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Three Noes and a severe blow for "Euroturbos"

The federal referendum of 4 March 2001 resulted in a massive rejection of all three popular initiatives. All three proposals were thrown out by all the cantons. At 54.9 percent, the turnout was well above the average.

"YES TO EUROPE", the popular initiative calling for an immediate start to negotiations for Swiss membership in the European Union, was handed a dramatic defeat with a mere 23.3 percent of Yes votes. The Federal Council, which in any case plans to push for membership but at a later, more favourable date, announced it would decide on commencing negotiations with the European

Union during the 2003–2007 legislative term. As expected, the popular initiative achieved the most Yes votes in Western Switzerland (48.4 percent in Neuchâtel, 44.22 percent in the Jura and 41.1 percent in Geneva) and the least in Central Switzerland (9.4 percent in Uri, 10.7 percent in Schwyz).

The popular initiative for cheaper prescription medicines achieved the least negative result of all three proposals, with all the cantons and 69.1 percent of voters against its adoption; the deciding factor here was the fear of an uncontrolled opening of the market for prescription drugs. Votes against the so-called Denner initiative were slightly higher in Western Switzerland than elsewhere.

Finally, the popular initiative entitled "Roads for all", which called for the general introduction of a 30-kilometer-an-hour speed limit on city and town roads, was defeated by 79.7 percent of voters and all the cantons. The Federal Council announced

that it would continue to pursue its policy of facilitated approval for pedestrian-friendly public zones and a speed limit of 20 kilometers an hour within community boundaries. PAT

COMMENTARY

The "Euroturbos", as impatient pro-Europeans are called in Switzerland, have scored a spectacular own goal. Now they will be bitterly regretting not withdrawing their initiative for the immediate launch of negotiations for membership of the European Union. They stuck their necks out and received a slap in the face. One can just about understand how, with the impatience of youth, the most inexperienced among EU supporters laboured under the delusion that they could light an initial spark under the European fire. Just about. But how does one explain their older brothers-in-arms, who were not even able to draw the only conclusion: withdrawal of the "Yes to Europe" initiative?

Now they have their just desserts. A disaster. Meanwhile the Federal Council is rubbing its hands and issuing lofty assurances that this rejection of the popular initiative should be regarded as a sanctioning of its European policy and its aim of launching negotiations on membership in five to six years. Yet one cannot help interpreting the result as a vote of no confidence in the Federal Council's policy towards Europe.

The clear rejection of both other popular initiatives – for a 30 kph speed limit and lower medicament prices – teaches another lesson which Federal President Moritz Leuenberger neatly encapsulated: Direct democracy its not achieved merely by launching "purist" popular initiatives; it is also necessary to address political realities and remain open to compromise solutions. Pierre-André Tschanz

Results of the Federal Referendums

Canton	Popular Initiative "Yes to Europe"		Medicaments Initiative		Popular Initiative "Roads for all"		Turnout in %
	YES %	NO %	YES %	NO %	YES %	NO %	
ZH	23.7	76.3	36.4	63.6	25.0	75.0	54.7
BE	23.5	76.5	31.5	68.5	22.2	77.8	53.8
LU	15.7	84.3	32.4	67.6	18.1	81.9	58.9
UR	9.4	90.6	30.9	69.1	18.0	82.0	52.4
SZ	10.7	89.3	32.1	67.9	13.1	86.9	61.9
OW	11.2	88.8	26.8	73.2	14.7	85.3	59.0
NW	10.9	89.1	27.4	72.6	13.9	86.1	60.7
GL	13.3	86.7	32.5	67.5	20.7	79.3	53.1
ZG	17.2	82.8	33.9	66.1	16.7	83.3	63.1
FR	27.3	72.7	23.6	76.4	13.1	86.9	61.6
SO	19.8	80.2	37.1	62.9	18.9	81.1	58.6
BS	29.2	70.8	29.2	70.8	35.8	64.2	59.5
BL	22.7	77.3	30.6	69.4	23.1	76.9	57.2
SH	17.6	82.4	36.7	63.3	23.7	76.3	69.2
AR	13.5	86.5	28.5	71.5	18.6	81.4	60.5
AI	6.8	93.2	24.9	75.1	10.7	89.3	59.0
SG	14.2	85.8	32.5	67.5	17.6	82.4	55.8
GR	14.5	85.5	32.8	67.2	25.6	74.4	48.9
AG	17.0	83.0	34.0	66.0	17.1	82.9	51.9
TG	13.7	86.3	33.9	66.1	17.1	82.9	53.8
TI	15.9	84.1	32.9	67.1	16.9	83.1	49.1
VD	39.4	60.6	22.5	77.5	17.9	82.1	46.0
VS	20.9	79.1	20.1	79.9	14.1	85.9	63.0
NE	48.8	51.2	25.5	74.5	18.2	81.8	69.2
GE	41.1	58.9	25.1	74.9	25.1	74.9	62.2
JU	44.2	55.8	20.0	80.0	15.1	84.9	54.9
Total	23.3	76.7	30.9	69.1	20.3	79.7	54.7