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# State Council votes to decriminalise cannabis

*Once more our members of parliament failed to complete all outstanding business. The subject of a semi-professional parliament was, however, once more tabled.*

**THE NEW PRESIDENT** of the National Council, Liliane Maury Pasquier (SP/GE), brought the subject up within the context of a special session scheduled for April to reduce what Pasquier described as the "mountain of pending parliamentary business". The Geneva SP representative also revived the question of reforming the current militia system. In her opinion, only a semi-professional parliament is capable of exercising its mandate efficiently. But parliamentary representatives once more demonstrated their flexibility during the winter session by extending their sessions until late in the evening in order to finish the most important business. In this way the two chambers of parliament managed to approve the Federal Council's budget projection for 2002, which foresees a deficit of CHF 294 million rather than the surplus originally envisaged by Minister of Finance Kaspar Villiger. This is attributable to the extraordinary expense of CHF 2.1 billion in financial aid for the new national airline approved by the National and State Councils at the special session in November. Both chambers also approved the Internet programme for 4000 schools. This involves an investment of CHF 100 million by the government and another CHF 800 million by cantons and communities towards the training of teachers in IT.

## Smoking a joint no longer a crime

The State Council has decided that smoking a joint should no longer be punishable under law and has voted in favour of decriminalising the consumption of marijuana. On the other hand, the cultivation and sale of cannabis remain criminal offences. As with every debate on drugs, emotions ran high: While the majority of State Councilors focused on the fact that this move

would eradicate repression, a minority mainly comprising French speaking members and SVP representatives expressed concerns that it would trivialise the consumption of soft drugs, and a few members complained that Switzerland was running the risk of isolating itself from the international community. The issue is now passed

pendent lifestyle and promote their integration in the labour market. The two new provisions were: introduction of a once-only assistance compensation, and the three-quarter pension. The once-only compensation will replace various existing contributions i.e. the compensation for persons requiring assistance and other insurance



The State Council has voted in favour of decriminalising the consumption of marijuana.

to the National Council. Among the many items on the State Council's agenda were two popular initiatives on nuclear energy: "MoratoriumPlus", and "Non-nuclear energy". Both were recommended for rejection with no counterproposal. The State Council, however, declared itself in favour of submitting the construction of new nuclear power plants to a referendum.

## More independence for handicapped persons

The most important piece of business dealt with by the National Council was the fourth revision of the invalidity insurance system (IV): At 112 against 1 vote and 21 abstentions the National Council approved a legal text which will provide handicapped persons with additional cash for a more inde-

pendent lifestyle and promote their integration in the labour market. The two new provisions were: introduction of a once-only assistance compensation, and the three-quarter pension. The once-only compensation will replace various existing contributions i.e. the compensation for persons requiring assistance and other insurance

benefits such as care contributions and certain supplementary pensions. The assistance compensation would be paid to all handicapped persons on an individual basis and allow them either to remain at home or move into a special home. The three-quarter pension will primarily benefit handicapped persons with an invalidity level between 60 and 70 percent. Currently the law provides for a full pension for invalidity levels above 66.6 percent only. This more generous provision will be offset by lifting supplementary pensions for spouses, which will result in annual savings of CHF 400 million. The IV revision has still to be submitted to the State Council.

*Pablo Crivelli*

Translated from the German by N. Chisholm