

Only one vote on December 6 : the European economic area

Autor(en): **Walter, Michel / Gueissaz, Anne**

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Only one vote on December 6:

The European Economic Area

The Federal Council has decided that the December 6 referendum will have one subject only: **Swiss membership of the European Economic Area (EEA). In view of its «unusual importance» for the country's future, it is felt that it would be inappropriate to combine it with other issues.**

In practical terms voters will have to state whether or not they approve the parliamentary resolution authorising the Federal Council to ratify the European Economic Area Treaty. If approved, the EEA will come into force on January 1, 1993. It will include the whole of western Europe, and with 380 million inhabitants it will be the biggest single market in the world.

Inside the area goods, persons, capital and services (including insurance,

transport, etc.) will be able to move freely, i.e. there will be no administrative or technical barriers whatsoever. This is the principle of «the four freedoms».

As a member of the EEA Switzerland would draw full benefit from these freedoms. It would also have a foot inside the European Community without actually being a member. But as the EEA is based on Community operating principles Switzerland would have to accept most present EC legislation («acquis communautaire»).

This includes some 1,600 laws and affects almost all spheres of social and economic life, including cooperation in environmental protection, scientific research and education (with mutual recognition of diplomas).

In general terms Swiss legislation al-

ready corresponds in large part to that of the EC. But about 60 major laws will have to be adjusted to those of the Community. The December 6 referendum will not be on these legal changes directly. If Switzerland joins the EEA they will come into force simultaneously, although they may be made subject to a later referendum through a popular initiative. If Switzerland does not join the EEA, they will simply be dropped.

The EEA Treaty would bring wide-ranging and very favourable material advantages to its members, but it is controversial at the institutional level since only its Community members would have the right to decide on future laws affecting the EEA. The others — including Switzerland — would have only a consultative role, although this would certainly be a genuine one.

It should also be noted that the EEA does not affect the following important policy areas:

- agriculture
- taxation
- monetary matters
- Europe's political unification
- military matters

If Switzerland should wish to participate in developing these other areas in future it would have to become a member of the European Community first. Voters would then have to be consulted again, once Swiss negotiators and the Community agreed on entry terms. At all events EEA membership would be a prior condition.

Michel Walter

the international treaty instituting it not only contains numerous provisions applying to Switzerland immediately and will inevitably lead to a revision of the constitution (which will in any case be subject to a compulsory referendum), but it is also of such paramount political and economic importance that the government is of the opinion that it would be unreasonable not to make it subject to a compulsory referendum.

GUA

Federal Councillors Jean-Pascal Delamuraz, René Felber and Arnold Koller with Federal Vice Chancellor Achille Casanova (second from right) explain Switzerland's European policies. (Photo: KeyColor)



Federal referendums of September 27

Results in brief

- The new trans-Alpine railways (St. Gotthard and Lötschberg base tunnels): YES (63.5% in favour, 36.5% against)
- Parliamentary reform:
 - Revised law on relations between the two houses (more efficient parliamentary procedures): YES (57.9% in favour, 42.1% against).
 - Parliamentary indemnities (higher pay

- for members): NO (72.5% against, 27.5% in favour).
- Infrastructure costs (government assistance to pay parliamentary staff): NO (69.5% against, 30.5% in favour).
- Revised Stamp Duty Law (tax reduction aimed at improving the competitiveness of Swiss banks): YES (61.4% in favour, 38.6% against).
- New rural property law (purchase of agricultural land reserved for farmers working their own properties): YES (53.6% in favour, 46.4% against).

Press roundup

On the Monday morning after, the Swiss press beamed its approval. The new Alpine tunnels had been causing worry, and with their Yes vote the Swiss people had shown their wisdom. They did not want, said **24 Heures** (Lausanne), to damage Switzerland's credibility abroad and put Swissair in a difficult position. The way is now clear for December 6 (date of the EEA referendum), proclaims **La Liberté** (Fribourg). Most newspapers emphasise the clear intention expressed by Swiss voters not to cut their country off from the rest of Europe. The French-language press underlines the very decided Yes from western Switzerland, where the people love tunnels!

The Yes to the lower stamp duty was greeted by the German-language press. The banks needed this badly. The **Tags-Anzeiger** (Zurich) pointed out that banking centre Geneva had the highest proportion of Yes votes, followed by Zurich and Zug. But, says the **Bund** (Berne), in view of the miserable state of federal finances the Sfr. 400 million will have to be balanced somehow.

The new rural property law, accepted narrowly, will allow farmers to buy land more cheaply than before, and this privilege is a good thing, says the **Basler Zeitung** (Basle); it is in fact pointless to compensate indebtedness by ever higher subsidies. Here too, says **Der Landbote** (Winterthur), the people have thought of the future; agricultural land must be kept for the farmers.

Parliamentarians' «wages» will not go up. The **Luzerner Neueste Nachrichten** (Lucerne) is not surprised. The request for more money in the middle of a recession when coffers are empty was not appreciated. Swiss voters had the good fortune to be right on target, says

Commentary

Swiss voters are not as backward, not as petty, not as blind as all that. They have said Yes to the building project of the century: the new railway lines through the Alps. This must be very disconcerting for the various groups of doubters who had been laying such heavy emphasis on the fact that federal finances are so much in the red. Voters simply refused to think of the trans-Alpine railways as just another investment. They were not influenced by the depressing forecasts about the cost of reimbursing the Sfr. 30 billion of government debt which the programme would involve over 15 years.

When the great St. Gotthard and Simplon tunnels were built in the last century people did not temper their enthusiasm by worrying about the price. The pioneering temperament of the time took a loftier view, and this lives on in today's Switzerland. Voters have approved the two new tunnels by a large

Current popular initiatives

For lower military spending and more peace policies
For prohibition of arms exports
André Daguët, Pavillonweg 3,
P.O. Box, CH-3001 Berne

For a 130 km limit on motorways
For an 80 km limit on roads outside localities
Bernhard Böbi, Zollweidenstrasse 31,
CH-4142 Münchenstein

Education for all – harmonising scholarships
Christoph Jakob, Erlachstrasse 9,
CH-3012 Berne

For the abolition of the direct federal tax
Christoph Erb, Swiss Traders Union,
P.O. Box 6816,
CH-3001 Berne

For a vote on EC entry negotiations!
Markus Ruf, Zähringerstrasse 19,
CH-3012 Berne

Il Corriere del Ticino (Lugano). But they did agree to improve parliamentary procedures.
RB

majority, showing that they want to keep Switzerland in its historic role as a major Alpine transit country.

This is a good sign for our approach to Europe. A No to the trans-Alpine railways – called for by the Greens, the Swiss Democrats and the Automobile Party – would have brought into question the transit agreement reached by Adolf Ogi after very difficult negotiations. The European Community would not have accepted Switzerland's determination to prohibit 40-ton trucks and heavy night traffic on our roads. We would have been in a state of transport war with all our neighbours.

On December 6 Swiss voters will decide on our membership of the European Economic Area. The Yes to the trans-Alpine railways suggests a second Yes for the EEA. The electorate has shown a European reflex which bodes well for the future. But efforts will have to be made to persuade the small cantons of central Switzerland; for a Yes on December 6 needs a majority of cantons as well as of voters.
Roland Brachetto

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