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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

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).

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-

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

farmers' organisation of German-speaking Switzerland, was swept aside by 77% of voters, and all cantons.

With over 50% (51.2% for the performance-linked heavy transport tax), participation was high (by Swiss standards).

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Commentary

What emerges from the results of the federal referendums of September 27th 1998 is a preference for opening-up and continuity. In transport policy, social policy and agricultural policy, the

people have chosen reform, inflicting a defeat on those in favour of a step backwards, whether they are lorry-drivers or ecologists, on the right or on the left.

The preference for opening-up expressed by the Swiss people is not restricted to the European question. It is true that the prospect of concluding the bilateral negotiations played a role in the acceptance of the performance-linked heavy transport tax. But reducing this yes to that single dimension would be to miss the essential point. The verdict of September 27th is entirely in line with a whole series of other decisions concerning transport policy: the introduction of the lump-sum heavy transport tax and the vignette for motorways nearly 15 years ago, the new railway tunnels in September 1992, the increase in the price of petrol to put the federal budget on a sounder footing, acceptance of the initiative for the protection of the Alps, confirmation of the road taxes, now inscription in the Constitution of the principle of the performance-linked heavy transport tax.

This cascade of decisions has brought into being a transport policy which on the one hand gives a lot of room to the ecological dimension and on the other takes account of European reality. These are two dimensions which will be dominant again next November 29th, because it will be a matter in a sense of making ends meet by adopting a new method of financing, of which the performance-linked heavy transport tax provides the underpinning, for the big railway projects.

This continuity and this preference for opening-up are to be found too in the fields of agricultural and social policy. The stinging rebuff to the totally misplaced initiative of the German-speaking small farmers is an additional confirmation for the reform of agricultural policy which aims to promote agriculture which is closer to the market and at the same time more ecological. Finally, in the social field, the question of the retirement age – of men like that of women – is at the centre of the 11th revision of the AVS. The Federal Council showed itself in favour last summer of making the retirement age more flexible. The rejection of the left's so-called catch-up initiative may be interpreted as support for the government's proposals.

Pierre-André Tschanz



"Rail 2000" is one of the big railway projects whose financing requirements will be met drawing on the performance-linked heavy transport tax. (Photo-service SBB)

Results of the federal referendums

Canton	Heavy transport tax		Small farmers' initiative		Initiative against raising the pensionable age		Voters Particip. in %
	YES%	NO%	YES%	NO%	YES%	NO%	
ZH	67.0	33.0	27.4	72.6	39.7	60.3	49.7
BE	57.2	42.8	26.8	73.2	39.3	60.7	53.1
LU	54.0	46.0	19.5	80.5	36.7	63.3	60.3
UR	57.8	42.2	24.2	75.8	37.2	62.8	54.9
SZ	40.9	59.1	18.9	81.1	29.4	70.6	51.1
OW	39.5	60.5	12.3	87.7	26.8	73.2	58.1
NW	52.0	48.0	15.2	84.8	27.4	72.6	59.9
GL	46.8	53.2	21.6	78.4	33.2	66.8	50.5
ZG	59.6	40.4	20.5	79.5	34.2	65.8	57.7
FR	42.2	57.8	14.8	85.2	50.1	49.9	56.9
SO	57.6	42.4	28.1	71.9	39.2	60.8	56.9
BS	72.5	27.5	30.9	69.1	43.9	56.1	55.7
BL	62.6	37.4	24.6	75.4	39.7	60.3	52.3
SH	55.8	44.2	24.3	75.7	42.2	57.8	70.6
AR	50.8	49.2	22.0	78.0	32.7	67.3	60.3
AI	35.6	64.4	13.5	86.5	23.2	76.8	59.1
SG	52.4	47.6	24.4	75.6	34.9	65.1	54.6
GR	59.0	41.0	25.0	75.0	39.2	60.8	46.0
AG	51.7	48.3	23.3	76.7	35.2	64.8	51.2
TG	48.1	51.9	17.9	82.1	32.2	67.8	55.2
TI	67.2	32.8	34.8	65.2	60.5	39.5	41.2
VD	55.4	44.6	13.8	86.2	49.2	50.8	46.1
VS	50.6	49.4	13.9	86.1	49.4	50.6	47.0
NE	48.5	51.5	13.8	86.2	57.7	42.3	47.3
GE	67.2	32.8	21.3	78.7	54.2	45.8	49.1
JU	49.4	50.6	16.4	83.6	68.3	31.7	55.3
Total	57.2	42.8	23.0	77.0	41.5	58.5	51.0