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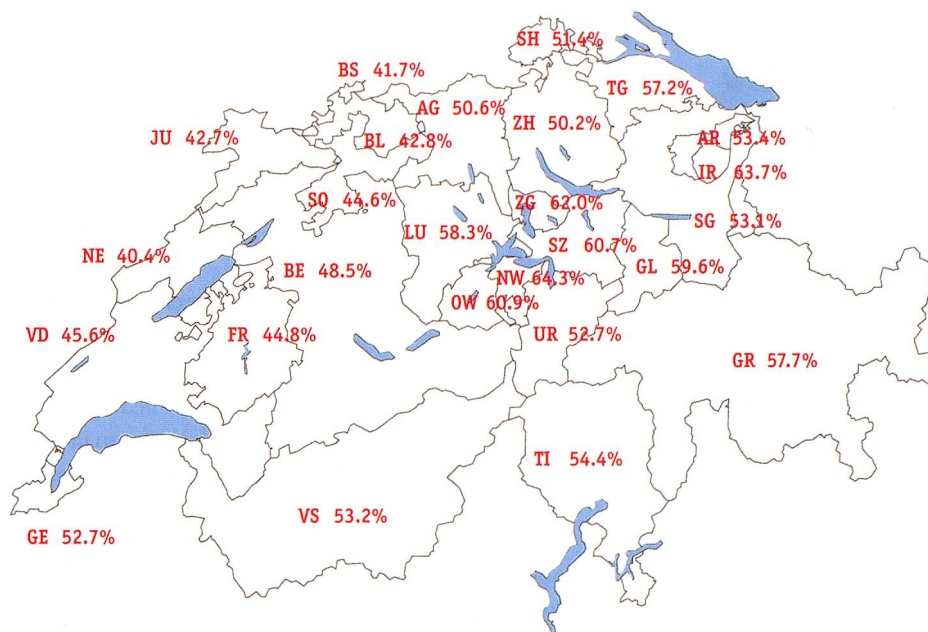
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Tax reform passed by a whisker. 50.5% of the electorate voted in favour of the corporate tax reform. Initiative against fighter jet noise pollution doomed.

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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Percentage of "yes" votes for the corporate tax reform in the individual cantons.

The naturalisation process – a long-running political saga

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

There is a tradition of popular voting on naturalisation, especially in German-speaking Switzerland, but it remains a controversial issue. In 2003, the Federal Court described the rejection of numerous naturalisation applications in the Lucerne commune of Emmen as autocratic. Contestable grounds were required to turn down an application, which were not constituted by a ballot-box vote. The court ruled that the vote was therefore invalid.

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-

ular initiative, the party is calling for each commune to be able to decide for itself which body should deal with naturalisation. And it says there should be no appeal procedure against this body's decisions.

The Federal Council, the Social Democrats (SP), the Green Party, the Free Democrats (FDP) and the Christian Democrats (CVP) all oppose the initiative. However, there are many people in the ranks of the latter two parties who have difficulty accepting the Federal Court's decision. They have therefore drawn up an indirect counter proposal to the initiative. This would prohibit popular voting on naturalisation, but would continue to allow the communal assemblies to vote on it. However, they would have to provide grounds for turning down an application. This would give the applicant the opportunity to appeal. This counter proposal will only come into force as law if the popular initiative is defeated.

A muzzle for the Federal Council?

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.

The Federal Council is opposed to the initiative. It says the electorate has a right to know about its government's position and objectives and to be informed about the possible impact of the ballot results on the state, society and individuals "in a comprehensive, factual and objective way". A parliamentary majority supports these arguments. Only the SVP has backed the initiative. Parliament has passed an indirect counter proposal to this initiative as well. This obliges the government to provide "consistent, factual, transparent and appropriate" information on ballot proposals. As with the naturalisation bill, this law will only come into force if the initiative is rejected.

More competition in healthcare?

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.