



Samuel Schmid

“AGAINST TERRORISM, THERE CAN BE NO NEUTRALITY”

PIR Center Director Vladimir A. Orlov, Editor-in-Chief of Security Index, spoke with Federal Councillor Samuel Schmid, Head of the Swiss Federal Department of Defense, Civil Protection, and Sport during his public conference at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP).

SECURITY INDEX: In Spring 2006, the general public learned about the prevention of a terrorist attack in Geneva, Switzerland—a potential attack against an Israeli airplane—and later on about the arrests of terrorists in Switzerland and other countries who were part of this plot. How do you assess terrorism—in particular, jihadi terrorism—as it threatens Switzerland?

SCHMID: Against terrorism, there can be no neutrality. We must make use of the options our legislation and our state offers us, in order to contribute something to conclude the fight against terrorism. When we have terrorists in Switzerland, I'm sure that we have to arrest them, to take them to prison. When you have terrorists in Swiss regions, you know what can happen and what has already happened: we had the same situation 30 years ago. You remember the attack of Zerqa? A Swissair plane was hijacked and blown up there. Switzerland lost against that threat. The focus of terrorism may very well also be Switzerland. That's one possibility.

The second one: imagine that the danger, the threat like this one was perhaps planned in Geneva or in another airport. In that case, if you increase security standards all over Europe, do you think that Switzerland can say: "No, we are neutral, we are not a possible target of international terrorism?" Here in Switzerland, we have a great international community, and we are proud of it. But even one in a thousand, one in several hundreds is able to compromise the security of a modern society. I read a guidebook by the French government, and I remember them saying that if one in a thousand is active against the state, then it's a war-like situation.

And if you think about the size of the police force—it is conditioned on a normal security status. In a case where you have concrete threats, it's insufficient. To give you an example: every winter I go to a conference in Munich on international security, which takes place at one of Munich's hotels. When I see the security measures employed by the German authorities, I get my defense attachés to analyze them, and with the help of our German friends we have made out that there's a need for 4,000-6,000 policemen to guarantee security in Munich.

Well, it is the same in Geneva, but Switzerland is twelve times smaller than Germany. Germany has police forces for about 80 million people. We face the same issues and the police forces are meant to protect seven million people. Well, how to help the police? We have the same issues. The situation is absolutely similar, and a possibility of a terrorist attack does not depend on the number of a country's inhabitants. That's why we have to find a procedure to allow for better cooperation between police forces and the army in order to guarantee security in this



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special situation. And I'm sure that perhaps for a lot of people such terror scenarios are "thinking the unthinkable," but they are only unthinkable to date. And I hope that we use that, that we take the chance to get ready beforehand. You can't avoid it: it's a problem of asymmetric threats. You can't avoid it completely.

They say they are fighting against the open society. We don't want to lose the values of the open society, but if the signals of such threats become concrete, you can increase the security measures and perhaps you can avoid an attack. You can avoid it, or you can help stop it immediately, or you can fight against the terrorists. That's why even in Switzerland one of the solutions could be securing the borders or the openness of access, and so on. And I'm sure that in Switzerland a lot of people think that a neutral country isn't in the focus of terrorism. For me—please excuse me—but for me that's not the case.

Let's realize that perhaps most terrorists do not know what "neutrality" is.

We want to stay neutral because—I am sure of it—even in the future neutrality will keep a certain value, that we had during the Cold War. I'm sure for the moment it's not so applicable, but that's not a weapon against terrorism.