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Three times No: once by the voters, twice by the cantons

No Swiss blue helmets, no constitutional article on culture, no easier naturalisation – that is what a majority of voters or of cantons want.

In the June 12 referendum, two of the three proposals were rejected because constitutional amendments require majorities of cantons as well as voters. It was particularly unfortunate that easier naturalisation for young foreign

Giuseppe Rusconi

residents should have been rejected by the cantons, in spite of being given a clear majority by voters.

Referendum result

Federal decision on a new constitutional article to promote culture

YES 1,058,654 (51.0%)
Cantons: BE, BL, BS, FR, GE, GR, JU, NE, TI, VD, VS, ZH
NO 1,017,924 (49.0%)
Cantons: AG, AI, AR, GL, LU, NW, OW, SG, SH, SO, SZ, TG, UR, ZG

Federal decision on revising the constitutional article on nationality law (easier naturalisation for young foreign residents)

YES 1,114,561 (52.9%)
Cantons: BE, BL, BS, FR, GE, GR, JU, NE, VD, ZG, ZH
NO 993,686 (47.1%)
Cantons: AG, AI, AR, GL, LU, NW, OW, SG, SH, SO, SZ, TG, TI, UR, VS

Federal law making Swiss troops available for peacekeeping operations (blue helmets)

YES 898,925 (42.8%)
NO 1,203,870 (57.2%)

Voter participation: 46%

One thing that strikes the observer is the low voter participation (46%) for what were in fact important issues. This time the language frontier does not seem to have played much of a role, and the difference between French and German speakers was not as great as it was, for example, in the referendums on the European Economic Area or on the Alpine Initiative. Italian-speaking Ticino voted like the German speakers on the blue helmets and easier naturalisation, but not on the cultural article.

In French-speaking Switzerland, there was a small majority in favour of the blue helmets, with Geneva at the head with a 54.7% Yes vote. In the two bilingual cantons of Fribourg and Valais, the proposal was rejected, but it was accepted by the big German-speaking cities of Zurich, Berne and Lucerne. The biggest vote against the blue helmets was in the central Swiss

cantons and in Ticino, home of the right-wing Ticino League. This was responsible for calling the referendum and can now chalk up an important victory.

The agreement of the French speakers to easier naturalisation for young foreign residents was much stronger. Geneva was again at the head with a 70.5% Yes vote, but in Berne and Zurich it was also accepted by 57% and 55.2% respectively.

There was also a clear Yes vote for the constitutional article on culture in the French-speaking cantons, supported by Ticino, Grisons, Zurich and Basle City.

Commentary

A closer look at the latest referendum result shows first of all that "Mr. Average" in Switzerland is possessed with deep anxiety about the changes which mark our time. This feeling makes him distrust the world outside, particularly international organisations, and also what he feels to be foreign even within the country. One consequence of this vague emotional distress has now also been felt by a group which is often itself critical in its utterances: the Swiss cultural world.

The second thing to be said is that in the past a No to a government proposal was taken as a reaction to the issue itself and did not imply a loss of trust in the Federal Council. This time it seems that a substantial proportion of voters are afflicted by a definite crisis of confidence in the government, which

recently, for example, approved construction of the motorway through the Valais although before the referendum on the Alpine Initiative it had repeatedly stated that it would not do so.

A third remark is that this time the huge rejection cannot be attributed to lack of information. On the contrary, voters were fully aware of that they were doing in voting against the two "sensitive" proposals on foreign policy and foreign residents. This was confirmed by the distance between the voting figures on the various issues in some cantons. In Ticino, for instance, 67% voted against the blue helmets, 54% against easier naturalisation and 61% in favour of the constitutional article on culture.

What will happen to Swiss politics in the immediate future? The government and the parliamentary majority are certainly up against a psychological blocking mechanism in the field of foreign policy. They will once again find it very difficult to justify the negative



Swiss blue helmets remain suspended: the majority of voters say No to a battalion for UN peacekeeping missions. (Photo: Felix Widler)

result on the international scene, although – small consolation – there is also the fact that in other countries voters are simply not asked to decide on such matters.

Giuseppe Rusconi

Federal referendums

September 25, 1994

● Federal decision on abolishing the subsidy on the domestic wheat price out of customs duties.

● Modification of the Swiss Criminal Code and the Military Criminal Code (race discrimination).

December 4, 1994

Subjects not yet decided.

Press review

"Shame", "insularisation", "frustration", "closing up" – these are the words most used in the Swiss press following the triple No by voters to the projects for taking part in blue helmet operations, promoting culture and easier naturalisation for young foreign residents. The main press reaction is dismay.

JOURNAL de GENÈVE
ET GAZETTE DE LAUSANNE

No doubt about it, the world created by the end of the cold war is difficult to unravel. We in the press who have the mission to do this do not always succeed. But to argue that this complexity should make us ignore the world and refuse to dirty our hands seems to be unworthy not only of a mature people but also of our forebears. What is emerging in vote after vote is not a strong Swiss identity but rather a fragile one which cannot pass the only test which is valid for nations as of individuals: measuring up to others.

Le Quotidien Jurassien

How fragile is this Switzerland of refusal and withdrawal which listens to the siren songs of the nationalist right-wing, with a majority dulled by material comfort and spiritual void. This timid Switzerland presents the world with an image of intolerable self-importance. Over and above the risks of explosion which are being created, this is a Switzerland which denies its humanitarian tradition and refuses its duty to assist. It is now bogged down and shuts out the future from its youth. This is surely the worst shame of a black Sunday, the most serious for our country.

Giornale del Popolo

If – over and above the "tough luck" that the issue of blue helmets came up at the most tricky moment of their history – we look for a common origin for this three-fold No, we unfortunately

find it in a desperate attempt to stop history in its tracks and cling to the debris of the past (against culture and against "the other" both at home and abroad). It is as if this is the only certainty that remains to us. And this on the very day when Austria said Yes to the European Union with unexpected enthusiasm and isolated us that little bit more.

Bündner Zeitung

The right wing in Switzerland is growing inexorably. On all three national issues voters followed not the centre Radical Democrats or Social Democrats, but rather the Swiss Democrats, the Ticino League, the Freedomers (the former Auto Party) and – except for easier naturalisation – the Swiss People's Party. The latter's Christoph Blocher is already reaping the harvest which he was expecting in the October 1995 elections. His ambition to become leader of the nationalist right-wing has not simply come nearer, it has now been achieved.

Tages-Anzeiger

That minority in the country and majority in parliament which is seeking an opening suffers its chain of defeats badly. With only one exception – membership of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund – all foreign policy proposals in the last few years have been rejected. On what ground? Those in favour should not grumble about direct democracy or their victorious adversaries but should look to their own attitudes: where there is no passion, the fire burns low and carries little conviction.

Blick

Should we Swiss be ashamed of ourselves? Assuredly not. A majority of Swiss are convinced that we should go our own, isolationist way. But in the last few years this has been the way to success.

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