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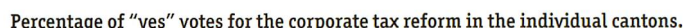
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Narrow victory for the Federal Council and the middle-ground parties. The people approved tax relief for shareholders holding more than a 10% stake in a company by a margin of just 20,000 votes. Eighteen cantons approved the proposals, but they were rejected by a wide margin in Basle and in French-speaking Switzerland. The initiative against fighter jet noise pollution suffered a heavy defeat: rejected by 68% of the electorate and all the cantons.

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Should naturalisation applications be decided by the electorate? The people and states will decide on 1 June. They will also vote on the initiative against official propaganda and on a constitutional article concerning health insurance. By René Lenzin

In the view of the Swiss People's Party (SVP), the people should, under the Swiss direct-democratic system, have the right to vote on naturalisation and reject applications without providing grounds. Through a pop-

The "sovereignty of the people rather than official propaganda" initiative aims to severely restrict the information provided by the Federal Council and administration in the run-up to popular votes. Only a single brief appearance by the Federal Councillor responsible for the matter being voted on and the government's information booklet, which is sent out with the electoral documents, would be permitted.

A parliamentary majority wants competition and transparency to be written into the constitution as key principles on which compulsory health insurance should be based. It is a counter proposal to the withdrawn SVP popular initiative entitled “For lower health insurance contributions”. In addition to the SVP, the FDP and CVP are also advocating the constitutional article. However, the SP and Greens are opposed to it as they favour state management of competition in the healthcare sector. The Federal Council’s position on the scheme is somewhere between reticent and sceptical. It would prefer to press ahead with the gradual reform of health insurance.