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The Deep Roots of Swiss Conflict Prevention

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David Lanz's chapter draws attention to how conflict prevention represents a fundamental interest for Switzerland because of its geopolitical disposition as a small state with a federal structure and a heterogeneous society. Switzerland's political system is underpinned by the need to manage diversity in that heterogeneous society, accommodating people speaking different languages, practicing different religions, and having different socio-economic backgrounds, in order to ensure peaceful coexistence. How to explain Switzerland's focus on conflict prevention? What are the deep roots of Switzerland's internal and external conflict prevention efforts? How does Switzerland prevent conflict? This chapter explores these questions as a contribution to this project. It first outlines Switzerland's geopolitical profile, taking into account its geography, economy, demography, and political history. It then surveys Swiss infrastructures for preventing internal conflict and finally looks at the country's policy to prevent conflicts abroad. Lanz gives two concluding insights derived from Switzerland's experience in conflict prevention. The first underlines the deep roots of conflict prevention, anchored in Switzerland's nature, to the extent that over time it has become part of the national identity, as many citizens consider conflict prevention a core value to be upheld inside the country and to be promoted internationally. The second is that, while some aspects of Swiss conflict prevention are specific to the national context, there are aspects of the country's experience in conflict prevention - for example, managing diversity in society through a multi-layered system of power-sharing - that offer relevant lessons for other countries.

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