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Voting rights

Your vote counts too!

For over two years now, Swiss Abroad have possessed the right to influence political life in Switzerland by means of the postal vote. At present, just under 50,000 people exercise this right. The following is to explain how you too can vote.

Since the postal vote for the Swiss Abroad was introduced, eight referendum dates have passed; in each of them the number of those voting increased and last time reached nearly 48,000. In the

autumn of next year, Swiss Abroad will be able to vote in federal parliamentary elections for the first time.

Unlike Swiss citizens at home, Swiss Abroad must register at their diplomatic post (embassy or consulate). This may be done in writing – using the form on the

ipality in Switzerland. This may be either your municipality of origin or one in which you have lived.

As soon as the municipality you have selected is informed by your Swiss diplomatic post, you will be entered in its voting register.

You will receive confirmation of this in writing, and from then on you will be sent all the necessary voting papers together with the official observations of the Federal Council by post

Don't forget your voting card!

In the June 12 referendum, some votes from abroad were declared invalid because they were not accompanied by voting cards. So please do not forget to include your voting card with the other documents or, where appropriate, to use the official envelope.

Popular initiatives and referendum demands

You also have the right to sign popular initiatives and referendum demands.

To do the former you must put your name to a signature list which you can obtain from the initiative committee in question. The addresses are published regularly in the official pages of Swiss Review. The list must then be returned to the committee with your signature and the name of your voting municipality.

The procedure for referendum demands is similar, but in this case it is not possible to publish the committee addresses in Swiss Review. This is because the time limit for signing is too short – only 90 days – and because such committees are not bound to give their addresses to the federal authorities, so there is no official list. Fortunately, however, there are other sources of information which you can use. These include foreign editions of some Swiss dailies and Swiss Radio International.

Current popular initiatives

The following popular initiatives are still open for signature:

A Switzerland without a tax substitute for military service – until November 11, 1994

Régis de Battista, 15, rue des Pavillons, CH-1205 Geneva.

For a reasonable drug policy – until November 18, 1994

Beat Kraushaar, P.O. Box 137, CH-8026 Zurich.

For fair representation of women in the federal authorities – until March 21, 1995

Jacqueline Gottschalk, P.O. Box 632, CH-3000 Berne 25.

For rewarding energy saving and against energy waste (energy-environment initiative) – until March 28, 1995

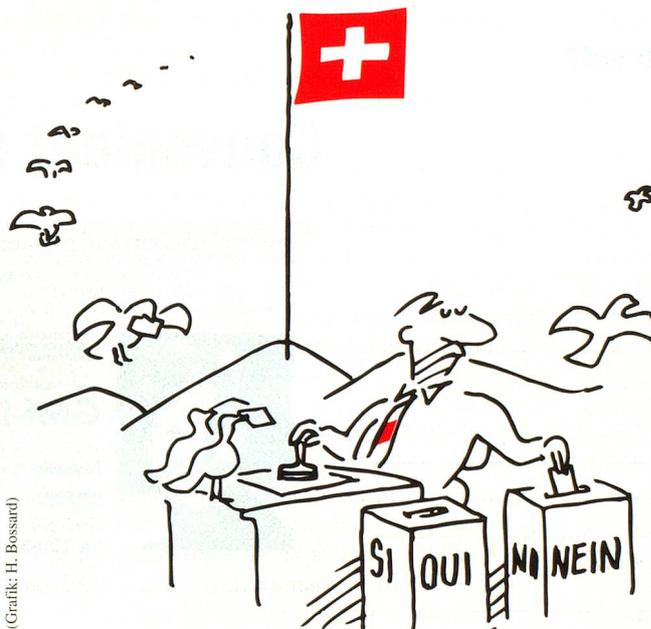
Gallus Cadonau, P.O. Box 2272, CH-8033 Zurich.

For a 'solar centime' (solar initiative) – until March 28, 1995

Gallus Cadonau, P.O. Box 2272, CH-8033 Zurich.

