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Cover

In just one year's time the new and re-elected members of the National Council will take the oath. In Swiss Review the election campaign has already begun. (Photo: Keystone)

I M P R E S S U M

Swiss Review, the magazine for the Swiss Abroad, is in its 25th 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 320,000. Regional news appears four times a year.

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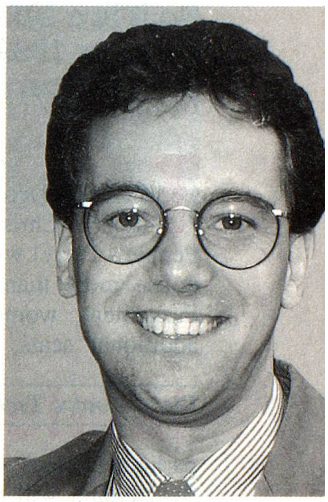
"For whom shall I vote?" We Swiss come up against this question every four years, next time on the occasion of the National Council elections of October 24th 1999. For the second time our compatriots abroad will be able to vote by post. This is reason enough for Swiss Review to open the election campaign and begin with its reporting on the 1999 federal elections. From this edition we are starting a series in which the Swiss political landscape is described with reference to the most important political subjects.

Given the large number of parties, it is not a simple matter to find one's way in this jungle. In today's National Council 15 parties are represented, and in Canton Zurich alone 30 groupings stood for election in 1995. And if this were not enough: over and over again, in referendums you find representatives of the same party in the camps both for and against.

Swiss concordance democracy binds the most important political forces in the responsibility of government. In 1995 the parties represented in the Federal Council received 74% of votes and 162 of the 200 seats in the National Council. On the other hand, this prevents a clear distinction between government and opposition, of the sort known to most parliamentary democracies. Our system allows both diverging opinions amongst the various individual government parties, as also different opinions within each of them. In addition, ever and again voters take decisions in referendums which are not consistent with the majority relationship which the same voters decided upon at the last elections.

Direct democracy must be able to live with this unpredictability and these contradictions if it wants to survive. But it can do this only if the elections have a high status. It must be said that in federal elections we lay down the basic orientation of the policy of our country for the next four years. We transfer decision-making on important subjects to a parliament to which we should give a corresponding amount of trust. This remains true even if we are able to reverse or change almost all its decisions in referendums, and it would be fatal to under-estimate these elections.



This is why we now call upon all Swiss Abroad: Make use of your political rights! Take part in the National Council elections of the coming year. Even if you have not yet put your name on the voting register of a Swiss municipality, fill in the form on page 10 and send it to your embassy or consulate.

"For whom shall I vote?" This question must be even more difficult for you abroad to answer than for us in Switzerland. After all Switzerland has given you the right to vote by post not least so that you can contribute to Swiss politics drawing on your experience. This circumstance and the opportunity it gives you to help give substance to Swiss democracy should make it worthwhile searching for answers.

René Lenzin