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Tighter asylum law



Remote/Martin Stollenwerk

Worlds are coming closer together with the EU's enlargement to the East.

EU citizens are covered by the agreement on free movement of persons in Switzerland. People from outside the EU, however, are only permitted entry if they are qualified personnel. And the government is cracking down on abuse of the asylum law.

RENÉ LENZIN

During a special one-week session, the National Council debated amendments to the asylum law and the law governing foreign nationals. The debate on the policy towards foreigners focused on eligibility to enter the Swiss labour market. The National Council advocated the two-tier system that has been effectively practised for several years. Citizens of the European Union (EU) and the European Free Trade Area (EFTA) benefit from the freedom of movement negotiated in the bilateral accords and therefore enjoy national-status priority on the Swiss job market, i.e. they are treated in the same way as Swiss and resident foreign nationals.

By contrast, only qualified non-EU and non-EFTA citizens are to be permitted to enter Switzerland for work purposes. Exactly what that means, however, is not quite clear. Firstly, the meaning of "qualified" has to be defined on a case-by-case basis. And secondly, the National Council has formulated an addendum to the law which also permits personnel for "specific types of work". In practice, what this boils down to is that permits would be granted to foreigners that the economy needs but who cannot be recruited either in Switzerland or from the EU. The two-tier system also applies to bringing in relatives: EU/EFTA citizens enjoy more leniency than members of outsider states.

The asylum law also has a European slant. With Switzerland planning to sign the Dublin Convention, anyone who has already applied for asylum in an EU state cannot apply again in Switzerland. Moreover, the Federal Council may draw up a list of other "safe" countries of origin and transit states. People entering Switzerland from these countries will no longer be permitted to apply for asylum, although exemption will be granted to persons who have fled their country because of persecution and to those with close relatives in Switzerland. Other proposals to crack down on abuse of the asylum law include measures to accelerate the decision and appeal processes, coupled with a biometric data registration system.

Switzerland will adopt a more lenient approach to cooperative asylum seekers who are not recognised as refugees but are unable to return to their country of origin in the

foreseeable future. They will now be granted asylum on humanitarian grounds, making it easier for them to enter the job market and bring their family in.

Translated from German.

For a more social health insurance plan

The federal people's initiative entitled "For a social, unified health insurance plan" was submitted by the Mouvement Populaire des Familles.

The initiative calls for an amendment to Article 117 and Article 197 (transitional provision) of the Swiss federal constitution.

The aim of the initiative is to control healthcare costs and provide for their fair distribution. In addition, the population should continue to have access to high-quality medical services even on the basis of an obligatory basic insurance. Reserves and provisions for the obligatory health insurance are reduced to a minimum. The proposed new unified insurance scheme must be transparently managed and decentralised so as to render it accessible to all insured persons. The Board of Directors and Supervisory Board must comprise equal numbers of representatives of public authorities, health service providers and insured members. The premiums would be pegged to the insured person's earnings capability.

Translated from German.

Date of forthcoming referenda 2004

26 September / 28 November

BDK