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More weight for the Fifth Switzerland

Ten years ago Switzerland introduced postal voting from abroad. This important move was thanks to a proposal by Georg Stucky, then the Liberal-Democratic National Councillor for Zug and now President of the Organisation for the Swiss Abroad (OSA).

In 1991, under the old system of voting in person, 14,000 voters living abroad were on the electoral roll. In 1992 this rose to 40,000, three years later to 57,000, and has now exceeded 80,000.

Votes from Swiss residents abroad affect our country, sometimes in a highly visible manner. Back in 1994 political observers suggested that the vote in favour of the health insurance law was thanks to the Fifth Switzerland. In June of last year the proposal to reform the military criminal code was approved solely thanks to votes from abroad. Added to this, Swiss Abroad recently made headlines with their



Gabrielle Keller

"The Fifth Switzerland is not a negligible minority"

unequivocal, above-average Yes to UN membership (see Swiss Review 02/2002).

While the Fifth Switzerland is certainly not a negligible minority, it is too early to celebrate. After all, 80,000 voters account for only

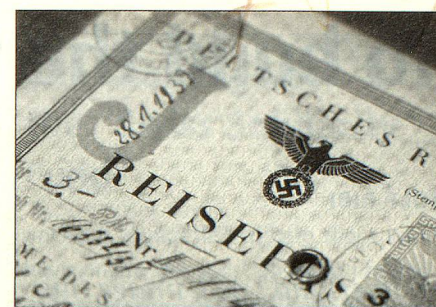
17.57 percent of the number of Swiss Abroad of voting age. The main reason which is repeatedly cited for this low "turnout" is the long postal distance which voting documents need to travel. This time lag could prove fatal, particularly for second votes. There is an urgent need to introduce electronic voting via the Internet (e-voting), which would eradicate this problem for many voters abroad.

Moreover, Swiss who live abroad are often less well informed about political and economic affairs back home. The Swiss Review publishes news and information on Switzerland six times a year. Internet users can also follow political developments online. So lack of information is only rarely a reason for abstaining. If the will is there, most Swiss Abroad can stay informed about Switzerland.

Many abstentions cannot be blamed on postal services and the problems associated with decentralised electoral rolls. Unfortunately, many Swiss lose their sense of political responsibility to their home country when they emigrate. However, anyone who wants to be taken seriously at home must do everything possible to participate in federal decisions. This is the only way to draw attention to the Fifth Switzerland and endow it with more political weight.

Gabrielle Keller

Translated from the German by N. Chisholm



FOCUS

The Bergier Report **4**

OSA

Yes to the Solidarity Fund **8**

OFFICIAL NEWS

New information booklet **10**

REFERENDUM

Abortion **12**

MAILBAG

15

MOSAIC

18



What role did Switzerland play in the Second World War? The Bergier Report clarifies the issue. Our picture shows tank barriers in the Jura near Solothurn: relics of a war which spared our country.

COVER: Patrick Lüthy

SWISS REVIEW

Swiss Review, the magazine for the Swiss Abroad, is in its 29th year of publication and is published in German, French, Italian, English and Spanish in more than 25 regional editions. It has a total circulation of over 360,000. Regional news appears four times a year.

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