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# s at stake

In doing this it will be necessary to take account of the economic field, in which it will be possible to measure the effects of the efforts to revitalise, adapt structures and liberalise. The effort to optimise the economic framework will have to continue, but it will require changes and corrections which will have their effect on social, regional, ecological, fiscal and employment policies. In fact all these fields are closely interlinked, and simple solutions no longer exist.

One of the most interesting and least expected lessons of the last federal elections in 1995 was the progress of the governmental parties, which increased their score by 4.3% in relation to 1991, after being in constant retreat since 1979. There is, it is true, nothing spectacular about that at first sight, but in looking more closely it may be seen that in the Government camp, the centre lost ground to the advantage of the "extremes", on the left as on the right. Socialists and the Blocher SVP won those elections because they put themselves across better than the others. If these apparently harmless phenomena should become stronger it could disrupt the functioning of our political system based on concordance and call for a reform of our political institutions. ■

### Registration rate: expectation exceeded

*Swiss Abroad have been able to vote at the federal level since 1975, and since 1992 by post. During the interval since 1992 the number of those who have put their names down on the voting register of a Swiss municipality has risen from about 14,000 to over 66,000. For comparison: 9 cantons have fewer citizens entitled to vote, as does Lausanne, the fifth biggest Swiss city. About 15% of all Swiss Abroad of voting age have registered. This exceeds the expectations of the Federal Council, which before the introduction of voting by post was expecting a registration rate of 10%.*
***RL***

### Voting and being elected

*Swiss Abroad can not only take part in Federal elections, but they may also themselves be elected. The simplest is when they are put on a list by a party but they may also hand in their own list. This should not include more names than the corresponding canton has seats in the National Council. Every list must be signed by a specific number of voters residing in the same canton (100 to 400, according to the number of seats of the canton). In addition, every canton decides on a Monday between August 1 and September 30 as the last date for voting registration, the date until which valid voting proposals must be handed in.*

*At present a quota regulation is being discussed by which a minimum number of places will be guaranteed on every list for each gender. As we went to press, it was not yet clear whether these decisions would be made before the 1999 elections.*
***RL***

The political rights of the Swiss Abroad

# Few differences in electoral behaviour

**Swiss Abroad may also vote. A good 66,000 of them have registered.**

Here a second seat for the Greens, there a few more votes for the CVP, and there a seat for "Renaissance Schweiz-Europa". This is what would have happened in 1995 in Cantons Lucerne, Geneva and Vaud if only the voting slips from abroad had been counted. But on the whole divergence from the overall result was small. Even though this was merely a spot check from 3 out of 26 cantons, the conclusion can be drawn that the Swiss Abroad do not vote much differently from "the rest of us".

Three years ago those entitled to vote abroad could take part in federal elections by post for the first time. More precisely stated, in the elections to the National Council, for the right to vote by post is valid only at the federal level. In the Cantons of Basle Rural, Berne, Geneva, Jura, Soleure, and Ticino (but only if the voter has his municipality of origin in Ticino) they can also take part in Council of States elections since in those cantons the regulations also allow political participation at the cantonal level.

Today the so-called Fifth Switzerland can lay a respectable potential in votes in the balance (see box), particularly when Swiss Abroad are directly affected by a voting text. But participation in votes in Switzerland is more work for them than for Swiss at home. First they must register for the exercise of their political rights and renew that registration every four years. In addition, it is more difficult for them to obtain information, particularly in more distant countries or in regions where the postal system does not function well. And lastly, the short time allowed for returning voting papers contains the danger that the political rights cannot be made use of.

These problems appear more strongly with elections. On the one hand the legal minimum dates for the dispatch of documents are even shorter. On the other hand they involve forming a view not only of the countless candidates, but also of the party landscape which appears differently from canton to canton.

This led to the fact that the turnout of the Swiss Abroad in the 1995 elections was about the same as for Switzerland as a whole, whereas in referendums it is as a rule slightly higher than the average. But like the information about electoral conduct, these figures should be taken with caution, since they are based on spot checks in individual municipalities or in cantons with a central electoral register for Swiss Abroad. The majority of the voting slips from abroad disappear in the general pot of all votes cast.

***René Lenzin*** ■