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Railway projects, drugs and ag

The people and cantons will vote on three subjects on November 29th. The greatest importance is attached to the question of financing the major railway projects.

At issue in November is an investment package of over 30 billion francs, of which practically half (13.6 billion) is intended for the construction of the Trans Alpine Railway Links (NEAT). The other referendum

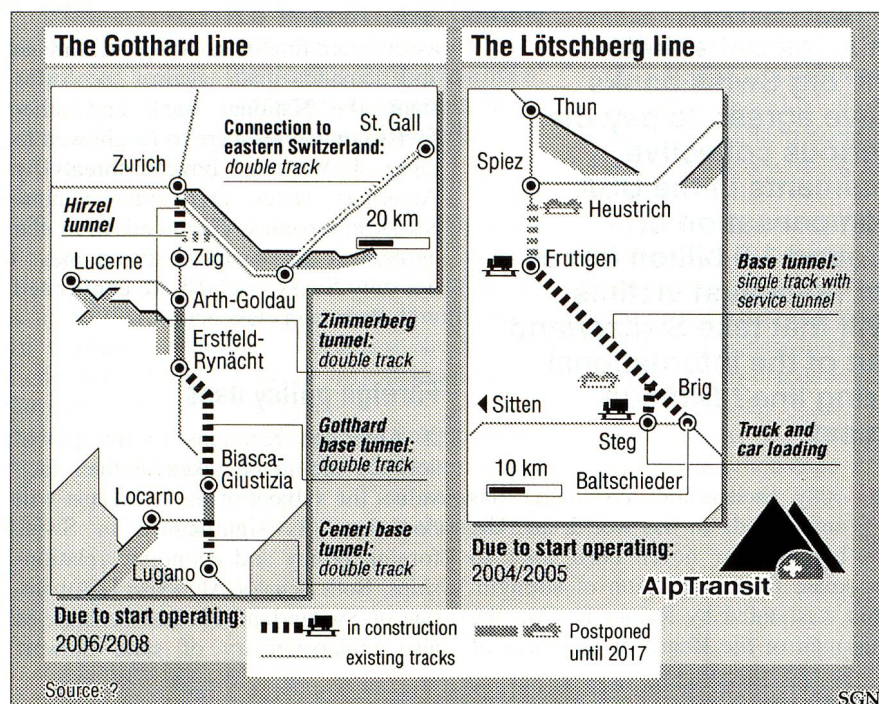
Dario Ballanti

texts are the popular initiative "For a reasonable drugs policy" ("Droleg Initiative") and the Federal decree on a new grain article, limited in time in the framework of the reform programme "Agricultural Policy 2002".

Financing the railway projects

The main question here is provision for the financing of four major railway projects: Bahn 2000, connection to the European high speed network, noise reduction on the existing railway network, and building the NEAT lines on the Gotthard and the Lötschberg. These comprise 57 kilometres between Uri and Ticino and 37 kilometres between Berne and the Valais.

Investment in these projects will amount to 30.5 billion francs over the coming 20 years. The Federal Council's message of 1996 on carrying out and financing the major railway projects has had a hard time running the gauntlet



Swiss Graphics News

On November 29th voters will decide on the so-called network variants of the NEAT. Base tunnels are planned at the Gotthard and Lötschberg.

through Parliament. After over a year of hesitation, both chambers have finally reached a compromise on the Alpine Transversals, the actual bone of contention.

The infrastructure work will start with the construction of the two base tunnels. It is true that in the course of the Parliamentary and Commission debates it looked for a time as if first the Lötschberg and then the Gotthard would be postponed until the second stage of construction work because of geological uncertainties in connection with the Piora Trough, which were only cleared up by

an expert's report. But finally the chambers agreed on the network variant which involves base tunnels under the Lötschberg and the Gotthard, and so accepted the Federal Council's decision that both lines are necessary to satisfy the constitutional mandate to protect the Alps in the Year 2000, and make possible a shift of goods traffic from the roads to the railways.

So from the technical point of view the work could now be started. The Gotthard base tunnel should be ready by 2010, 4 to 5 years after the Lötschberg base tunnel. The Zimmerberg and Ceneri tunnels on the other hand will not be built until the second phase. Before that can happen, the people and the cantons must agree on the financing of these projects. And at a time of notoriously red figures, the financing of the major railway projects has led to heated debates in Parliament.

Finance for the project is to be drawn from four sources. The performance-linked heavy transport tax accepted in the referendum on 27th September will make the biggest contribution – according to estimates more than 9 million francs a

29th November 1998: the Labour law for the second time

Rather belatedly the Federal Council has decided that on November 29th the people will also vote on the Labour law, against which a referendum has been successfully provoked. The first revision of the law was rejected by voters in December 1996. Now the second also is coming up against resistance, particularly in the French-speaking areas.

