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Confidence in the government's policy

The Swiss people and cantons followed to the letter the recommendations of the Federal Council and of the majority in parliament on each of the three subjects of the federal referendums of June 7th.

They very clearly approved the budgetary objective 2001 and rejected the two popular initiatives "To protect life and the environment from gene manipulation" and "S.o.S. – Switzerland without police snooping". Participation in the vote was 41%.

In each case the majority exceeded two thirds of voters, and no canton went out on a limb. These flattering results were received by the Federal Council with satisfaction verging on euphoria. Treasurer Kaspar Villiger spoke of "an hour of glory for democracy".

Budgetary objective 2001

The inscription in the transitional provisions of the federal constitution of the objective to balance the federal budget by the year 2001 was approved by 71% of voters. It received its best scores in the cantons of Appenzell Inner Rhodes (81%), Glaris and Zug (78% in each). At the bottom of the list came three French-speaking cantons (Valais 55%, Neuchâtel 54% and Jura 52%).

Federal referendums

September 27th 1998

- Federal law on a performance-dependent heavy transport tax.
- Popular initiative "for reasonable food prices and ecological farms"
- Popular initiative "for the 10th AHV-revision without a higher pensionable age"

29th November 1998

Subjects not yet decided.

The next step is to draw up measures making it possible to cut the federal budget deficit to about 1 billion francs by 2001. An agreement reached at the end of a round table between the country's main political and economic actors held at the beginning of last April will serve as a model. This is a programme of economies affecting at the same time expenditure and income, with – in particular – cuts in the social, transport, defense and cantonal equalization fields, along with some new receipts (taxes, National Bank).

Genetic manipulation

67% of voters rejected the popular initiative "For genetic protection". The Nos were the most massive in French-speaking Switzerland (Valais 84%, Vaud 83%, Neuchâtel and Fribourg 79%), while at the bottom of the list came the cantons of Berne (58%),

Commentary

The federal referendum of June 7th could go down in history. Not so much because of the remarkable confidence expressed by the Swiss people in their government – which is an event in itself – as because it seems to be the sign of a change in mood amongst the Swiss people. The economic indicators – we know it – suggest a recovery since the end of last year. Switzerland can at last see the end of the tunnel of the recession and of the economic gloom; the consumer climate is improving; unemployment is dropping. And it could be that the economic recovery will put paid – again finally – to the psychological and political gloom – the negativism which has struck Switzerland since the 1980's. Perhaps this is the explanation not so much for the result of the referendums of June 7th, but for the clarity of the decisions taken.

The excessive character of the popular initiative in favour of genetic pro-

tection is not sufficient to explain its very definite rejection, nor indeed is the existence of a legislative programme intended to prevent abuse or worries about employment. The political campaign was tense, substantial and controversial, the subject complex. It is true that a victory was forecast – though much less definitive – of Nos to the initiative. In the same way, the objective 2001 for balancing the federal budget seemed well placed; but who would have thought that it would gain seven votes out of every ten when on the red-green side people accused it of having a neo-liberal accent. As to the snub inflicted to the initiative to abolish the political police, this is a way of finally turning the page. The records affair is in the past; the Augean Stables have been cleaned.

The Swiss have given their government a vote of confidence; they have shown confidence in themselves and their confidence in the future.

Pierre-André Tschanz



No to the gene protection initiative: Chemistry researchers and employees are relieved. (Photo: Keystone)

Basle City, Ticino (69% each) and Jura (65%) closing the list.

The rejection of this popular initiative means that on July 1st the law introducing measures aimed at maintaining internal security will enter into force, allowing the federal police to exercise preventive police activity to combat terrorism, violent extremism, espionage and organized crime, and to ensure respect for Switzerland's democratic and constitutional foundations, as well as the protection of the fundamental freedoms of its population.

