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State of the nation

The forthcoming federal elections are developing into a contest to woo the voters of the “Fifth Switzerland”. However, domestic issues are clearly dominating this year’s campaign.



MARC LETTAU

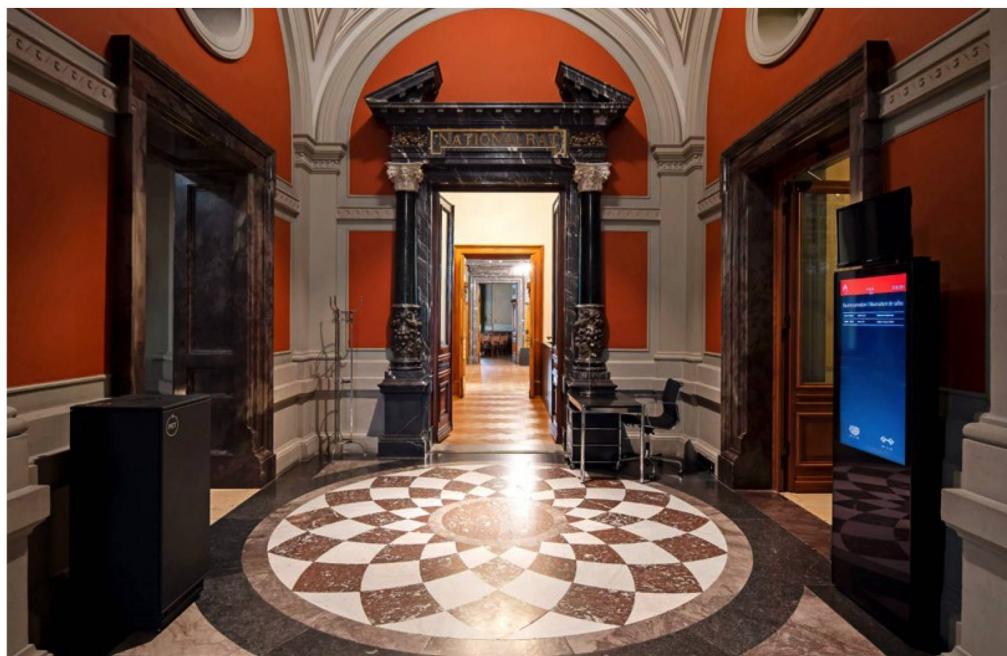
In the run-up to elections, the hopes and concerns of the electorate increasingly become the focus of political debate. The federal elections of 20 October 2019 are no exception. GFS Bern’s Worry Barometer is a popular gauge for assessing the nation’s mood. According to the research and polling institute’s latest findings, for Swiss voters domestic issues are currently the most pressing.

For a number of years, the greatest concern among survey respondents was the threat of unemployment. Now the biggest source of worry is pension provision. Some 45 per cent of people (previous year: 44 per cent) think that the uncertain financial future of Old-Age and Survivors’ Insurance and the controversy surrounding proposals to raise the retirement age are a matter of concern. As their second concern, 41 per cent cite the ever-increasing cost of Swiss healthcare along with expensive health insurance premiums that

are putting a strain on household budgets. In comparison, only 26 per cent mentioned healthcare as one of their main concerns in the previous year. The issue of immigration and refugees also remains high on the list. Overall, GFS Bern have discerned a “shift in attention towards the domestic agenda”. In keeping with this, climate change and environmental protection rose to become one of the top five voter concerns following the 2018 heatwave.

Although the contest to woo the “Fifth Switzerland” is intense, the domestic emphasis has put the interests of the Swiss Abroad slightly into the shade. For example, e-voting has more or less been put on ice. In our big election survey (see the following pages), six out of seven political parties take a positive view of this innovation, at least with regard to voters who live abroad. There is indeed plenty of goodwill, but domestically the idea is a non-starter at the moment.

The parliament lobby, now empty: election day will reveal who will soon be filling the space.
Photo: Keystone



Nevertheless, notable efforts are being made to give the Swiss Abroad a stronger political voice. Parties – the SP and SVP in particular – have Swiss expatriates standing for election in a number of cantons. Politics is also about people, so a large number of foreign-based election candidates would do the interests of the “Fifth Switzerland” no harm at all. This, for the

How to vote smart

Whom do I vote for if I don’t know any of the election candidates? This is a common quandary even for many voters who live in Switzerland, let alone in faraway countries. Smartvote is an online platform that enables you to learn more about the political views of the people who are standing. Election candidates use the tool to answer questions on a range of issues, thus creating a database of profiles. The trick is that Smartvote also allows you, the voter, to answer the same questions. You can then compare your own political views directly with those of the different candidates. The more a candidate’s responses tally with your own responses, the more likely their political stance will be similar to yours. www.smartvote.ch

Swiss Abroad at least, is the good news as we approach the 2019 elections.

For more information on election candidates from the “Fifth Switzerland”, visit www.revue.ch