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The right to vote by correspondence

The 1999 National Council elections: a guide

In Switzerland National Council elections are a political event which takes place every four years. What position does the National Council hold in Swiss political life? What is the election procedure? How is the ballot slip filled out?

list. If a party list contains fewer eligible candidates than there are seats available in a constituency, the blank lines are counted as addi-

candidate whose name is crossed out does not receive a vote. However, the line which is thereby blanked out still counts as an additional

The National Council is the larger of the two chambers that make up the Federal Assembly. It comprises 200 members and represents the people of Switzerland as a whole. Its seats are distributed amongst the cantons and half-cantons in proportion to their resident population (Swiss and foreign nationals), with each canton and half-canton entitled to at least one seat.

General elections to the National Council are held every four years on the penultimate Sunday in October. Candidates must be of Swiss nationality, over 18 years old and not certified as incapacitated by mental illness or instability. Residence in Switzerland and inscription in the electoral roll are not prerequisites.

Every canton or half-canton is a constituency of its own. Swiss Abroad are entitled to vote in the canton in which their voting municipality is located. They may, however, stand as candidates in any canton.

Proportional representation

In all 21 cantons and half-cantons with more than one seat in the National Council, a proportional representation system has been practised since 1919. Under this system seats in the National Council are distributed amongst the various parties in proportion to the amount of votes cast for these parties and/or their candidates.

Voters are given a number of ballot slips in the form



The Houses of Parliament in Berne. (Photo: R. Nyffeler)

of pre-printed party lists, together with one blank slip. Only one of these may be used for voting.

A list may contain no more names than the constituency has seats. Every vote for a name figuring on a list also counts as a vote for the party named at the top of the

list. The amount of votes a party receives consists of the votes given to candidates and any such additional votes.

The party lists may be altered in the following ways:

• **Crossing out:** individual names may be crossed out. A

vote for the party named at the top of the list.

• **Mixing:** names taken from one pre-printed list may be added to another. In such a case the party named at the top of the list loses a vote to the party of the candidate added.

• **Accumulation:** all candidates may be listed twice. This gives them two votes. (Candidates may not, however, be voted for more than twice).

These three types of alteration may be combined.

A voter who does not wish to use a pre-printed party list may fill out the blank ballot himself with the names of candidates and with or with-

Voting documents

Swiss Abroad entitled to vote receive their pre-printed ballot slips from their voting municipality as well as the various party manifestos in some cantons. To find out more about the parties and candidates in your canton, contact the parties directly. The addresses are given at the end of each party profile.



out mentioning the party. All names on the ballot must, however, be taken from one of the party lists. Blank lines on a list on which a party is not mentioned are not counted.

First past the post

In the five cantons and half-cantons with only one National Council seat (Uri, Upper and Lower Unterwalden, Glarus, Appenzell Innerrhoden), the majority or first-past-the-post system is used. Here the surname and first name and, if necessary, the address and profession of one eligible candidate only must be written by hand on the official (blank) ballot slip. The person with the most votes is elected.

Digression: the Council of States

The Council of States is the smaller of the two chambers of the Federal Assembly and has 46 members. Each canton provides two members and each half-canton one member.

Elections to the Council of States are held under cantonal law. They do not necessarily occur at the same time as National Council elections. The period of office is currently four years for all cantons. Swiss Abroad may vote in elections to the Council of States only in those cantons in which they are entitled to vote at the cantonal level.

NYF

Interview with Emanuel Jenni on the UNO

UNO: valuable work that fits in with our objectives

“Switzerland’s adhesion to the UNO is a logical extension of our foreign policy.” This is the opinion expressed by diplomat Emanuel Jenni, head of the UNO Section within the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (EDA), in which function he is responsible for the coordination of Swiss policy within the UNO.



(PHOTO: ZVG)

If Switzerland is not a member of the UNO, why is there a UNO Section within the EDA?

Switzerland’s involvement in the UNO system is already extensive. Switzerland is a member of all UNO special organisations such as the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO). We fully participate in all UNO foundations and programmes such as UNICEF (the children’s fund), UNDP (the development programme), and UNHCR (the UN High Commission for Refugees). Moreover, as observers we closely follow the activities of the UNO’s main organs,

particularly the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and the Security Council. Switzerland is also a party to the Statute of the International Court of Justice.

Why this involvement?

The Federal Council and Parliament recognise that UNO institutions do valuable work that coincides with Swiss foreign policy objectives. Because of this we contribute ideas, money and staff. All states of a certain size are now members of the UNO’s main organs. With its wide-ranging international relations and interests, Switzerland cannot be indifferent to the issues they debate and the decisions they make. Even as a non-member, therefore, we must closely monitor the work of the UNO and try to safeguard our interests.

Is there any reason why Switzerland is not a member of the UNO?

The nation decided against membership in 1986. Now we have a reformed UNO, a different world balance and hence a new framework. It is time to rethink the decision. This is also the Federal Council’s position.

What has changed?

