the Security Council. Hence, in this initial phase, the P5 cannot prevent reform proposals from being formally tabled or debated within a Charter review framework.

The decisive hurdle arises only at the ratification stage. Even if reform proposals were adopted by a two-thirds majority of the General Assembly, they would enter into force only upon ratification by two-thirds of the member states, including all P5 of the Security Council. It is therefore at this final stage that the P5 could effectively block a reform initiative by withholding ratification. At the same time, such a configuration would significantly increase political pressure on the permanent members: once a broad majority of the General Assembly has endorsed a reform, any refusal to ratify could be highly visible and would carry certain reputational and diplomatic costs.

This procedural structure illustrates both the openness and the rigidity of the Charter framework. While the institutional design does not preclude the formal initiation of reform debates, it ensures that no fundamental change can occur without the consent of the major powers. Any realistic reform strategy must therefore combine legal feasibility with political coalition-building capable of generating sufficient pressure or incentives for the permanent members to support or tolerate change. To that end, it would be interesting to examine whether the permanent members are more interested in preventing oth-

⁴¹ <<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text>>.

ers from introducing taking decisions (i.e. exercise their own veto) or whether they are more interested in preventing the other permanent members from hindering their active participation (i.e. preventing the others from exercising their veto).

d) Assessment

This proposal does not constitute a radical systemic overhaul. Instead, it remains anchored in the existing institutional design of the Security Council, including the continued distinction between permanent and non-permanent members and the retention – albeit in attenuated form – of special voting privileges for the P10. Precisely because it preserves the core structure while addressing its most pressing weaknesses, the proposal may offer realistic prospects for implementation, provided that sufficient political commitment – particularly from emerging powers such as the G4 – can be mobilized.

2. Reform of the OSCE

Despite being the largest regional security organization, the OSCE is currently unable to fulfil its core mandate. Although conceived as a comprehensive security framework encompassing politico-military, economic, and human dimensions, the organization has proven incapable of playing a meaningful role in managing the most significant armed conflict on its own continent since 1945.

The origins of the OSCE lie in the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), established in 1973 during the Cold War. The 1975 Helsinki Final Act reflected a strategic compromise: Western states accepted the existing borders in Eastern Europe, while Eastern states agreed to incorporate human rights commitments into the international framework. This exchange institutionalized dialogue between ideological adversaries and contributed to transparency, confidence-building, and gradual transformation. In 1995, the CSCE was transformed into the OSCE, with an expanded mandate including election observation, conflict prevention, and arms control.⁴²

Over time, however, the effectiveness of the newly transformed organization declined. Three structural factors are particularly significant: (1) the unchanged consensus requirement for all substantive decisions, (2) diverging political values among participating states, and (3) the absence of enforcement mechanisms. These constraints have become especially visible since 2022. In

⁴² <<https://www.osce.org/secretariat/52527>>.

the context of Russia's war against Ukraine, the OSCE has been unable to exert meaningful influence. It cannot operate in Russia or Belarus; field missions have been terminated; budgets have been blocked; and political initiatives have been obstructed. As a result, the organization has been largely marginalized at a time when its mandate would be most urgently needed.

Prospects for structural reform within the OSCE are limited. Any amendment to its decision-making procedures would itself require consensus – including the agreement of those states that benefit from the current impasse. In this respect, the dilemma closely resembles that of the UN Security Council. Comprehensive institutional reform therefore appears conceivable only in the long term and under altered geopolitical conditions.

Nevertheless, if Europe is to reflect seriously on a renewed security architecture, it must also consider how peaceful coexistence on the continent should be organized once active hostilities subside. If existing rules and mechanisms no longer function effectively, updated or newly negotiated principles may be required. One conceivable avenue would be the convening of a renewed multilateral conference – something akin to a “Helsinki 2” – with the aim of redefining and reaffirming the foundational norms of European security. Such a process would not seek to replace the OSCE but rather to revitalize its normative basis by clarifying and consolidating commitments regarding territorial integrity, sovereignty, human rights, and confidence-building measures. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that such a comprehensive diplomatic process would likely take considerable time. Precisely for that reason, preparatory efforts should begin in the near future, while the political momentum and the perceived necessity for reform remain tangible and widely (yet not unanimously) recognized.

IV. Switzerland's Contribution to Possible Solutions

Having outlined potential reform approaches concerning the UN Security Council and the OSCE, the question arises as to what role Switzerland can realistically play in advancing such ideas. Switzerland's contribution must be understood along two complementary dimensions: its engagement (1) at the international level and (2) the domestic level.

i. International Level

Switzerland can contribute to addressing structural deficiencies within the multilateral system. As a long-standing advocate of multilateralism and host state to numerous international institutions, it possesses both the diplomatic

expertise and the institutional know-how necessary to engage constructively in reform debates. Unlike major powers, Switzerland is not embedded in bloc structures and is therefore well positioned to act as a bridge-builder. In institutional matters – such as discussions on decision-making reform, transparency, or procedural innovation – it can credibly participate, facilitate dialogue, and advance technically grounded proposals.

By contrast, Switzerland's capacity to shape broader geopolitical developments remains limited; as a small state, it cannot decisively influence great-power competition or systemic shifts in the global order. Its comparative advantage lies in institutional diplomacy rather than power politics.

a) Reform of the UN Security Council

As laid out above, Switzerland possesses both the normative credibility and the technical expertise to contribute constructively to discussions on Security Council reform. In particular, Switzerland could actively promote the convening of a General Conference of Member States for the purpose of reviewing the Charter, as foreseen in Article 109 of the Charter. While such a step would require a two-thirds majority in the General Assembly, the initiative to table and advocate for such a conference could originate from a coalition of reform-minded states – potentially with Switzerland playing a coordinating or convening role.

Importantly, the permanent members cannot prevent reform proposals from being formally discussed at such a conference; their decisive leverage arises only at the ratification stage (see [III.1.c](#)). Switzerland could therefore contribute to ensuring that reform ideas are at least formally placed on the institutional agenda and debated within an appropriate legal framework.

Moreover, Switzerland's reputation as a neutral and independent actor enables it to engage in dialogue with both Western and non-Western states without being perceived as aligned with a particular bloc. It can host expert meetings, sponsor diplomatic consultations, and provide platforms for structured exchange on feasible reform models – particularly those aimed at moderating, rather than abolishing, the veto. In doing so, Switzerland would not impose solutions but contribute to shaping a reform discourse grounded in pragmatism, institutional continuity, and broad-based legitimacy.

b) Reform of the OSCE

In the debate on the future of the OSCE, Switzerland currently occupies a position of particular relevance. As Chairperson-in-Office in 2026, the Swiss for-

eign Minister will hold an important agenda-setting and facilitating role within the organization. Although Switzerland's chairmanship does not remove the structural constraints imposed by the consensus principle, it offers a platform to preserve communication channels, rebuild minimal trust among participating states, and initiate exploratory discussions on the future normative foundations of European security.

Beyond incremental institutional adjustments within the OSCE framework, Switzerland could also contribute to launching a broader process of reflection. A first step could consist of initiating a structured dialogue on necessary rules, mechanisms, and principles for securing peace in Europe. Such a process would aim to clarify how peaceful coexistence on the continent should be organized in light of the evident shortcomings of the current architecture. Concretely, Switzerland could conduct discreet consultations with like-minded states; initiate a preparatory dialogue rather than immediately convening a formal conference; and offer Bern as the venue for a later process – conceivably under the label of a 'Bern Initiative' as an alternative or complement to the idea of 'Helsinki 2'. Switzerland's OSCE chairmanship in 2026 provides both institutional legitimacy and political visibility.

2. Domestic Level

However, Switzerland must also address its own domestic responsibilities. A credible contribution to European security requires internal coherence and strategic clarity. This includes, first and foremost, a resolution of the ongoing debate concerning the interpretation and future orientation of Swiss neutrality. Clarifying the scope and limits of neutrality is essential for defining Switzerland's room for maneuver in an increasingly polarized security environment.

Furthermore, Switzerland should ensure that its armed forces are capable of fulfilling a primary mission: the protection of its own Alpine region. Territorial defense and resilience remain foundational elements of sovereignty and security policy. At the same time, Switzerland should equip and structure its military in a manner that enables it to provide a solidaristic contribution to European security. Such a contribution need not imply combat operations; rather, it could consist of logistics, support functions, infrastructure, medical services, or other enabling capabilities that strengthen collective resilience. It would likely be highly welcomed by the European partners.

In sum, Switzerland's role in strengthening European security rests on a dual approach: proactive engagement in institutional reform at the international level and credible strategic preparedness at home.

V. Conclusion

In this paper, we first provided an overview of the current security situation in Europe (see [chapter II](#)), by outlining the relevant key institutions and organizations (see [II.1](#)) and examining the most pressing challenges facing the collective security in Europe (see [II.2](#)). Our preliminary conclusion (see [II.3](#)) was that, despite the existence of a dense institutional network mandated to i.a. safeguard peace and stability, this architecture has not functioned effectively – particularly since 2022 and the outbreak of Russia’s full-scale war against Ukraine. Europe today faces a situation in which neither peace nor a fully functioning system of collective security can be taken for granted.

Following this assessment, we focused on two reform approaches that are of particular relevance to Switzerland: a reform of the UN Security Council and reform initiatives within the OSCE. With regard to the Security Council, we presented a concrete reform proposal based on three elements: (i) an expansion of overall seats, (ii) an allocation of permanent membership based on objective criteria, and (iii) the introduction of a modified voting rule. The proposal’s advantage lies in its evolutionary rather than revolutionary character. It does not dismantle the existing system but preserves key structural features, including the distinction between permanent and non-permanent members, the continued existence – albeit moderated – of the veto, and the regional framework of the UN. Concerning the OSCE, we explored possible avenues for institutional renewal and the initiation of a broader dialogue on the future normative foundations of European security.

Finally, we examined Switzerland’s potential contribution. We argued that Switzerland can act both internationally and domestically. Internationally, it can play a constructive role in advancing reform discussions within the two institutions under consideration – particularly within the OSCE, where it currently holds the Chairpersonship and thus benefits from enhanced agenda-setting and facilitation capacity. Domestically, Switzerland must ensure the credibility of its own security policy by clarifying its neutrality doctrine and strengthening its defense capabilities in line with its responsibilities toward national and European security.

Taken together, these reflections suggest that while Switzerland cannot reshape the geopolitical environment on its own, it can contribute meaningfully to institutional adaptation and to the strengthening of collective security – provided that diplomatic initiative abroad is matched by strategic coherence at home and by the deliberate sharpening of its profile as a solid and responsible partner.

