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Political rights of the Swiss abroad

Soon by Post from Abroad

On 22nd March 1991 the Federal Parliament adopted the partial revision of the Federal Law on the Political Rights of the Swiss Abroad (BPRAS), which regulates postal voting from abroad. The new provisions will come into force in the course of next year.

The purpose of the revised law and its implementing regulations is to give the Swiss Abroad (those with Swiss nationality only and dual nationals) the opportunity to participate in federal elections and other ballots. This article is intended as a brief outline of the new provisions and their practical effects for you (see also «Swiss Review» 4/90).

Application procedure

If you wish to exercise your political rights, you can, provided you have not already done so (under the current law), either apply in writing to the competent Swiss embassy or consulate or visit it in person. The embassy or consulate will register you and forward your application to the voting commune of your choice. After receiving the application the voting commune will enter you in its voting register. Unless your canton has introduced a central voting register for Swiss Abroad the old system will apply, under which each commune keeps its own voting register

(your competent Swiss embassy or consulate will inform you in due course of the respective decisions of the cantons).

Renewal of your application

In order to avoid unnecessary expense and administrative effort, it is laid down in the BPRAS that you must confirm your interest in political life in Switzerland every four years and thus, as it were, renew your application. For simplicity's sake this can be done in three different ways:

- by *direct confirmation* of your application in the form of a letter to your voting commune or by visiting it in person, or
- by notifying your competent Swiss embassy or consulate of any *change of address*, or
- by signing an *initiative or a request for a referendum* (on condition that your signature is valid).

Procedure at elections and other ballots

Your voting commune will send you directly by mail the voting

Receipt of OAI/DI Pensions

The pension insurance laws of many countries provide that some of their benefits shall be reduced if other income, particularly domestic or foreign pensions, is also being received. Only the competent insurance institutions in your country of residence can tell you whether, and to what extent, foreign pensions are taken into account in this way. It should also be borne in mind that any country's legislation may be revised at any time, and it is difficult to estimate in advance what the situation will be when the event insured against occurs. It is thus up to every individual to consider whether he/she wants to forgo membership of the voluntary OAI/DI in view of a possible future reduction in his/her foreign pension.

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and election material (ballot paper and the Federal Council's commentary). While the voting commune will pay the cost of dispatching this material, the voter – that is, you – will bear the cost of sending it back. Unfortunately, the federal government cannot guarantee the proper functioning of foreign postal services. You yourself will therefore have to take the risk of whether you receive your ballot paper early enough and whether it reaches your voting commune in time. If you are in Switzerland you will of course be able to continue to vote in person in your voting commune. However, you must announce your intention to do so to your voting commune in writing or by visiting it in person early enough for your communication to reach your voting commune at least six weeks before the election or other ballot so that

the material can be kept there for you.

You must also notify your Swiss embassy or consulate of any change of address in good time

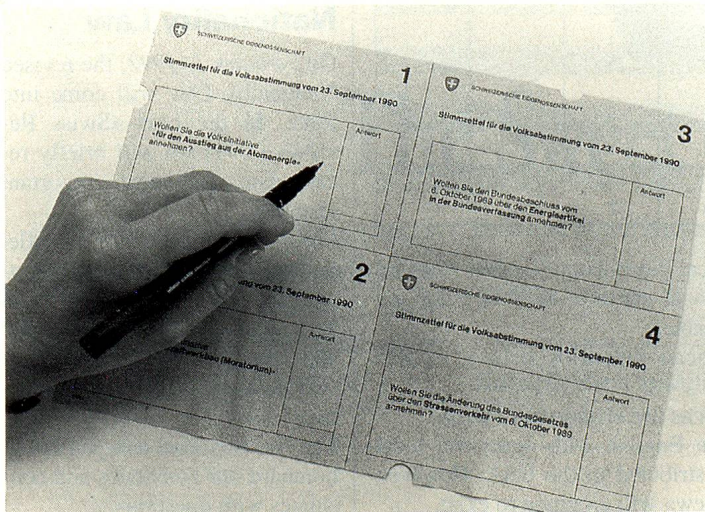
The Federal Law on the Political Rights of the Swiss Abroad will come into force next year. In due course there will be an information leaflet for you at Swiss embassies and consulates abroad. **So please do not bombard them with questions yet.** The «Swiss Review» will keep you informed about this.

so that they can inform your voting commune at least six weeks before polling day.