For controlled immigration – until September 9, 1995

Philipp Müller, P.O. Box, CH-5734 Reinach, Aargau.



(Grafik: H. Bossard)

next page, for example – or in person.

When you register, you must choose a voting munic-

ipality. You must then return them to the municipality, also by direct-post.

Central voting registers

The law introducing the postal vote for the Swiss Abroad gives cantonal authorities the right to create one or several central voting registers. The intention here is to make dispatching and organisation quicker and more rational.

So far four cantons have taken advantage of this provision. These are Appenzell Inner Rhodes, Basle City, Geneva and Vaud.

However, this does not affect voting registration in any way. You must still choose a municipality in which you once lived or that of your origin.

Late arrival

It can happen that voting material which is sent from Switzerland on the correct date nevertheless arrives late or that ballot papers returned from abroad arrive after the voting date. In such cases, the federal government cannot be held responsible.

Paul Andermatt



Pension fund benefits (2nd pillar)

Tax at source from 1995

On January 1, 1995, the new Federal Law on Direct Federal Taxation is due to come into force. This provides that pension funds must deduct at source 1% of gross pension income from benefits paid to persons resident abroad. It applies only to direct federal taxes, most of which – in contrast to cantonal and municipal taxes – is used for central government purposes.

For their part, cantonal authorities must introduce

taxation at source by January 1, 2001, at the latest. The canton in which a pension fund is domiciled is entitled to this tax. Following the new provisions applicable to direct federal taxation, the tax laws of most cantons have already been revised, also with effect from January 1, 1995. This means that normally federal and cantonal taxes will be cumulative from that date. Cantonal deductions have not yet been laid down everywhere,

but it may be assumed that the cumulation could result in a total burden of over 10%.

The vast majority of Swiss Abroad live in countries with which Switzerland has concluded agreements to avoid double taxation. In such cases, the following rule usually applies: benefits provided under state pension schemes (federal, cantonal or municipal) are taxable in Switzerland, i.e. at source, while benefits from private schemes are taxable in the country of residence, i.e. not at source.

Old-age and disability pensions unaffected

The tax change does not apply to government old-age and disability pensions. These are exempt from taxation at source and will continue to be taxed in the country of residence only.

Swiss Abroad living in countries with which such agreements have not been reached risk having their pensions taxed twice.

Further information may be obtained from pension funds or from cantonal tax administrations.

ANP



Registration form for Swiss Abroad entitled to vote

(please write clearly in block letters and send it to your embassy or consulate)

Addressee

To the Swiss diplomatic post at

Sender

Family name

First name

Maiden name

Precise address abroad

Date of birth

Place of birth

Marital status

since

Place of origin

Canton

Post code

Family name/First name of father

Family name/First name of mother

On the basis of the Federal Law of December 19, 1975, and the Ordinance of October 16, 1991, on Political Rights for the Swiss Abroad, I wish to exercise my right to vote in federal elections and referendums and to sign popular initiatives and demands for referendums.

As voting municipality I wish to choose:

Place

Canton

Post code

* because this is my municipality of origin
 * because I resided here from 19..... to 19.....
 (* Cross out where not applicable)

Place/Date

Signature

New identity cards

Convenient and safe



At last! From January 1995, Swiss Abroad will be able to obtain new identity cards from their diplomatic posts.

The brown and beige identity cards valid today are to be replaced because they can be easily forged. A new model, in credit-card format, is being gradually introduced, and the process should be complete by January 1995. The details given on the new cards will be in Switzerland's four languages and in English. A three-stage system of integrated security elements makes forgery impossible.

For reasons of both safety and speedy delivery, particu-

From next year, for Swiss Abroad too: the handy new Swiss identity card.

larly abroad, all details on the cards will be centrally recorded at the Federal Office of Police. Data protection will be guaranteed.

The price has not yet been finally decided, but the new card will cost less than a passport.

A later issue of Swiss Review will bring you further details.

ANP