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Swiss news/Letters to the Helvetia Magazine

Forthcoming ballots in June 2013

Direct election of cabinet

A proposal to introduce a nationwide direct election of cabinet members looks set to be rejected by voters in June according to the latest poll commissioned by the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation.

If the ballot for the cabinet election had been held in late April, only a quarter of voters would have approved the initiative.

Perhaps more surprisingly, just 26 per cent of supporters of the rightwing Swiss People's Party, the main backer of the proposed change, are definitely in favour.

Voters from other parties have also clearly rejected the proposal. According to Claude Longchamp, head of the gfs.bern polling team that carried out the survey, the initiative "doesn't just have a lot of opponents, but the opposition is widespread as well."

Supporters say the reform would boost Switzerland's system of direct democracy. But most voters, like the proposal's opponents, fear permanent campaigning will become the norm at the expense of ministerial tasks and duties.

Asylum legislation up in the air

The other issue on the June ballot is the reform of Switzerland's asylum legislation, which went into effect last September. Opponents gathered enough signatures to force a vote after parliament signed off on it last year.

Changes included suspending the possibility to hand in asylum requests at Swiss embassies as well as rejecting applications from conscientious objectors and deserters. A legal basis was also created to allow asylum seekers labelled as troublemakers to be housed in separate centres. A survey indicates that 45 per cent of voters are in favour and 29 per cent against.

Source: www.swissinfo.ch (3 May 2013)

Letters to the Helvetia Magazine

We are very pleased to publish the following letter from Nathalie Schaffer-Leamy with reference to Tanja Latham-Zurbruegg's article on taking the train in Switzerland. We like to hear from our Helvetia readers so please don't hesitate to write to the Editor or members of the Helvetia Team.

Hi Tanja,

My name's Nathalie Schaffer-Leamy and I am a member of the Wellington Swiss Club. I wanted to say thank you for your article on train travel in Switzerland in the February/March issue of the Helvetia. This is exactly the kind of article I had in mind when I said "travel tips" in the survey last year.

Another thing you could mention about train travel are the Billets Dégriffés (Sparbillette <http://www.sbb.ch/abos-billette/billette-schweiz/sparbillette.html>). They're really cheap tickets which are available for travel between towns/cities on the main lines. The discounts are up to 60% (Last year, my husband and I travelled from Geneva to Basel return for just under the price of one normal ticket).

But of course, there are a couple of catches: One can only buy these tickets online, and they are non-transferable and valid only on the specific train they were booked for. So you have to make sure you don't change your mind about when you want to travel and don't run late for your train! There are also limited numbers available for each day/itinerary/time. Have a look at the SBB website. I think it's worth a mention. Oh, and if you have a Halbtax-Abo, you get up to another 30% off!

Thank you again for a great Helvetia. I always enjoy reading it. Even my husband likes to read it!

Have a lovely weekend!

Nathalie

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