

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 38 (2011)
Heft: 2

Artikel: Politics : military weapons to remain at home in the cupboard
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-907335>

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Opposition from all sides

The Federal Council's proposals constitute an indirect counterproposal to the recently submitted popular initiative on public transport. This project launched by environmental associations and left-wing/green parties calls for half the earmarked fuel duty to be made available to public transport. The Federal Council's plan also intends the use of fuel duty for the railways but it believes the level of redistribution proposed by the initiative's organisers goes too far.

Whether its concept can win majority support will only become clear during the political debate. However, there is widespread opposition. The cantons are against additional expenditure on the railways. The SP and the Greens will not accept tariff increases for public transport because this offers environmentally misguided incentives, and many conservative politicians want to prevent public transport from being permanently financed in part by road transport duties.

ADDITIONAL INCOME

Road: As a first step, the price of the motorway toll would be increased from CHF 40 to between CHF 80 and CHF 100. This would produce additional annual revenue of CHF 300 to 450 million.

The fuel duty surcharge would later increase by 7 cents to 10 cents per litre, generating additional annual income of CHF 500 to 700 million.

Rail: The railways would have to pay CHF 300 million a year more for use of the tracks. As they would pass on this increase in train path charges to customers, the average cost of rail travel would increase by 10%.

Anyone commuting long distances would in future be allowed to deduct less in travel expenses from taxes. This would produce additional income of CHF 250 million, which would go to the railways.

The cantons would contribute CHF 300 million to the railway infrastructure fund.

The fund would receive an additional CHF 40 million a year from redeployment of the existing guarantee credit for noise protection.

Military weapons to remain at home in the cupboard

56.3% of voters and 20 cantons have rejected the weapons initiative. Members of the army will not have to store their weapons in armouries in the future. By René Lenzin

The popular initiative entitled "Protection against armed violence" suffered defeat at the ballot box. With a turnout of just under 49%, the proposal was opposed by the majority of cantons and the Swiss people. Only four French-speaking cantons as well as Basel-Stadt and Zurich supported the initiative (see map).

Overall, differences in voting behaviour were evident between urban and rural areas rather than between linguistic regions. Although the overall outcome in French-speaking Switzerland was narrow approval, the rural cantons of Fribourg and Valais rejected the initiative with a "no" vote above the national average. The urban-rural divide was best illustrated in the two cantons with the largest populations. In the canton of Zurich, 33.9% voted in favour in the Andelfingen district compared to 65.4% in the Zurich district. 40.6% of voters approved the initiative overall in the canton of Berne compared to 66.4% in Berne city.

The popular initiative called for military weapons to be stored in armouries rather than at home, as they are now. It also demanded a national weapons register as well

as evidence of the need to purchase and ability to use firearms. It aimed to have a preventive effect as the Federal Council and Parliament had already tightened up firearms legislation prior to the vote. Soldiers can no longer keep ammunition for their army pistols or assault rifles at home. They can also deposit their weapons at armouries voluntarily, but very few have done so thus far.

After the referendum, Simonetta Sommaruga, the Minister of Justice, announced further plans to tighten firearms legislation to prevent fatal accidents and suicides involving military weapons.

No referenda on 15 May

No more national referenda will be held before the federal elections on 23 October 2011. Given that there are no proposals ready to be put to the vote, the Federal Council has decided no referenda will take place on the originally scheduled date of 15 May. However, various elections and referenda will still take place on this date at cantonal and communal level.

