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Autor: Peter, Theodora
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Farmers' resistance sinks nature protection initiative

The Swiss electorate rejected a constitutional article providing greater protection for biodiversity. The No vote was a surprisingly emphatic 63 per cent. A majority of voters in the “Fifth Switzerland” said Yes to the measure on 22 September.

THEODORA PETER



The issue seems pretty indisputable: who, in light of the rise in the number of endangered plant and animal species, could be against more biodiversity? Nonetheless, the people behind the initiative were increasingly forced onto the defensive during the voting campaign. The main source of resistance was from agriculture. The farmers' association warned that greater protection for nature could come at the expense of agricultural land: “30 per cent less land? Say goodbye to Swiss food production!” was the pointed slogan on the No posters. The Swiss electricity industry also came out against the initiative, fearing its own restrictions, such as on building wind turbines and solar facilities.

On the other side, the nature protection associations failed to counter accusations of ‘fear-mongering’. The term ‘biodiversity’ was apparently too nebulous to stir up any feelings of concern or awareness of the need for urgent action among the people. There is a consensus in the scientific community that rapid, effective measures are needed to protect and promote biodiversity in Switzerland. Over 400 researchers have signed a statement to this effect. They have identified a “continuous deterioration in living conditions and ecological quality” for many species and habitats. In their view, efforts made to date have not gone far enough. Even the Federal Council admitted that the Confederation had not met all its biodiver-

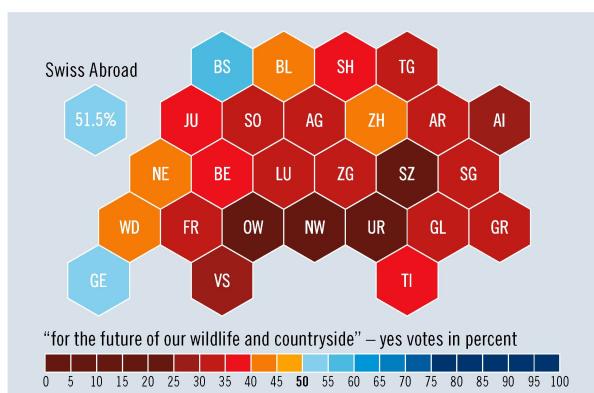
sity goals. The government intends to use action plans to promote species diversity in a targeted manner. It is not prepared to provide much more funding for this, however.

A resounding No to the pension fund reform

A government proposal also ran aground at the ballot box. The occupational pension reform motion recorded a 67.1 per cent No vote at the polls; the Swiss Abroad also narrowly voted the measure down, with 51 per cent against. This proposal was intended to safeguard the funding of retirement pensions over the long term – by reducing benefits, among other things. The trade unions successfully defeated the measure in the referendum. The resounding No from the people is a victory for the Left, which claimed another sociopolitical vote for itself, in the wake of the successful initiative to introduce a 13th month for the old-age and survivors’ pension (OASI) (“Review” 3/2024). The big losers here are the conservative parties, who had pushed the proposal through parliament against the wishes of the Left. It did not help the Yes camp that contradictory statistics emerged during the voting campaign. This led to uncertainty and growing scepticism among the electorate.

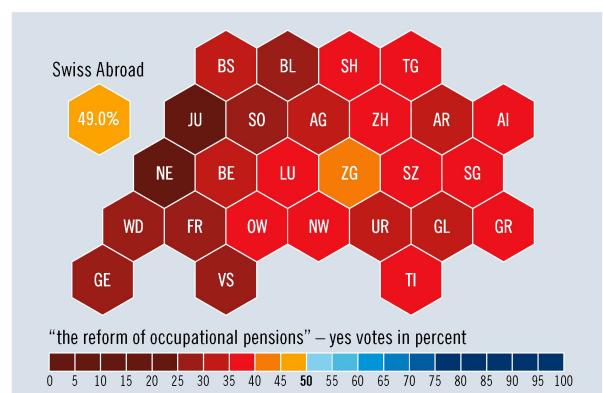
A look back at the results of the 24 November popular vote (held after this issue went to press) will feature in the next “Review”.

for the future of our wildlife and countryside



The initiative “for the future of our wildlife and countryside” was defeated nationally with 63 per cent against. The “Fifth Switzerland” was more sympathetic towards the issue: 51.5 per cent said Yes to the biodiversity initiative, as did the cantons of Geneva and Basel-Stadt.

the reform of occupational pensions



With 67.1 per cent of people across Switzerland voting No, the reform of occupational pensions met with a resounding defeat. The Swiss Abroad narrowly rejected the measure with 51 per cent against – the “Fifth Switzerland” took greater heed of the recommendations from the Federal Council and Parliament.