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Divided opinions

No to facilitated citizenship for young foreigners, Yes to maternity leave, and No to the postal initiative: this was the outcome of the federal vote on 26 September. The Röstli trench between French-speaking and German-speaking Switzerland yawned deep and wide


BY ROLF RIBI

FACILITATED CITIZENSHIP for young second-generation foreigners with immigrant parents found no favour with Swiss voters. Neither a majority of voters nor cantons voted in favour of the Federal Council's and parliament's proposal to facilitate access to Swiss citizenship for "secondos" under defined conditions (see Swiss Review No. 4/2004). The proposal was rejected by a clear 56.8 percent, with Appenzell Innerrhoden, Schwyz and Glarus showing the

strongest opposition. Western Switzerland, with the exception of the Valais, resolutely voted in favour of this proposal, with the strongest support coming from Geneva, Vaud and Neuchâtel. The only German-speaking canton to vote in favour of the proposal was Basel City.

Voters' opposition to automatic citizenship for young third-generation foreigners (i.e. the grandchildren of immigrant families) was less marked. 51.6 percent of voters and a clear majority of cantons rejected the proposal to grant Swiss citizenship if born in Switzerland, with the most resounding No vote cast by Glarus, Schwyz and Appenzell Innerrhoden. This proposal, too, was clearly supported by cantons in western Switzerland, led by Vaud, Neuchâtel and Geneva. Berne and Basel City echoed French-speaking Switzerland.

The 55.4 percent vote in favour of paid maternity leave was thanks to voters in western Switzerland. This constitutional reform entitles mothers to 80 percent of their salary (up to a maximum of CHF 172 per day) for 14 weeks following the birth of their child. The clearest support was shown by the cantons of Vaud and Geneva, but Ticino, Basel City, Berne, Zurich and Basel Country also voted in favour of paid maternity leave. The proposal was given the thumbs-down in eastern and central Switzerland, with Appenzell Innerrhoden, Schwyz and Glarus showing the strongest opposition. As with the citizenship issue, the maternity leave vote reflected a yawning Röstli trench.

The people's initiative for "Postal services for all", launched by unions and consumer organisations, was narrowly rejected. It proposed a nation-wide network of post offices and the consumer-friendly basic provision of postal services, with any deficit to be made up by government. But 50.2 percent of voters and a clear cantonal majority voted No, led by Zug, Nidwalden and Thurgau. Western Switzerland and peripheral cantons such as Valais, Uri and Graubünden favoured this people's initiative, with the strongest support shown by the cantons of Jura, Valais, Ticino and Geneva. 

Translated from German

COMMENTARY

Jubilation and sorrow

This autumn's voting Sunday produced clear winners and losers. Sixty years after the constitutional mandate, Switzerland has finally become the last country in Europe to introduce paid maternity leave. From now on, working mothers and their families will no longer have to worry when a new addition to the family is expected. This happy outcome would not have come about without strong support from French and Italian speaking Switzerland, because only four German-speaking cantons voted in favour of maternity insurance, and there was major opposition in more rural regions. Non-working mothers came away empty-handed: they can and will receive assistance only through higher child allowances or supplementary family benefits.

The unhappy losers of this referendum were young foreigners, who have been denied easier access to Swiss citizenship. Thanks to schooling and jobs they are well-integrated, speak our dialects, pay their taxes and social security contributions, and want to have a say in politics. But instead of obtaining easier access to the red passport, they have merely been shown the red card. This must be a source of sadness for these young people to whom Switzerland has long been home. An aggressive propaganda campaign by right-wing nationalist groups, as well as reports on criminals and hit-and-run drivers from the Balkans, had a negative impact on the vote.

Swiss Post, the "yellow giant", was not shown the red card, but it was shown the yellow card. The people's initiative for "Postal Services for all" was thrown out by a hair's breadth. Had two more cantons and a few more voters voted Yes, it would have been accepted. Even so, the people's message is clear: no reduction of public services, but customer-focused postal services throughout the country, including alpine and peripheral regions. After all, the village post office is also part and parcel of the homeland. Rolf Ribi

Translated from German

Swiss Abroad vote in favour of facilitated citizenship

Swiss Abroad voted in favour of both citizenship proposals by a clear majority of more than 75 percent. This, at least, was the outcome of the vote in the cantons of Basel City, Lucerne, Geneva and Vaud. Swiss Abroad votes are not counted separately in other cantons.

The GFS study conducted on behalf of the Organisation for the Swiss Abroad (OSA) in 2003 already confirmed that Swiss Abroad, while strongly attached to their home country, want a more cosmopolitan, internationally active Switzerland with a liberal policy on foreigners and asylum. gk