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How Swiss citizens abroad can vote

On 21 October 2007, all Swiss citizens of voting age who are resident abroad can join their domestic compatriots in determining the composition of the National Council and the Council of States for the next four years. What is the procedure for voting? We explain how it works.

The National Council, or large chamber of the Swiss parliament, has 200 seats and represents the Swiss resident population. The 200 seats are divided between the cantons according to their respective populations. There is one seat for about every 36,000 inhabitants.

Each canton forms a constituency, so there are 26 constituencies across Switzerland. Each constituency has the right to at least one seat in parliament. As the canton with the highest population, Zurich sends 34 national councillors to Berne, while the cantons of Uri, Glarus, Obwalden and Nidwalden as well as the two Appenzells each have just one representative in the large chamber.

Since 1919, national councils have been elected for four-year terms using a electoral system known as proportional representation, in which seats are allocated to parties according to the number of votes they re-

ceive. This enables even minorities to obtain seats, in contrast to majority or “first-past-the-post” systems, in which minorities have no chance of winning a seat in parliament. Majority elections are held in the cantons which have only one seat on the National Council. Here the relative number of votes is decisive, in other words, the seat goes to the candidate who receives the most votes.

The Council of States, or small chamber, represents the political voice of the cantons. Most cantons send two representatives to the Council of States. Because of historical cantonal divisions, however, Appenzell Innerrhoden, Appenzell Ausserrhoden, Basel Land, Basel City, Nidwalden and Obwalden each send just one (bringing the total to 46). The councillors decide independently, not as instructed by their cantons.

Elections to seats in the Council of States are subject to cantonal regulations. For this reason, Swiss small-chamber elections are not held everywhere on the same weekend as National Council elections. The small-chamber representatives for the cantons of Zug, Appenzell Innerrhoden and



The entrance to the National Council chamber.

Grisons are elected earlier. With the exception of Jura, all cantons elect their councillors of state on the basis of a majority of votes. In most cases, an absolute majority (i.e. candidates need to receive more than 50% of the votes cast) and a second round of voting are required.

Because small-chamber elections are subject to cantonal legislation, foreign-resident Swiss citizens may take part in the elections in those cantons which grant them the right to vote at the cantonal level. At present, these are the cantons of Berne, Basel Land, Fribourg, Geneva, Jura, Neuchâtel, Solothurn, Schwyz, Ticino and Zurich.

Active and passive voting rights

Citizens have the right to vote (active voting rights) and be

elected (passive voting rights) if they have Swiss nationality, have reached the age of 18 and have not been declared mentally ill or incapacitated. People resident outside Switzerland may also stand for election.

The Swiss abroad may vote actively in elections in the canton and constituency where their electoral community is located. However, they may stand for election in any canton, provided they have been put forward. Even so, each candidate can only stand for election in one canton.

The run-up to the election

The individual parties submit their proposed candidates to the relevant cantonal authority, which checks the proposals and gives the representative of the signatories a deadline by which any defects in the submission must be remedied. The amended proposals are called lists. The number of candidates on each list is limited to the number of National Council seats available for the constituency in question. No name may appear more than twice. Nobody may be a candidate in more than one constituency anywhere in Switzerland. If not, the system of proportional representation – in which

FOPH PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS RECOMMENDATIONS

The Federal Office of Public Health in Berne has published a series of personal hygiene recommendations for use in the event of a pandemic. These hygiene measures could reduce the risk of infection and even slow the spread of a flu pandemic. The FOPH also recommends you purchase a store of fifty protective masks (surgical masks) per person right away.

In summary, the FOPH recommends taking the following hygiene measures if a pandemic occurs:

- Wash your hands regularly with soap;

- Use paper handkerchiefs when coughing or sneezing, dispose of them afterwards ;
- Avoid shaking hands;
- Wear protective masks if recommended to do so by the authorities.

Details of the recommendations can be consulted at www.bag.admin.ch

Further information on pandemic preparedness can be found at www.eda.admin.ch, “Services”, “Living abroad”.



candidates from different lists or the same list may appear twice – would not function. This so-called prohibition of multiple candidacy is designed to prevent the proposed candidates from standing for election on several lists in the same constituency or in more than one constituency. Each proposal must be signed in person by a minimum number of eligible voters resident in the relevant constituency and bear a designation at the top of the document for ease of identification. No eligible voter may sign more than one proposal.

Additional votes

If a party list contains fewer valid names of candidates than the number of seats available in the constituency, the blank lines are assigned to the party in whose name the list was submitted as additional votes. Party votes can therefore be votes for candidates or additional votes.

Combined lists

Different parties can combine their lists within a constituency in order to benefit from their joint voting power. Whenever two or more lists are combined, they are initially treated as a single list when seats are allocated. Thereafter, the seats are

divided between the parties forming the combined list according to the rules of proportional representation. This gives smaller parties better prospects of obtaining a seat.

Within a combined list, only combinations of sublists are permitted. Such sublists have the same main designation, the only differences being an additional note to identify the sex or age of the candidates, the wing or grouping of the party, or the region.

Election materials

The voting documents consist of the printed party lists and blank ballot papers. Eligible voters in cantons in which only one national councillor is elected (Uri, Obwalden, Nidwalden, Glarus, Appenzell Innerrhoden and Appenzell Ausserrhoden) do not receive printed ballot papers, only blank ones.

A brief guide to voting

The Swiss abroad may cast their vote for a list containing the names of candidates from a particular party. This list may not contain more names than available lines. No name may appear more than twice on the list.