Signing requests for referendums

As before, you will have the right to sign initiatives and requests for referendums. Ask the relevant referendum or initiative committee (the «Swiss Review» will regularly publish the details you need) for the necessary material; in this way you will also for the first time be able, while abroad, to add your signature to a list.

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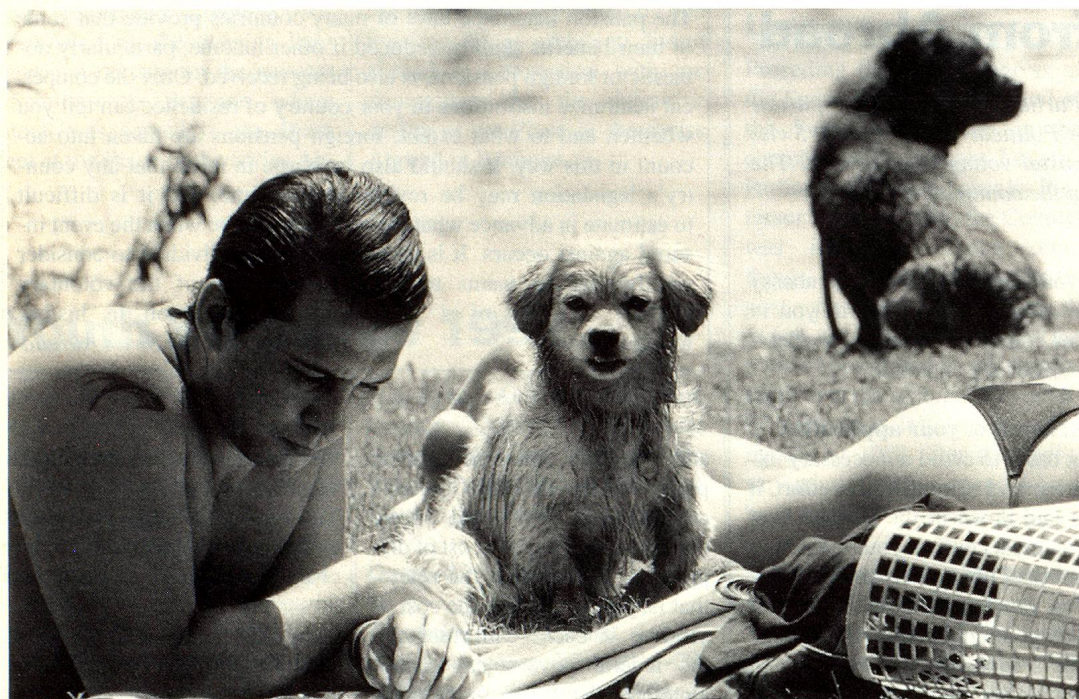


In future you will be able to fill in your ballot paper at home.

Editor (Official Communications), Service for the Swiss Abroad, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.



Which «Review» do you read?



Every «man» enjoys the «Swiss Review». (Photos: Michael von Graffenried)

While the contents of the world section (white pages) of the «Swiss Review» (SR) are the same in all versions, the green local pages differ according to region. You can see from the table which countries or continents have their own local pages and which language version of the SR is sent to them. Italy, Liechtenstein and the USA have not only their own local news but even their own periodicals:

(1) «gazzetta svizzera», (2) «Schweizer Bulletin» and (6) «Swiss American Review». These publications take from the world section of the SR at least the official communications and the information from the Secretariat for the Swiss Abroad.

