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OSA

## Swiss National Council says NO!!!

On September 27th the National Council (Nationalrat) followed the recommendation from the Economic Commission of the Lower House and rejected implementing the Automatic Exchange of Information (AEOI) with New Zealand. The majority of the members are of the opinion that the Swiss in New Zealand are disadvantaged over other Swiss living abroad, because of the Swiss pension (AHV) being confiscated by the New Zealand Government.

The proposal has now been sent back to the Federal Council (Bundesrat) requesting them to negotiate and sign a Social Security Agreement first, before introducing the AEOI with New Zealand. The Social Security Agreement will need to include the abolishment of the penalising Section 70 and all other negative aspects of the present Section 70.

Out of a (second) group of 41 countries or territories with whom the Swiss Government proposes to introduce the AEOI beginning January 1st 2018, only two were rejected so far. One was Saudi Arabia (95 to 92 votes), for human rights related reasons and New Zealand with a large majority of 104 to 87 votes. This great result was only possible with the unanimous votes from both the Christian Democratic Party (CVP) and the Swiss Peoples Party (SVP).

The next step will be for the Council of States (Ständerat) to vote on this in the upcoming parliamentary session in December. If both Chambers reject the signing of the AEOI with New Zealand, then the Federal Council (Bundesrat) will have to commence negotiations with New Zealand concerning a Social Security Agreement. If the two Chambers are not of the same opinion, then the whole process will start all over again.

We are now half way there. There is still a lot of work to do behind the scenes. I would like to thank all of the Swiss who at the beginning of this year followed our President and my appeal by writing to as many parliamentarians in Switzerland and Members of the Federal Council (Bundesrat) as possible, expressing their frustration and dismay concerning the decade old unsolved pension issue. I would also like to express my sincere thanks to our Ambassador David Vogelsanger and his team for their relentless work and support upfront and behind the scenes to make this news become reality. The window of opportunity is still open. Our voices have been heard.

### Peter Ehrler

Elected Council Member of the Swiss Abroad representing New Zealand.

## 44 Swiss municipalities have changed their official language since 1950

Language is a complicated matter in Switzerland. Between 1860 and 2000, 83 municipalities, known as communes (in French), Einwohnergemeinde (in German), comuni (in Italian) and vischnancas (in Romanche), changed their official language. Of these 83, 44 switched during the last 60 or so years.

Since 1950, six communes have switched from German to French, one from Italian to German, two from German to Italian, one from German to French and back to German again, one from Italian to German and back to Italian, one from German to Romanche and back to German, and 32 from Romanche to German.

Most of them are near language borders, but a few, like Orselina in the canton of Ticino are not. Between 1930 and 1980 German speakers were the majority in the small commune near Locarno, despite the commune being surrounded by majority Italian-speaking comuni. It experimented with German in the 1970s, before switching back to Italian. On the other side of the Alps in Ticino, the commune of Bosco Gurin, switched from German to Italian around 2000.

One commune, La Ferrière, not only changed its language from German to

French, it also changed cantons, from Bern to Jura, when the canton of Jura was created in 1979.

Four communes in the canton Fribourg, Pierrafortscha, Courgevaux, Courtaman and Wallenried, have changed their official language. Pierrafortscha and Courtaman switched from German to French, while Courgevaux went from German to French and back to German, and Wallenried flip flopped from German to French to German and then back to French, between 1950 and 2000.

One commune in Vaud, Champmartin switched from German to French in the 1960s. Canton of Neuchâtel surrounded by francophones, Thielle-Wavre, switched from German to French in the 1980s.



The largest number of linguistic switches have occurred in Graubünden. Since 1950, 32 communes have changed their official language from Romanche to German. Another, Bivio, near St. Moritz, changed from Italian to German around 2000.

Switzerland had 26 cantons and 2,287 municipalities in July 2016, with an average population of around 3,640.

The Swiss federal government gives Switzerland's cantons freedom to decide on linguistic matters. For example the canton of Vaud's state constitution designates French as the official language, while the canton of Fribourg's state constitution specifies German and French as official state languages. Supermarkets in Fribourg typically have signs in both French and German.

Other multilingual cantons include: Graubünden (Romanche, German and Italian), Valais (French and German), and Bern (French and German).

The main bilingual towns are: Biel (Bienne), Fribourg (Freiburg) and Morat (Murten)

by Le News