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Voters back Federal Council and parliament

On 26 November, the Swiss electorate approved two moves proposed by their government and parliament – overwhelmingly in the case of national minimums for child benefit, and narrowly in support of controversial new legislation to pay CHF 1 billion to the new members of the European Union.

"Yes" to aid for the east

As expected, the referendum on cooperation with Eastern European countries was a close call: Only 53.4 percent of voters and 15 cantons approved the new Federal Law on Eastern Europe (BG Ost) in a poll initiated by the SVP and two small right-wing parties. The cantons of western Switzerland and the urban regions of German-speaking Switzerland voted clearly in favour of the act, while the rural regions of central and eastern Switzerland opposed it just as strongly. The largest proportion of "Yes" votes was recorded in Vaud (61.5 percent), Basel City (60.5), Geneva and Jura (both 60.1). The new legislation was rejected most vehemently in the cantons of Glarus (64.6), Ticino (62.9), Schwyz (61.3) and Thurgau (56.7). A cantonal majority was not required, but would have been achieved. The approval rate was slightly lower than that of the 2005 EU referendum on the Schengen and Dublin Accords and the free movement of people. The losers were the SVP, who had almost single-handedly opposed the new act. Indeed, it is the third time in a row that the party has failed to win a poll on Europe. Endorsement of the BG Ost means Switzerland can now

continue to build on its bilateral relations with the EU.

"Yes" to new family policy

A clear 68 percent of voters approved the Federal Child Benefit Act. All cantons except Appenzell-Innerrhoden endorsed it, most overwhelmingly in the cantons of Jura (83.7 percent), Ticino and Fribourg (both 75.8), Vaud (75.6) and Basel City (70.6). Turnout was 44.4 percent. The referendum was initiated by the Swiss Trade Association. The outcome was also a blow to the Swiss Employers' Association, the SVP and the FDP. The winners were the SP, the CVP, the Greens and the trade unions. The new federal act lays down national minimums for child benefit and support for adolescents in vocational training, and creates uniform qualification conditions. It will increase family allowances in a total of 22 cantons. One million children and adolescents currently receive family allowances. The private sector's contribution towards these benefit payments will increase by CHF 455 million from its present level of CHF 4 billion. So now there is even less scope for any new family-related demands. RR

"Yes" votes by canton for aid for the East and on child benefit:

