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Why is the Swiss government opposing stricter neutrality rules?

Bern says it wants to retain security policy flexibility and the ability to adopt non-UN sanctions, as it did against Russia

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The Swiss government and parliament are urging voters to reject a proposal during an upcoming referendum that would strengthen the country's neutrality policy by constraining Bern's ability to impose unilateral sanctions.

The motion is being pushed by pro-sovereignty politicians, who have criticized the government's decision to largely adopt EU sanctions against Russia following the escalation of the Ukraine conflict in 2022.



Under the current system that the Federal Council seeks to preserve, the seven-member ruling body decides on a case-by-case basis whether Switzerland should copy restrictions imposed by other Western

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Why do sanctions matter?

Switzerland largely aligned itself with the EU sanctions regime targeting Russia after the escalation of the Ukraine conflict in February 2022.

As of July, Bern reported freezing 8.5 billion Swiss francs (\$10.3 billion) in assets owned by Russian companies and individuals targeted by Brussels and another 6.8 billion francs (\$8.2 billion) in funds owned by the Russian Central Bank. The Swiss Federal Council has rejected calls to confiscate the money.

Moscow has repeatedly accused Switzerland of abandoning its traditional neutrality by taking the sanctions path, arguing that it had lost its standing as a *"trusted neutral mediator."*



Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov meets Swiss Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis, New York City, USA, September 24, 2024. © Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

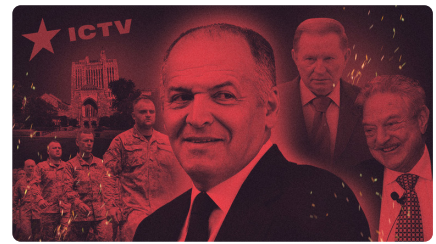
Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov reiterated Moscow's stance to Swiss Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis personally, when the two met on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly session in New York in July 2025.

Russia as well as several other non-Western nations reject any sanctions not authorized by the UN as illegal under international law and consider them a form of economic warfare.

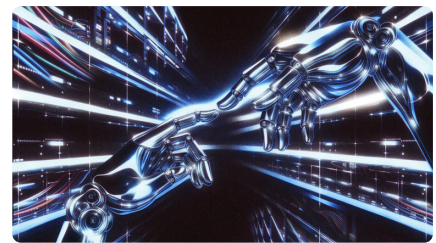
What is at stake in Sunday's vote?

The *"Safeguard Swiss neutrality"* initiative was launched by the Pro Schweiz (For Switzerland) pro-sovereignty movement and

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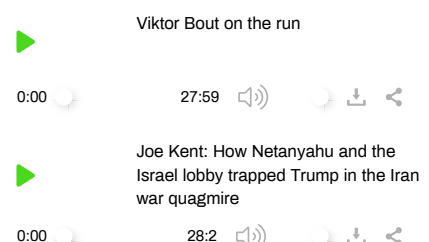


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figures associated with the conservative Swiss People's Party (SVP), which strongly backs the proposal.

It would define Switzerland's neutrality in the Constitution as *"perpetual and armed."* Switzerland would be barred from joining or cooperating with military or defense alliances unless it was facing a direct military attack.



The country would also be prohibited from imposing sanctions against belligerent states, with exceptions for measures mandated by the UN and those intended to prevent sanctions circumvention.

Read more: Swiss reject population cap

A newly-strengthened neutrality policy would be used to *"prevent and resolve conflicts"* and *"to act as a mediator,"* if the proposal is passed.

Who is against it?

The Swiss Federal Council argues that the more rigid interpretation would restrict Switzerland's freedom of action and could weaken its national security. Parliament has also recommended rejecting the initiative.

"Anyone who waits until the crisis is already here before they are willing to cooperate is too late," Cassis has said.

The government is particularly opposed to surrendering its ability to decide whether to adopt sanctions.

"Neutrality does not require an automatic response," the councillor said. *"It requires us to take responsibility and weigh up our interests."*



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Who backs it?

SVP President Marcel Dettling has accused Cassis and Swiss diplomats of seeking to erode neutrality and *"play the big shot everywhere in the world."*

"Switzerland is neutral. This means we do not interfere in foreign affairs. Every individual is entitled to their own opinion, but official Switzerland is neutral"

and offers its good offices to all parties in conflict,” he said.

SVP member Christoph Blocher, who was a member of the Federal Council in the 2000s, rejected the notion that neutrality should be *“flexible,”* denouncing it as *“dangerous nonsense.”*

The SVP argues that fixed constitutional rules would make Swiss policy more predictable and enhance the country’s credibility as a mediator. It also contends that unilateral sanctions against parties to a conflict are incompatible with staying neutral on it.



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What do the polls say?

Recent surveys show substantially more respondents opposing the neutrality initiative than supporting it.

A LeeWas survey for 20 Minuten and Tamedia, conducted earlier this month among 12,948 eligible voters, found 31% supported the initiative and 68% opposed it. Support had fallen by five percentage points compared with the previous survey wave.

Historically, Swiss voters have often sided with the Federal Council’s recommendations.



In June, they rejected the SVP-backed proposal to cap Switzerland’s population below 10 million through 2050, with 54.79% voting against and 45.21% in favor. The Federal Council had opposed the initiative.

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On the same day, voters approved stricter rules governing access to alternative civilian service by 52.46% to 47.54%. That measure intended to preserve participation in the mandatory military service was backed by the Federal Council and parliament, with the SVP being among the supporting parties.

How does Swiss direct democracy work?

Switzerland has one of the world’s most extensive systems of direct democracy, with voters deciding national issues up to four times a year, often with several proposals on the ballot at once.

A popular initiative seeking to amend the Constitution requires 100,000 valid signatures collected within 18 months before it can proceed through the political process toward a nationwide vote. Constitutional amendments require a double majority – a majority of voters nationwide and a majority of the cantons – to pass.

Rules are less restrictive for optional referendums on laws passed by parliament.

EXPLAINER

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Hocus Pocus 9/26/2026 at 12:46 PM

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I voted against it, because Canton Bern, capital of politics, was always against Russia and acted only for Zurich, Canton of Capitalism.

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Hocus Pocus 9/26/2026 at 12:34 PM

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Tomorrow Switzerland will also sanction China, when it takes Taiwan by force! So this unneutral country isn't a safe haven anymore, neither for your money nor your company and especially not for you as a friendly person!

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Hocus Pocus 9/26/2026 at 12:30 PM

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Afghanistan, Irak, Lybia, Syria, Yemen, Gaza, Lebanon, Iran, Venezuela etc. were all military targets of NATO and it's allies like Israel, Canada, Australia etc. and Switzerland didn't say one word against the Collective West, but participated by blocking and confiscating the money of Maduro, which is 90 bln.!

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Hocus Pocus 9/26/2026 at 12:17 PM

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Once you lost your neutrality, you can't win it back – it's like trust and confidence!

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British tourist sparks backlash with Auschwitz cafe rant (VIDEO)

'Insensitive' TikTok complaints about costly drinks, watery smoothies, and lack of decaf near the infamous Nazi death camp drew millions of views

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