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Elections '95: What you should know

The Swiss Parliament, or Federal Assembly, consists of two houses, the National Council and the Council of States. The National Council has 200 members and represents the Swiss population as a whole. Seats are allocated to cantons and half-cantons in proportion to their populations (both Swiss and foreign residents). Each canton and half-canton has the right to at least one seat.

National Council

General elections to the National Council take place every four years on the second to last Sunday in October. Every Swiss citizen over the age of 18 is eligible, provided he or she has not been declared incapable because of insanity or mental derangement. Possessing a residence in Switzerland and being on a municipal voting register are not conditions.

Each canton and half-canton makes up a constituency. Swiss Abroad are entitled to vote in the canton in which their voting municipality is situated.

In the 21 cantons and half-cantons entitled to more than one National Council seat the proportional voting system is used. This means that seats are allotted to the various parties in proportion to the amount of votes obtained by each party or its candidates. An advantage of the proportional system is that small as well as big parties are represented in the National Council.

In the five cantons or half-cantons which have only one seat (Uri, Upper and Lower Unterwalden, Glarus, Appenzell Inner Rhodes) the majority system is used. The candidate who receives the most votes is elected. This system has the advantage that the person rather than the party is elected.

Council of States

The Council of States has 46 members. Each canton has two representatives, and each half-canton has one.

The Council of States is the federalist element in Switzerland's two-chamber system. This is expressed in the fact that each canton has the same number of



Filling in electoral lists in 1949: strictly for men only! (Photo: RDZ)

members regardless of its population. It does not constitute direct representation by the cantons, however, since each member of the Council of States (as indeed of the National Council) is responsible for his own vote and does not receive instructions from his canton.

Elections to the Council of State take place according to cantonal law. They do not have to take place at the same time as National Council elections. At present the period of office is four years for every canton. Swiss Abroad are entitled to vote only in cantons where cantonal law gives them the right to do so.

Paul Andermatt

Congress for the Swiss Abroad 1995 on the federal elections

The National Council elections on October 22, 1995, will be the main subject of next year's Congress for the Swiss Abroad, to be held on August 25-27 in Berne. In discussions with the political parties, those taking part will be able to find out more about the various programmes and main points of interest, as well as to make known their own specific desires and concerns. Swiss Abroad who consider contact with representatives of the parties important should earmark these dates now. Further information, together with the registration form for the congress, will appear in a coming issue of Swiss Review.

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