We live in an age of globalisation. More than ever before, the problems this creates call for international organisations like the UNO. Global issues demand global solutions.

Added to this is the fact that the UNO has enjoyed a better negotiating position since the end of the Cold War. The East-West conflict, which effectively blocked the UNO, is over. The UNO has undergone a reform and is now more efficient than 13 years ago. Switzerland would be able to pursue its foreign policy objectives within the UNO, and its adhesion is a logical extension of our foreign policy.

What concrete contribution could Switzerland make to the UNO?

It could contribute to securing world peace. It could exercise full voting and debating rights within the only

UNO Membership

Switzerland’s membership of the UNO is one of the Federal Council’s legislative objectives for the 1999–2003 period of office as well as the subject of a popular initiative launched by a multi-party committee in September 1998. The initiative calls for Switzerland’s adhesion to the United Nations. Provided 100,000 signatures are collected by March 2000, the electorate and legislative councils will then be called on to vote on UNO membership.

Information on the Swiss-UNO relationship:
www.eda.admin.ch
www.uno.ch (Initiative Committee)
www.auns.ch (UNO opponents)

Current popular initiatives

No new initiatives.



global organisation for human rights, environment and development, especially in matters concerning the use of funds. It could optimally promote its interests within a global forum.

What about the UNO opponents?

We must explain more fully that the world and the UNO have changed. In addition, we must explain to the Swiss populace that UNO membership does not affect Switzerland's neutrality. As

a UNO member we will remain independent, autonomous and neutral. If we get this message across, the majority of voters will opt for UNO membership.

So membership would be preceded by a referendum?

Yes. Under Article 89 Paragraph 5 of the Federal Constitution, membership of the UNO as an organisation for collective security must be voted on by the electorate and the legislative councils.

Interview: Robert Nyffeler ■

Initiatives in brief

Apprenticeship initiative

A Committee of the Young for the Young has launched the initiative "For a sufficient range of vocational training" (apprenticeship initiative), calling for the following additions to the Federal Constitution:

1. The right to sufficient vocational training must be constitutionally guaranteed.
2. Government and cantons must ensure a sufficient range of options in the field of vocational training. The training must meet quality standards and may be given within enterprises and vocational schools, at state-run schools or in the appro-

priate institutions under state supervision.

3. The government is called on to set up a vocational training fund to be financed by a vocational training tax levied on all employers. The costs of the apprentice places offered would be taken into account provided they meet the quality standards.

4. The government must preside over the distribution of such funds to the cantons, which would be responsible for their use. Cantons would collaborate with social partners to control the quality of vocational training.

NYF ■

Optional AHV/IV insurance: Federal Council approves draft legislation

At its session on 28 April 1999 the Federal Council approved the message (i.e. proposal of a parliamentary bill) on a revision of the optional old age and survivors' insurance and disability insurance (AHV/IV) for submission to parliament. Under the terms of the package of reforms drawn up by the Federal Office for Social Insurance (see also Swiss Review No. 3/97, 2/98, 4/98 and 5/98), only persons in states with which Switzerland has no social insurance agreement (i.e. primarily states outside Europe and North America) will in future be entitled to join the voluntary old age and survivors' insurance scheme. Moreover, new membership of the voluntary scheme will be restricted to persons (Swiss and foreigners) who were insured under the obligatory old age and survivors' (AHV) insurance scheme for at least five consecutive years immediately prior to the new regulations coming into force.

This amendment is also the subject of draft legislation on the sector-related agreements between Switzerland and the EU, which the Federal Council also approved during the same session, and may be enacted sooner than the other revision proposals concerning the voluntary AHV/IV, which parliament will debate separately.

On the one hand the Federal Council's message on a revision of the voluntary AHV/IV proposes, among other things, the withdrawal after six years of insured members under 50 years of age residing in states which are party to an agreement with Switzerland; an increase in the contribution rate; and abolition of the depressive contribution rate for low incomes. On the other hand it proposes the abolition of the disability insurance clause (hence, in the event of a claim, the years which disability insurance contributions were paid would entitle a person to partial benefits even after withdrawal from the insurance scheme), and additional options for obligatory insurance for persons under 30 years old studying abroad, as well as for spouses of obligatory insurance members abroad, etc. In addition this message on the revision of the optional AHV/IV also proposes that the responsible authorities conclude social insurance agreements, in order to address situations where amendments to the existing insurance scheme lead to loss of old age and survivors' insurance cover for a large number of Swiss residing in countries which are party to an agreement with Switzerland. Passage through parliament of the message on the revision of optional AHV/IV is likely to take some time.

Since the Federal Council's message (proposal for legislation) is not yet binding and the outcome of its passage through the National and State Councils is still uncertain, we recommend all members of the optional AHV/IV insurance schemes (in particular those residing in countries with which Switzerland has an agreement) not to act hastily but to wait for parliament's resolution. Depending on the outcome, the Federal Council's bill may be amended. Nevertheless it is probably wise to take the precaution of examining private or local alternatives.

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