

Voting "super Sunday" in September

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Voting ‘super Sunday’ in September

Following the cancellation of the federal votes that were scheduled for May, as many as five proposals – including the SVP’s limitation initiative – will now be put to voters on 27 September. As we re-emerge from lockdown, Switzerland’s relationship with the European Union (EU) is back on the agenda.

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COVID-19 also brought direct democracy to a temporary halt, causing the Federal Council to cancel a voting Sunday. The last time this happened was in 1951, when foot-and-mouth disease was the culprit. Apart from the voting topics that have been rolled over from 17 May, the electorate will decide on two other important issues this autumn: paternity leave and fighter jets (see pages 22 and 23). Federal Chancellor Walter Thurnherr said the vote-heavy September date was “manageable, if less than ideal”. Voting Sundays in recent years have repeatedly seen voters give their verdict on five or even more proposals.

The limitation initiative, put forward by the Swiss People’s Party (SVP), is the most controversial of all the autumn votes. If the SVP initiative is successful, Switzerland will either have to renegotiate or terminate the Swiss-EU Agreement on the free movement of persons. This might jeopardise the bilateral relationship between Switzerland and the

EU. Industry groups and all other political parties have been forceful in their opposition to what they call the “termination initiative” (see our article in edition 2/2020 of “Swiss Review”).

With the lockdown over, the cards have been reshuffled ahead of the votes. The predicted recession will lead to growing unemployment and a fall in government revenues throughout Europe. How people view the impact of the coronavirus crisis will be key, say commentators. Once borders reopen, will we pull up the drawbridge or prioritise our partnership with the EU? The Swiss have been in favour of the bilateral approach until now. It remains to be seen how the extraordinary circumstances of recent months will influence the public mood. No opinion poll results are available as we approach our editorial deadline. But one thing is clear: the vote will decide the future direction of Swiss-EU relations.

Overview of all the votes on 27 September

- **Limitation initiative:** Switzerland should take back full control over immigration, according to the SVP’s “For moderate immigration” initiative. If the SVP initiative is successful, this would result in the termination or renegotiation of the Swiss-EU Agreement on the free movement of persons. **International mobility is of great importance to many Swiss Abroad. The Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA), referred to as the Parliament of the “Fifth Switzerland”, made a statement regarding the limitation initiative after the editorial deadline for this edition of “Swiss Review”. To read it, visit www.revue.ch/en or www.aso.ch/en**
- **Swiss Hunting Act:** The Federal Council and parliament believe that relaxing the legislation that protects wolves and other animals will help to regulate the Swiss wolf population. According to animal welfare and nature conservation organisations, this revision of the Swiss Hunting Act goes much too far. See our lead article in edition 2/2020 of “Swiss Review” for more details.
- **Federal taxation:** The general childcare deduction on taxable income is to be increased from 6,500 to 10,000 francs. The Swiss Social Democratic Party (SP) has initiated a referendum in opposition to this reform. In its view, the increase will only help wealthy families.
- **Fighter jets:** Parliament has authorised the Federal Council to spend up to six billion Swiss francs on procuring new fighter jets. The Group for a Switzerland without an Army, the SP and the Greens are opposed. The referendum does not apply to any specific aircraft model. For further details, see page 22.
- **Paternity leave:** Fathers should receive two weeks’ paid leave in the first six months after the birth of their child. This indirect counterproposal to a popular initiative (that called for four weeks of statutory paternity leave but has since been withdrawn) is being contested by the SVP and the Young Liberals. See page 23 for further details.