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Autor: Tschanz, Pierre-André
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One Yes, four Noes

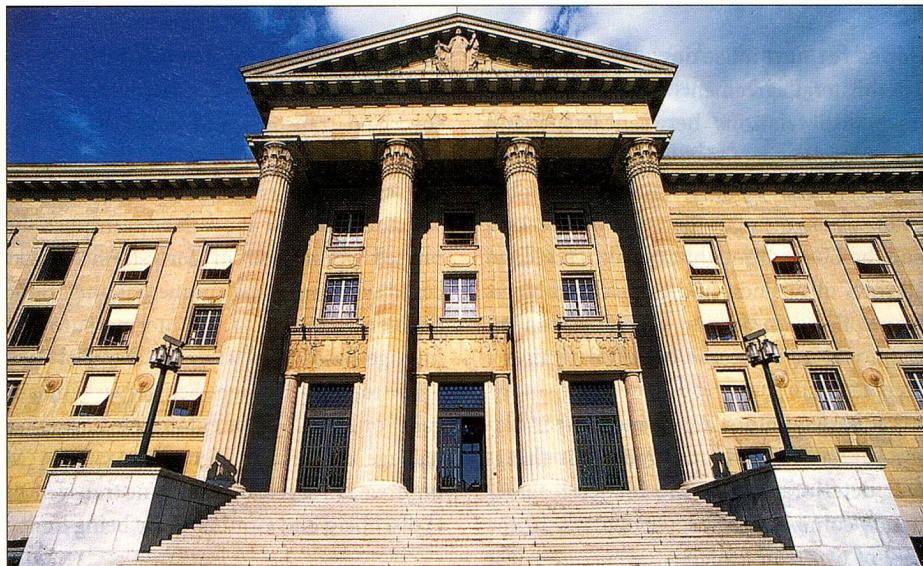


Photo: Markus Senn

Now that judicial reform has been approved, the Federal Court is able to concentrate on its core tasks.

Once more the Swiss electorate unconditionally followed the recommendations of the Federal Council and parliamentary majority. The turnout was approximately 42%.

JUDICIAL REFORM, the second package of constitutional reform measures, was overwhelmingly accepted by all cantons and more than 80% of the electorate. In the cantons of Geneva (92.3%), Basle City (91.7%)

and Ticino (90.1%) the Yes's even exceeded 90%, while voters in Obwalden (69.2%) and the Valais (70.7%) were slightly less enthusiastic about the reforms.

The initiative "for an acceleration of direct democracy" was defeated by all cantons as well as 69.8% of the voters. The rejection was most marked in Geneva (25%) and the Jura (25.2%). With 38.9% in favour, the Ticino delivered by far the highest number of Yes votes.

Only 18.2% voted in favour of the initiative "for equal representation for women in the Federal authorities", one of the lowest ever registered number of Yes's. Here, too, the cantons' rejection was unanimous. The clearest thumbs-down was given by the canton of Appenzell Ausserrhoden (92.9%), while the canton of Geneva's rejection (68.9%) was the mildest.

The initiative "for dignified reproduction" was rejected in all cantons and defeated by a margin of over 70%. The initiative found most favour in Basle City (36.2% Yes) and St. Gallen (35%), but it was overwhelmingly rejected in western Switzerland (especially in Vaud with only 15.2% of the vote and in Geneva with 15.3%).

Finally, only 20% of the vote was cast in favour of the "traffic halving initiative". The clearest Noes came from voters in the Jura (14%) and Schwyz (14.2%), while Basle City achieved the best result with 33.9%. PAT

Results of the federal referendums

Judicial reform
YES 86.4% NO 13.6%

Acceleration of initiative process
YES 30.2% NO 69.8%

Women's quota
YES 18.2% NO 81.8%

Reproductive technology
YES 28.4% NO 71.6%

Halving of traffic
YES 21.5% NO 78.5%

Turnout: 42%

COMMENTARY

Clear and unequivocal, with the anticipated fivefold government endorsement – the results of the federal referendums on 12 March can be reduced to this formula. Once more the electorate followed the recommendations of Federal Council and parliament.

The electorate gave the second part of the constitutional reform, governing judicial reform, its almost whole-hearted blessing, voting in its favour by an overwhelming 86%. Nevertheless it is important to remember that parliament spent a great deal of effort in removing from the proposal anything that could have incited controversy – even at the risk of undermining the original objective of this reform, to relieve the High Court of some of its workload.

The four popular initiatives put to the vote on 12 March were all regarded as too extreme and rejected by all cantons by margins of 70% to 82%.

Despite this resounding success, the government would be well advised not to feel too smug about its victory; because the next few referendums – particularly the one on 21 May concerning the bilateral agreements with the European Union – are of major importance. Switzerland cannot afford another European flop. However, there appears to be little danger of over-confidence, since the electorate's rejection of membership of the European Economic Area is still all too fresh in the minds of most politicians.

While the results of Sunday's voting are music to the government's ears, to the instigators of these popular initiatives they are a painful cacophony. The people's verdict must give them pause for thought since, leaving aside the Yes's from dissatisfied voters, the initiators were only able to win over a small, diminishing segment of the electorate to their cause.

Pierre-André Tschanz