

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 21 (1994)
Heft: 5

Inhaltsverzeichnis

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Elections for the new National Council will be on October 22, 1995. The council meets in this hall with its famous painting by Charles Giron - «The Cradle of the Confederation». (Photo: RDZ)

IMPRESSUM

Swiss Review, the magazine for the Swiss Abroad, is in its 21st year of issue and is published in German, French, Italian, English and Spanish in more than 20 regional editions. It has a total circulation of over 300,000. Regional news appears four times a year.

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Publisher, Editorial Office, Advertising: Secretariat for the Swiss Abroad, Alpenstrasse 26, CH-3000 Berne 16; Tel: 41 31 351 61 10, Fax: 41 31 351 61 50, Postal Cheque Account (Swiss National Giro): 30-6768-9. Printed by: Buri Druck AG, CH-3001 Berne.



For almost exactly two years now the Swiss Abroad have been able to vote in federal referendums by correspondence. The second time they were called to the polls, the highly controversial issue of Switzerland's entry into the European Economic Area (EEA) was decided. It is hardly surprising that in the run-up to this the number of those who registered to vote doubled to about 28,000 from July to December 1992. One year after the introduction of this extension of voting rights, 40,000 Swiss Abroad had registered, and since then the figure has risen to almost 50,000 (for reference, 8 of the 26 cantons have fewer registered voters).

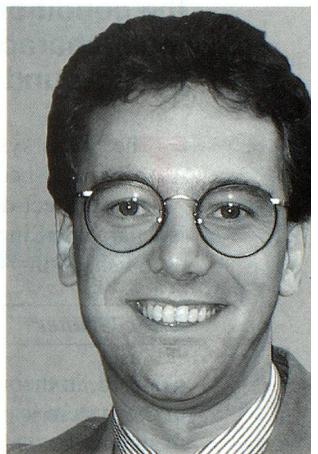
In spite of this progress, there are people - some abroad, but most of them here in Switzerland - who are disappointed by the figure. It may seem at first sight as if the proportion of 12% of those entitled to vote is low, but it is too early to draw conclusions. Many Swiss citizens living abroad feel they still have to get a clearer view of their new rights. And we have to take into account the fact that obtaining information about individual voting issues and about the Swiss political scene as a whole is much more difficult for people living abroad than for those here at home. This is true for regions which are very far away or particularly isolated. A pretty large number of those theoretically entitled to vote have consciously refrained from registering, because they are not versed in one of Switzerland's national languages or because their relationship with Switzerland is so vague that they do not feel they can vote in a fully responsible way. Also, if we consider the number of Swiss Abroad who have registered to vote with the miserably low proportion of Swiss who actually vote here at home it is really not as bad as all that.

This does not of course mean that we do not wish the number of Swiss Abroad who register to vote to increase further. Very much the contrary is the case. If the Fifth Switzerland is to have an effective political lobby in the long run, the proportion of those who vote

must rise. This means that anyone who has not yet put his name down in the voting register of his municipality of origin - or of a municipality where he has previously lived - should now do so without delay. You can either use the printed registration form which appeared in the last issue of Swiss Review or else apply for one from your diplomatic post.

The next political challenge for those living abroad is coming on apace: the federal parliamentary elections in October 1995. The editors of Swiss Review are aware of the importance of the occasion and will be making these elections a quasi-permanent subject of attention from this issue on. We begin with a background article about the role of the parties in Switzerland's political life, and from now until the elections we shall be publishing brief descriptions of the groups at present represented in parliament. The amount of space devoted to each party will depend on its relative strength and regional spread. The series will conclude just before the elections with an overview of all the various party programmes and promises. This comprehensive reporting - as much as our limited space allows - should provide Swiss citizens abroad with the basic information they need to fill out their voting lists as meaningfully as possible.

Three years after the referendum on the new trans-Alpine railway lines (NEAT), October 22, 1995, will be another voting first: Swiss Abroad will be taking part in parliamentary elections for the first time. If they go to the polls in sufficient numbers, it will be merely a question of time before a Swiss citizen resident abroad is elected to the National Council. This will mean that the passive right to vote has finally led to a situation in which the whole range of political rights available is being exploited.



René Lenzin
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