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E-voting – reorientation process currently ongoing

Since mid-2019, Swiss voters have no longer been able to vote electronically. Swiss Abroad have been particularly affected by the suspension of e-voting. However, work to reorient the e-voting testing process is currently ongoing. Security and transparency are the watchwords in this regard.

Federal legislation is now being revised in relation to e-voting, after the Federal Council conducted a consultation. The resumption of testing will be subject to new standards along with the implementation of measures to improve security.

Academic experts have been involved in the reorientation as part of a broad dialogue. In future, members of the public will be encouraged to report cracks in the country's e-voting systems on an ongoing basis, using publicly accessible information for this purpose (source code; documentation; test reports; details of identified vulnerabilities). Anyone who provides a useful tip-off may receive a cash reward in return. The federal government will commission independent experts to check whether security standards are being maintained. The aim is to facilitate continual improvements. There will be additional collaboration with experts to help cement this process.

Furthermore, only fully verifiable e-voting systems will be used in future. Up to 30 per cent of voters per canton and up to 10 per cent of the nationwide electorate will be allowed to



participate in e-voting pilots. Swiss Abroad as well as voters with physical or mental impairments will be given preferential treatment, in other words they will be able to take part without being included in these quotas.

The Confederation, cantons and the system provider Swiss Post are already implementing the new standards with a view to resuming the testing process as soon as possible. The revision of federal legislation will have no effect on the distribution of powers, so the cantons will still be free to

decide whether to offer e-voting as well as which e-voting system they want to use, while the federal government will set the statutory parameters and act as the authorising body. (BK)

How it used to be: access card with code for the Geneva e-voting system discontinued in 2019. Now the Confederation is revising its approach to e-voting.

Photo: Keystone

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New ways to send voting papers?

Swiss Abroad can only vote if the relevant voting papers arrive in time. But sending voting papers is a major logistical challenge, further exacerbated by the pandemic. The federal government and three cantons are therefore looking at new ways of delivering these documents.

To find out how voting papers can best arrive on time, the 13 June 2021 popular vote coincided with a pilot project that trialled the dispatch of voting papers via diplomatic courier. A survey was also conducted at the same time. The Federal Chancellery and the Consular Directorate of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) were involved, as were three cantons – Aargau, Ticino and Geneva. The pilot project was based on a postulate by Zurich FDP National Councillor Andri Silberschmidt.

Around 1,600 Swiss Abroad in Australia, Brazil and Thailand registered to vote in the cantons of Aargau, Ticino and Geneva were invited to participate in the survey. One half received their voting papers via Swiss Post as before. On a trial basis, the other half received the documents via their local Swiss representation abroad. Everyone returned their voting papers the conventional way, i.e. directly to their home municipality in Switzerland and not via their local representation.

Some 20 per cent of voters took part in the survey. Their answers as well as the feedback provided by the authorities involved must now be collated and analysed. Comparing the two methods of dispatch will provide an insight into the effectiveness and cost of sending voting papers via diplomatic courier. Following evaluation of the results, a decision will be made on whether to conduct further trials as part of the pilot project.

The Silberschmidt postulate envisages that the Federal Council not only trial the use of diplomatic couriers in a pilot project, but also that it ascertain whether the dispatch of voting papers to Swiss Abroad for elections and popular votes at federal level should be changed in any other way. The Federal Council will assess the pilot project in detail and address the possibility of making other improvements – in the form of a postulate report by spring 2023 at the latest. (BK)

In the bag

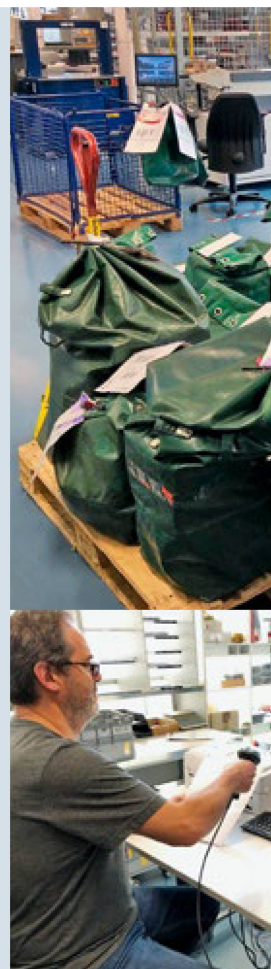
The bid to find new ways of sending voting papers (see main text) extended to the use of diplomatic couriers in June. But what is a diplomatic courier?

Diplomatic couriers are the people who carry documents and other items between the head office of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) in Berne and Switzerland's representations abroad. The activities of diplomatic couriers are governed by the Vienna Convention of 18 April 1961 on Diplomatic Relations, which came into force in 1964.

Diplomatic bags carry official correspondence between diplomatic representations abroad and the foreign ministry of the sending state as well as between other missions and consulates of the sending state. They enjoy inviolability and must not be opened or held by enforcement authorities during transit.

Diplomatic correspondence is put into diplomatic bags – and declared as such – at the FDFA's head office in Berne. Under the terms of the Vienna Convention, a diplomatic bag may only contain diplomatic papers or items reserved for official use. A diplomatic bag must have a seal attached and be marked as a diplomatic consignment. It can literally take the form of a bag or other container. It is then sent abroad by conventional mail or via courier services such as DHL.

The diplomatic courier in Berne processes over 18,000 incoming and outgoing diplomatic consignments every year. All these consignments together account for a total weight of 160 tonnes. (KD)



❶ The FDFA courier hall where the diplomatic correspondence is carefully packed.

❷ It's a major administrative task: all the outgoing missives are collected.

❸ The diplomatic dispatch packed in a green bag has a seal attached and is marked as a diplomatic consignment. Photos provided



Federal votes

The Federal Council determines voting proposals at least four months before the voting date.

Everything you need to know about voting proposals (voting pamphlets, committees, recommendations by Parliament and the Federal Council etc.) is available at www.admin.ch/votes or via the Federal Chancellery's VoteInfo app.

The Federal Council has decided that the following federal proposals will be submitted to the people on 28 November 2021:

- Popular initiative "For better nursing care (Nursing Care Initiative)"
- Popular initiative "Appointing federal judges by random selection (Justice Initiative)"
- Amendment to the Federal Act on the Statutory Principles for Federal Council Ordinances on Combating the COVID-19 Epidemic (COVID-19 Act) (Hardship Cases, Unemployment Insurance, Childcare, Creative Artists, Events)

Popular initiatives

No new popular initiatives have been launched.

The list of pending popular initiatives is available in German, French and Italian at www.bk.admin.ch > Politische Rechte > Volksinitiativen > Hängige Volksinitiativen

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Santo Domingo (2020)

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