Amongst the most controversial points of the new law is the definition of the hours between 20.00 and 23.00 as evening work. This is a compromise after the failure of the first draft, which planned to prolong day work hours until 23.00. Today the hours between 20.00 and 06.00 count as night work. In the second version the possibility of allowing Sunday work 6 times a year without permission also falls away. These changes have persuaded the Swiss Trades Union Federation not to support the referendum.

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year. Two further sources of funding are federal borrowing to a maximum of 25% of the project costs (1.5 billion a year), and the customs duty on fuel, or mineral oil tax (220 million per year). And finally Parliament has agreed to an increase in VAT of 0.1% (200 million per year). In order not to whip up the motorists lobby against the bill, However, the plan to raise the price of petrol by 5 centimes a litre has been abandoned.

"Droleg" Initiative

After the initiative "Youth without drugs", rejected on September 27th 1997, which was directed towards repression and abstinence, voters now have to pronounce on yet another text on this recurrent subject. The initiative – "For a reasonable drugs policy", also known as "Droleg", contains requirements which are diametrically opposed to those of "Youth without drugs". It was submitted on November 9th 1994 with 107,669 valid signatures.

Its aim is to allow access to narcotics outside medical treatment but under Government control. Thus the initiative text calls for freedom from penal sanctions for consumption, and preparation for one's own consumption, for licensed production and supply of narcotics for non-medical consumption, and taxation of narcotic products.

The Federal Council and Parliament oppose the initiative, because it would lead to Switzerland going it alone on drugs policy. Like "Youth without drugs" Droleg is considered too extreme by the federal authorities, although for different reasons. Instead of the Droleg initiative, as in the case of last years' drugs referendum, the Federal Council is advocating its pragmatic four-pillar policy (prevention, therapy, aid to survival coupled with damage reduction, and repression). A central element of this is the supply of heroin under strict medical supervision.

New Grain Article

This constitutional article is a component of the reform programme "Agricultural Policy 2002", launched by the Federal Council to raise the competi-

tiveness of the food sector. The new article – limited in time i.e. until the end of 2003 – should permit liberalisation and abolition of barriers in the bread and fodder grains' market. This cannot be achieved with the present grain article in the Federal Constitution (article 23^{bis}). This was introduced in the run up to the Second World War, and had the aim of ensuring the supply of domestic grain for bread which was vital in times of crisis.

The Federal Council and Parliament are now in favour of a relaxation and adaptation of the provisions, and intend to attain this objective through a more flexible formulation of the article still in force. ■

Federal referendums of September 27th 1998

Continuity with one yes and two noes

Yes to the performance-linked heavy transport tax and no to the catch-up initiative on the AVS and to the small farmers' initiative: the sovereign has given its support to government policy, without reservation.

The most important decision is without doubt that concerning the performance-linked heavy transport tax. With 57.2% of yes votes and 42.8% of no votes, this was clearer than expected. The most confident supporters of this tax, which is to take over from the present lump-sum tax from 2001, had been hoping for a majority of 55%. They finally succeeded in obtaining a relatively comfortable majority in support of an ecological approach to transport. Thanks to this new tax, Switzerland will be able to gradually raise its weight limits for heavy road transport to 40 tonnes.

The product of this tax – about CHF 1.5 billion per year in 2005 – is intended to underpin the financing of the big railway projects. The people's verdict will be pronounced at the federal referen-

Federal referendums

29th November 1998

- Federal Decree of March 20th 1998 on the building and financing of the infrastructure plans for public transport.

- Federal Decree of April 29th 1998 on a new grain article limited in time.

- Popular initiative (For a reasonable drugs policy).

- Change of March 20th 1998 in the Federal Law on Labour in industry and trade (Labour Law).

dums of next November 29th (see page 12).

The heavy transport tax obtained the strongest support in Basle City, Geneva, Ticino, and Zurich. It was rejected in 7 cantons, of which three French-speaking (JU, NE and FR). The clearest majorities against were in Appenzell Inner Rhodes, Upper Unterwalden and Schwyz.

58.5% of the voters and 18 cantons rejected the popular initiative. For the 10th revision of the AVS without raising the pensionable age. Only 5 French and Italian-speaking cantons (FR, TI, NE, GE and JU) produced accepting majorities with the yes clearest in Jura and Ticino, while the strongest noes came from Appenzell Inner Rhodes and Upper Unterwalden. The raising of the pensionable age for women was therefore confirmed: this will be in two stages, to 63 from 2001 and to 64 from 2005. Federal Councillor Ruth Dreifuss, Minister of Social Affairs, interpreted the result of this vote as support for the project to make the retirement age more flexible, included by the government in the framework of the 11th revision of the AVS.

The small farmers' popular initiative, which was opposed by all agricultural circles except the small