The following are examples of possible cast party lists:

List 1: Party A

01.01 *Anne Prima*

01.02 *Jacques Secundus*

If this party list is placed in the ballot box as is, each of the candidates receives one vote. The party receives as many votes as the number of available seats in the constituency. Party votes are made up of votes for candidates and additional votes.

List 2: Party B

02.01 *Séraphine Tertius*

02.02 *Charles Quartus*

Here, one name on the printed list has been deleted. In general, cast ballot papers must contain at least one eligible candidate. A candidate whose name has been deleted receives no votes. However, even though one of the names has been deleted (blank line), party B still receives a second vote in the form of an additional (party) vote.

List 3: Party C

03.01 *Pierre Quintus*

03.02 *Jean Sextus*

03.01 *Pierre Quintus*

You may also delete a name on a list and enter the name of another candidate already listed. This is known as accumulating. This candidate then receives two votes. Your list may not contain more names than available lines. By listing a candidate twice, you give him an advantage over candidates you have deleted or who are listed only once. However, this has no effect on the number of votes cast for the relevant party, which is decisive when allocating seats. No candidate may be named three or more

times. Inverted commas, “ditto”, “idem” or other similar expressions are not permitted.

List 4: Party D

04.01 *Jules Septimus*

04.02 *Sophie Octava*

03.01 *Pierre Quintus*

You may also add names from another list (in this case list 3) to a printed list (here list 4). This is known as split voting. However, you may only add names of candidates that appear on one of the lists you are sent. In this example, party D loses a vote and the deleted candidate also loses out. By contrast, the candidate added from another list benefits, as does his party (both of whom get a vote). Split lists may not contain more candidates than may be elected in the constituency.

Free or blank lists

List no.... Party...

04.01 *Jules Septimus*

01.01 *Anne Prima*

If you do not wish to vote for a party list, you may write the names of candidates yourself on a blank list. These candidates must appear somewhere on the party lists, although they need not belong to the same party.

If you put a party name at the top of a ballot paper, the list becomes a party list. Blank lines are then assigned to this party (as additional votes).

Lists without a party name are known as free lists. The votes go to the parties of the candidates whom you wish to elect and who appear on the ballot paper. By contrast, the blank lines on this list are not



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In the chamber of the Council of States.

assigned to any party, and are lost. Here too votes may be accumulated or split. Please note that you may only write down as many names as the number of National Council seats available to your canton.

Important

1. Only official ballot papers are valid.
2. Ballot papers must be completed or altered by hand. Changes must be clear and unambiguous. Names must be written out in full. Designate the candidates in such a way that there is no doubt as to their identity (ideally by stating their party). Please also add their candidate number.
3. Ballot papers may be neither signed nor attributable in any other manner.
4. Ballot papers containing slanderous remarks will be declared invalid.
5. Ballot papers may not contain more names than the number of National Council seats available to the canton.
6. Cast ballot papers must contain at least one valid candidate name. Only the names that appear on the printed ballot papers are valid.
7. The procedure for postal voting differs from one canton to another. Eligible foreign-resident voters are therefore recommended to carefully read through the instructions contained in the envelope sent to them by their constituency.
8. Any foreign-resident voters who wish to cast their vote in person at the polling station in their community should notify their electoral community of this in writing or by personal appointment. If the electoral community receives notification at least six weeks before the election, it sets aside voting materials for the non-resident voter concerned. In this case, these voting materials must be

collected from the voter registration bureau of the electoral community during opening hours.

9. Do not cast more than one National Council ballot paper.

Voting

Your electoral community sends you the voting documents in the official language of your choice before the date of the election. These comprise:

- The ballot papers;
- The Federal Chancellery's voting instructions;
- One or two envelopes addressed to your electoral community, depending on your canton, so that you can cast your ballot in secret;
- A separate voting card, if the voting documents envelope does not suffice to identify you.

The election and voting procedures are laid down by cantonal legislation. There are 26 different regulations! We therefore recommend that you read your electoral community's instructions carefully. This ensures that your vote will count in full. If you have any questions about voting, please contact your political community directly.

Changes of address should be sent to the Swiss embassy or consulate at which you are registered.

Related election links

www.parlament.ch/e/homepage/wahlen-2007.htm
www.ch.ch, "Authorities"
www.bk.admin.ch/aktuell/abstimmung/nrw/index.html?lang=de
www.tellvetia.ch



In the National Council chamber.

No construction that damages the Swiss environment or landscape

In June 2006, the initiative committee "Helvetia Nostra" launched the popular initiative "Against the unbridled building of constructions that damage the environment and the landscape" (see [Swiss Review 5/06](#)). The aim of the initiative is to give the Swiss Federation greater powers in key urban and regional planning issues.

The initiative aims at adding a fourth paragraph to Article 75 of the Swiss Federal Constitution, stating that constructions which damage the environment or landscape, such as industrial

complexes, airports, shopping centres, sports stadiums, amusement parks, multi-storey car parks, etc., may only be erected if they are of overriding importance and permit adherence to the principles of sustainability. Generally binding guidelines are to define the potential locations and dimensions of such constructions.

This constitutional amendment would also require changes to the Constitution's transitional provisions. A new clause 8 in Article 197 of the Transitional Provisions of the Federal Constitution would require the Federal Council to issue a decree defining the necessary implementing provisions and plans if the relevant law does not come into force within two years of the approval of the amended Article 75, paragraph 4.

POPULAR INITIATIVES

The following initiatives have been launched since the last issue:

- "For a healthy climate" (until 29 November 2008)
 - "Against the construction of minarets" (until 1 November 2008)
- Signature forms for current initiatives can be downloaded from the Federal Chancellery site: www.admin.ch/ch/d/pore/vi/vis_1_3_1_1.html

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