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No more waiting for the postal ballot?

On 19 January the first political votes were successfully cast via the Internet in the community of Anières (GE).

E-voting offers Swiss nationals resident abroad an attractive new voting option.

IN 2000 THE FEDERAL government launched a major e-government project and approved a credit of CHF 30 million for pilot projects with the aim of exploiting the advantages of the Internet for administrative and political purposes. It goes without saying that Internet voting is a key aspect of e-government.

The electronic voting system in Anières was a world premiere. According to Daniel Brändli, head of the federal government's e-voting project, "while electronic voting trials have been held in the USA, never before have they been conducted for political elections." The canton of Geneva was commissioned to launch the project and selected Anières as the test community for the simple reason that the first referendum of 2003 would be held there. The trial proved hugely successful, raising the turnout from the previous average of only one-third of voters to two-thirds.

According to statistics published by the Geneva City Chancellery, 46 percent of voters voted on-line, and 65 percent indicated that they would take advantage of the e-voting option once it was introduced. "A genuine people's vote for Internet ballots," claims Robert Hensler, head of the Geneva City Chancellery.

Aside from Geneva, the government is also running two other pilot projects in Neuchâtel and Zurich. The new voting regulation was introduced in Neuchâtel in February, and the e-voting trial is scheduled for the second half of 2004.

The canton of Zurich launched its e-government project in March 2001 and is in the process of creating a central electoral register with centralised access. Here, too, according to Susanne Sorg, the communica-



Latinphoto/German Falke

Depending on where you live, mail may take some time to arrive. The picture shows a mailbox in the financial district of Buenos Aires.

tions officer for Zurich's Cantonal Council, the first electronic referendum is scheduled for September 2004.

How it works

Opponents of e-voting cite the security problems which the Internet entails. Replying to this criticism, the Geneva City Chancellery states that the system used in Anières is "as secure, if not more secure, than postal voting", and is protected by several firewalls.

Every voter in the community of Anières receives a personal 16-digit code along with his or her voting documents. Security is therefore guaranteed. According to Daniel Brändli, any hacker who tried to hack into the system without an ID number would have "only a 1 in 5 billion" chance of succeeding.

Once identification has been successfully made, another form appears on the screen. Here the voter has to enter his or her date of birth followed by a secret 4-digit code which

is obtained by scratching the relevant area on the voting documents. The last step is to enter the voter's domicile, after which the electronic ballot slip can be filled out.

Vote counters and party representatives are also assigned several passwords for accessing the virtual ballot box containing the e-votes.

For the sake of democracy

The aim of e-voting is to provide voters, particularly the 600,000 or so Swiss Abroad, with an additional voting medium. The Organisation for the Swiss Abroad regularly receives complaints from Swiss voters living abroad who receive voting documents too late and cannot therefore exercise the political rights they have so recently gained.

In Switzerland itself, e-voting is primarily aimed at young voters and persons with restricted mobility. One of the main aims is to combat apathy at the polls. An earlier measure implemented in Geneva has already had a positive impact. Postal voting is now used by 90 percent of voters, which in turn has boosted turnout by 20 percent. The pilot trial in Anières appears to confirm this trend. Of the 46 percent of voters who cast their vote electronically, 22 percent regularly or occasionally abstained from voting in the past.

Electronic guide to the government

On 10 February the Federal Chancellery launched a new Internet portal as part of the e-government project. The aim of www.ch.ch is to guide users through the administrative jungle. A collaborative effort between the federal government, cantons and communities, this information platform is available in all four national languages and from this summer will also be available in English. From 2005, the platform will also allow users to perform administrative tasks such as submitting tax forms or registering their change of address via the Internet.

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In addition, according to Michel Chevaller, the canton of Geneva media officer responsible for e-voting, "the government also wants to introduce the electronic collection of signatures for initiatives and referenda, as part of its efforts to promote electronic options for exercising people's rights."

The project launched by the canton of Neuchâtel addresses precisely this objective. Polling booths have traditionally been an ideal place for political parties to collect sig-

natures for their initiatives, but this has proved increasingly difficult since more and more people are now casting their votes by mail (in Geneva, only five percent of voters now go in person to the polling booth). Here, too, the Internet could offer an ideal solution: all in all, a veritable boon for direct democracy!

The legal basis for pilot projects will be in place until 2004, after which the government will rule definitively. So, while not exactly

round the corner, electronic voting is not too far off!

Isabelle Eichenberger 

The government pilot projects:

<http://www.admin.ch/ch/f/egov/ve/index.html>

Translated from German.

www.swissgeo.org – your perfect holiday companion!

At www.swissgeo.org Internet surfers can consult electronic maps featuring more than 30,000 interesting locations in Switzerland. The maps are ideal for organising your next holidays in Switzerland or for locating addresses

Looking for a particular street? Or perhaps you want to find the location of an embassy, garage, club, bar, car park or monument? Just enter <http://www.swissgeo.org> to access the geographic information system of swissinfo/Swiss Radio International (SRI).

[swissgeo.org](http://www.swissgeo.org) also provides detailed information on each geographical location: address, telephone, website etc. Added to this, the swissinfo geographical information system offers a wide range of functions, from zoom to sending an e-card to your friends, parents or colleagues!

Last but not least, www.swissgeo.org is available in ten languages: English, German, French, Italian, Romansh, Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese, Arabic and Chinese.

swissmusic – the best of Swiss music on the Internet

With its four linguistic regions, Switzerland offers a huge diversity of music. "swissmusic" is an English-language site devoted, as the name implies, to Swiss music. And it contains a new and exclusive anthology of the Swiss pop and rock scene.

"swissmusic" (<http://swissmusic.swissinfo.org>) offers surfers a complete cross-section of the best Swiss musical productions free of charge, from the national anthem to the latest Stephan Eicher hit. It covers all musical styles: rock, pop, classical, jazz, folk music etc.

The well-researched sections of the new www.swissinfo.org music site are aimed at specialists as well as the general public. A number of links provide visitors with easy access to other sites dedicated to Swiss music.

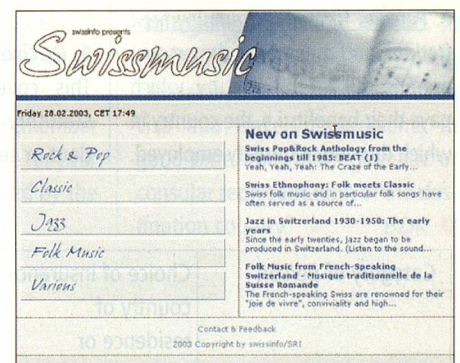
"Best of new releases" is for all those who want to keep up with the latest music. Here you will find a selection of recently-released Swiss albums and singles. The "Anthology" gives you

the opportunity to rediscover some golden oldies.

30 years of Swiss pop-rock: new on the Internet

Alongside the history of jazz, folk and classical music, "swissmusic" offers an exclusive anthology of Swiss pop and rock. Over 100 tracks, more than half of which have never been released previously on CD, trace the development of this musical genre from the hugely popular rock 'n' roll of the 1950s to the major pop and rock hits of the 1980s.

The anthology, produced by swissinfo/Swiss Radio International (SRI) and the SUISA Foundation for Music, is also available as a 5-CD boxed set entitled "Swiss Pop & Rock" (issued by SUIADISC/distributor: SoundService).



swissmusic: meet the big names of Swiss music on the Web.

Information

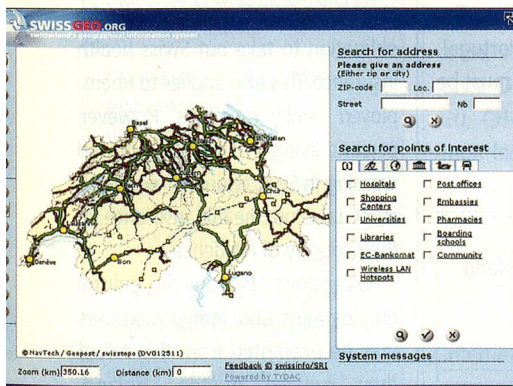
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