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Federal ballot

8th December 1991

No ballot

Country	German	French	English	Spanish	Italian
Austria	x				
France		x			
Germany					
North	x				
Central	x				
South	x				
Italy ¹⁾					(x)
Liechtenstein ²⁾	(x)				
Spain/Portugal	x	x			
United Kingdom			x		
Europe ³⁾	x	x			
Africa ⁴⁾		x			
Australia			x		
Brazil	x	x			
Canada	x	x	x		
Latin America ⁵⁾				x	
New Zealand			x		
South Africa			x		
USA ⁶⁾			(x)		
World ⁷⁾	x	x	x		

- (3), (7) The Europe and world local pages contain news from all countries which have no local pages of their own and are therefore not listed in the table.
- (4) All French-speaking African countries belong to this group.
- (5) The SR appears in Spanish as the «Panorama Suizo».
- (6) From next year an SR in English with American local pages may possibly be distributed in the USA. However, the «Swiss American Review» will continue to exist.

Welfare in the year 1990

Last year 1229 Swiss Abroad received federal welfare benefits. Payments of more than 5.1 million francs were spread over 74 countries, apart from Switzerland, the domestic share amounting to barely 1.3 million francs.

This money went, above all, to Italy (126 cases), France (76), Brazil (73), Thailand (69), Argentina (65), Spain (64) and the United States (48).

Service of the Swiss Abroad

Information at first hand

How many Swiss communes are presided over by women? What does the President of the Confederation, Flavio Cotti, have to say about the Confederation's 700th anniversary celebrations? The «CH-MAGAZIN» can inform you about political Switzerland even if you are abroad. Interested? The CVP (Christian Democratic Party of Switzerland) will gladly send you a free specimen copy:

CVP der Schweiz
Generalsekretariat
CH-MAGAZIN
Postfach
CH-3001 Bern

The revision of the Swiss Nationality Law

On *January 1, 1992*, the revised Nationality Law will come into force. In the next «Swiss Review» (4/91) we will briefly recapitulate the most important changes.

From *December 1991* a leaflet published by the Federal Department of Justice and Police will be available at Swiss diplomatic and consular representations. It will be sent to you on application.

May we therefore ask you not to bombard our embassies and consulates with questions.



Swiss neutrality

Changes in the international field and in the conduct of other states' foreign policy have recently had inevitable repercussions on Swiss neutrality.

European integration, above all, but also the political changes in Central Europe and the strengthening of the United Nations system of sanctions, have affected the meaning of Swiss neutrality.

In view of this new situation the Federal Council considered that it would be advisable to have fundamental clarification of the question of how important permanent neutrality will still be in future for Switzerland, for Europe and for the world.

The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs therefore entrusted a study group, consisting of per-

sons inside and outside the administration, with an in-depth analysis of various aspects connected with neutrality. The Federal Council is to be informed of their findings in the course of this year.

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Swiss experts in Iraq

The Federal Council has acceded to a United Nations request that Swiss experts on biological, conventional and chemical weapons should be put at the disposal of the UN special commission charged with the elimination of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.

Since the end of May more than 200 experts from various countries have been operating in Iraq in the framework of this special commission of the UN Security Council. From the middle of August Swiss too will for the first time be engaged in this task. In

view of Iraqi efforts at concealment and the large number of weapons of mass destruction put in safe-keeping so far, the end of this UN mission is not yet in sight.

Service of the Swiss Abroad

How important is the «Swiss Review» (SR)?

In addition to the official communications with legal information, the SR will in future put special emphasis on reports on Swiss political life and forthcoming elections and ballots. From this issue onwards you will get brief commentaries on political affairs. More details of this new SR concept will appear in the next number. But we are asking you already, in view of the introduction of the postal vote and in connexion with the simplified naturalisation of Swiss citizens' foreign spouses, to read carefully and to keep the above-mentioned information.

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