PAT

Results of the federal referendums

Canton	Budgetary objectives 2001		Gene protection initiative		«S.o.S.» – Switzerland without police snooping		Voters in %
	YES%	NO%	YES%	NO%	YES%	NO%	
ZH	74.8	25.2	37.7	62.3	26.4	73.6	43.9
BE	72.4	27.6	41.8	58.2	26.9	73.1	38.1
LU	75.6	24.4	35.1	64.9	21.3	78.7	45.5
UR	65.8	34.2	36.6	63.4	22.3	77.7	33.0
SZ	72.2	27.8	35.1	64.9	22.9	77.1	36.5
OW	74.1	25.9	35.4	64.6	21.1	78.9	35.6
NW	77.0	23.0	34.0	66.0	20.7	79.3	41.0
GL	78.1	21.9	38.8	61.2	24.3	75.7	47.2
ZG	78.0	22.0	36.5	63.5	22.2	77.8	45.4
FR	70.4	29.6	21.4	78.6	20.2	79.8	34.5
SO	67.5	32.5	35.9	64.1	24.9	75.1	45.8
BS	71.2	28.8	32.7	67.3	31.2	68.8	53.8
BL	74.6	25.4	29.2	70.8	24.4	75.6	44.5
SH	72.2	27.8	36.1	63.9	28.5	71.5	62.3
AR	72.9	27.1	44.2	55.8	23.4	76.6	46.0
AI	81.8	18.9	37.2	62.8	16.9	83.1	34.0
SG	77.1	22.9	38.9	61.1	22.5	77.5	40.0
GR	75.0	25.0	42.7	57.3	26.8	73.2	33.2
AG	75.0	25.0	34.3	65.7	21.6	78.4	37.6
TG	76.5	23.5	36.9	63.1	21.1	78.9	41.8
TI	62.3	37.7	36.8	63.2	31.3	68.7	30.1
VD	61.4	38.6	16.8	83.2	22.9	77.1	34.9
VS	55.4	44.6	15.8	84.2	19.6	80.4	45.8
NE	53.5	46.5	21.2	78.8	23.6	76.4	35.4
GE	62.3	37.7	23.2	76.8	29.8	70.2	52.1
JU	52.1	47.9	27.6	72.4	34.5	65.5	32.3
Total	70.7	29.3	33.4	66.6	24.9	75.1	40.3

Press Review

There has been a lot of talk in the Swiss press about confidence in the wake of the federal votes of June 7th 1998. And many of the newspapers published the photo of the three Federal Councillors, Pascal Couchepin, Arnold Koller and Kaspar Villiger, beaming on the evening of the vote.

Tages-Anzeiger

"The (Social-democratic) Party – the loudest in calling for Switzerland to join the European Union – has now put itself offside. The SP was the party which wanted to base Switzerland's ability to face the future on a foundation which runs counter to Europe's policies. That ought to make the Social Democrats think hard, with Ursula Koch in the lead."

Blick

"The SP is no longer a modern people's party. It does not wish to emulate the process of transformation which other

European social-democrats have gone through successfully. Any party which supports outsider-initiatives to which the people give so clear a thumbs-down, any party which – faced with 100 billion debts – has the nerve to reject an austerity programme is a party which does not want progressive policies like those of Tony Blair in Great Britain or Wim Kok in the Netherlands."

Basler Zeitung

"Was the long and violent debate about the 'referendum of the century' as some called it no more than a noisy sham battle which failed to affect long-persuaded blocks of opinion? Hardly. It was a debate of the century, if only because an attempt was made to use the resources of a direct democracy to impose a constitutional ban putting national limits on a branch of science that is expanding world-wide."

laRegionne Ticino

"The resounding yes to Budget Objective 2001(...) can be said to be not just a victory for the government but above all a personal success for the finance minister, Kaspar Villiger. A result of great importance which is the reward of the Tour de Suisse which he made around the whole country to persuade the electorate to put a constitutional stop to the country's spiralling debts."

24 heures

"Ten percent success (for popular initiatives) – that's a figure which should encourage those putting forward new popular initiatives to be a little more reticent in their frantic desire to legislate."

LA LIBERTÉ

"Government and parliament – having launched the vast counter-project 'Genlex' – must now keep their promises. An ethics commission has already been set up. The next step must be the revision of the rules of the game as far as responsibility, the issue of authorisations, and the protection of animals and the environment are concerned. So that the whole business does not turn to dust."