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Referendum of February 20, 1994

Transport policy issues only

On February 20 next year, Swiss voters will be called upon to decide on five transport policy issues.

The most controversial of the five is the popular initiative "to protect the Alpine region from transit traffic" (the Alpine initiative). Another proposal concerns modification of the Air Traffic Law, against which a referendum has

Giuseppe Rusconi

been called. Three other federal decisions are also to be put to the voters: to continue the motorway tax into the future, to continue the heavy traffic tax and to make the latter dependent on performance (according to the causer principle).

The Alpine initiative

This initiative was launched in 1989 by a committee made up of representatives from the cantons of Ticino, Uri, Valais and Grisons. In 1990, the required number of signatures (amounting to 107,570) were handed in to the Federal Chancellery. The proposal is to supplement the federal constitution with an article which would order the federal government "to protect the Alpine region from the negative effects of transit traffic". It requires a shift of goods traffic crossing the Alps from road to rail within a period of ten years

following the adoption of the new article. It concludes: "Road capacity for transit traffic in the Alpine region shall not be increased, with the exception of ring roads intended to spare towns and villages from transit traffic". The main motivation of signatories supporting environmental groups is to prevent construction of the second Gotthard road tunnel.

The Federal Council and parliament are recommending voters to reject this popular initiative. But it is supported by the Social Democrats, the Greens, the Swiss Democrats and the Evangelical People's Party. In view of the recent decision to build new railways through the Alps, Transport Minister Adolf Ogi has described the initiative as "pointless", and he stresses that if accepted it would come up against international and bilateral agreements and would discriminate against foreign traffic. In addition, road traffic is also a component of prosperity, and people do not want any new prohibitions.

The Air Traffic Law

The Federal Council and parliament have decided to adjust the Air Traffic Law to the developments of the last two decades. Criticism from the left is mainly directed against strengthening federal powers over airport construction (to the detriment of cantonal and municipal authorities). The left also objects to provisions which would allow the fed-

Federal referendums

February 20, 1994

- Federal decision on continuing the heavy traffic tax.
- Federal decision on continuing the motorway tax.
- Federal decision on the introduction of a heavy traffic tax depending on either power or consumption.
- Popular initiative 'to protect the Alpine region from transit traffic'.
- Modification of the Air Traffic Law.

June 12, 1994

Subjects not yet decided.

September 25, 1994

Subjects not yet decided.

December 4, 1994

Subjects not yet decided.

eral government to allocate funds for building new airports and extending old ones. In consequence, a referendum has been called against the law, which was accepted by the National Council and the Council of States on June 18, 1993.

Traffic taxes

In 1985 Switzerland was first introduced to both the motorway tax and the tax on heavy traffic – but these were limited to a period of ten years. The money raised was to be used for the extension and maintenance of the national road network. The Federal Council and parliament are now proposing that these taxes should be continued into the future. If voters agree, the motorway tax will continue indefinitely and from 1995 will be raised from Sfr. 30.– to Sfr. 40.– per private car, while the tax on heavy traffic will be continued until the year 2004 and raised by about 30%. Further inflation adjustments will be decided by parliament and possibly by voters. If the people and the cantons accept the proposal that traffic tax should be based on performance, the present system will be replaced – possibly by an EC-compatible tax on the number of kilometres covered. ■

The Alpine initiative is targeted to some extent against construction of the second Gotthard road tunnel. Our picture: A pack animal from Brig with its driver.

