

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 26 (1999)
Heft: 3

Artikel: Federal referendum of 13 June 1999 : maternity insurance aborted
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-907006>

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Maternity insurance aborted

No to maternity insurance, No to a revision of the law on disability insurance, Yes to physician-prescribed dispensation of heroin, Yes to the new asylum law and the Federal Decree on urgent measures on issues relating to asylum and foreign nationals: these, in brief, were the results of the recent referendum.

The federal referendum of 13 June produced only one real surprise: a rejection of maternity insurance, which in principle has been mandated by the constitution for 54 years yet has suffered a fourth defeat (following previous attempts in 1974, 1984 and 1987), this time by 61% of the vote. What caused most comment was the marked regional split: German-speaking Switzerland voted massively against maternity insurance, while practically all Francophone cantons (with the exception of the Valais) as well as the Ticino

voted in favour. All German-speaking states rejected the maternity insurance, some with an overwhelming 75–80% of the vote. Resistance was greatest in the cantons of central Switzerland. As anticipated the Federal Council's proposal for a revision of the federal law on disability insurance, which would have abolished the quarter-pension for persons with a 40–49% degree of disability, was soundly defeated by 69.6% of voters and by all the cantons. At least the third vote concerning the Federal Department of the Interior resulted in a



The constitutional mandate remains unfulfilled – the gap in maternity coverage continues. (Photo: Keystone)

Results of the federal referendums

Canton	Asylum law		Measures relating to asylum and foreign nationals		Medical prescription of heroin		Disability insurance		Maternity insurance		Turnout in %
	YES%	NO%	YES%	NO%	YES%	NO%	YES%	NO%	YES%	NO%	
ZH	74.1	25.9	73.7	26.3	62.8	37.2	31.1	68.9	37.6	62.4	48.7
BE	73.2	26.8	73.3	26.7	53.4	46.6	28.2	71.8	36.3	63.7	46.9
LU	73.7	26.3	74.6	25.4	54.8	45.2	30.6	69.4	28.2	71.8	50.3
UR	67.8	32.2	70.0	30.0	51.1	48.9	30.2	69.8	22.1	77.9	45.7
SZ	67.9	32.1	71.8	28.2	48.8	51.2	28.0	72.0	20.3	79.7	47.0
OW	67.9	32.1	68.9	31.1	52.7	47.3	26.9	73.1	24.7	75.3	55.7
NW	70.5	29.5	72.4	27.6	51.3	48.7	29.2	70.8	22.4	77.6	52.0
GL	72.1	27.9	73.0	27.0	46.7	53.3	24.8	75.2	20.6	79.4	45.8
ZG	75.7	24.3	76.8	23.2	62.8	37.2	31.6	68.4	31.2	68.8	53.3
FR	66.2	33.8	65.2	34.8	45.3	54.7	32.7	67.3	54.1	45.9	41.9
SO	72.6	27.4	73.8	26.2	57.5	42.5	27.8	72.2	28.4	71.6	51.1
BS	70.3	29.7	70.6	29.4	69.3	30.7	34.2	65.8	43.5	55.5	54.8
BL	75.7	24.3	76.1	23.9	65.0	35.0	32.5	67.5	34.6	65.4	48.8
SH	69.5	30.5	67.8	32.2	53.8	46.2	25.8	74.2	30.4	69.6	66.6
AR	72.7	27.3	74.0	26.0	50.0	50.0	32.1	67.9	22.8	77.2	57.0
AI	75.0	25.0	75.3	24.7	45.6	54.4	30.0	70.0	14.1	85.9	49.2
SG	75.9	24.1	76.8	23.2	51.5	48.5	32.7	67.3	23.8	76.2	49.0
GR	69.8	30.2	70.5	29.5	57.2	42.8	29.8	70.2	30.3	69.7	37.8
AG	73.6	26.4	76.2	23.8	52.7	47.3	30.8	69.2	26.3	73.7	43.7
TG	77.8	22.2	78.4	21.6	49.9	50.1	26.3	73.7	23.2	76.8	47.1
TI	70.8	29.2	70.9	29.1	50.6	49.4	35.1	64.9	62.6	37.4	33.0
VD	61.1	38.9	60.2	39.8	42.8	57.2	36.6	63.4	64.1	35.9	38.1
VS	55.8	44.2	55.8	44.2	35.4	64.6	27.0	73.0	49.1	50.9	35.3
NE	55.4	44.6	54.0	46.0	42.0	58.0	30.8	69.2	62.9	37.1	39.8
GE	57.6	42.4	57.0	43.0	58.9	41.1	25.7	74.3	74.3	25.7	49.1
JU	52.6	47.4	51.5	48.5	49.1	50.9	22.5	77.5	70.4	29.6	42.6
Total	70.6	29.4	70.9	29.1	54.5	45.5	30.4	69.6	39.0	61.0	45.3

third success in less than two years for the government's drug policy, albeit on a lower scale than previous votes. The Federal Decree on the medical prescription of heroin was accepted by only 54.3% of voters. Opponents of an extension to the controlled dispensation of heroin came not only from French-speaking Switzerland (JU, NE, VS, VD, FR) but also from the German-speaking regions (SZ, GL, AR, AI, TG).

Ruth Metzler enjoyed a twofold success at her first referendum as Federal Councillor. The people and states sanctioned the new asylum law governing the status of refugees of war (70.5%) as well as the urgent measures enforced a year ago to address misuse of asylum law and combat illegal immigration (70.9%).

DB

Federal referendums

28 November 1999

No referendum.

Press Review

Neue Zürcher Zeitung

The vote against maternity insurance does not signal the beginning of the end for the welfare state, as was suggested by some circles in the course of the campaign. It signifies something else. The nation is not willing to enlarge the welfare state as long as the funding of existing welfare benefits is anything but secure.

Tages-Anzeiger

Nowadays there is insurance to cover every event that results in loss of income, from breaking a leg to serving in the army. Every event, that is, except confinement. Within Europe Switzerland continues to present an inglorious «special case». Switzerland? Only German-speaking Switzerland voted No. But the verdict applies to the country as a whole.

BERNER ZEITUNG BZ

The people have realised that one need not say B if one discovers that A was

wrong, that a few hundred million make a lot of difference, and that one cannot preach water and drink wine. In this respect public opinion was more consistent than official opinion and, heeding warnings of excessive welfare costs, voted against maternity insurance.

LA LIBERTÉ

Following on from the EEA and the naturalisation of young foreign nationals, yet another blow to national unity. The language rift has widened, even in bilingual cantons. (...) Yesterday the Swiss electorate voted against women, against foreigners, against any enlargement of the welfare state, and against their future.

24 heures

By once more rejecting maternity insurance and voting for a repressive asylum policy as welcomed yesterday by SVP President Ueli Maurer, the Swiss nation has launched a boomerang against solidarity that will rebound on them and cause them harm. (...) Maternity, asylum: solidarity, one of our founding myths, is no longer one of our shared values. Paradoxically it is egoism that

now unites the Swiss. Nowadays the Rütli oath would simply be: «Every man for himself, God for everyone!»

la Regione Ticino

This time the great German-Swiss cities as well as the most urbane German-Swiss cantons did not share the Latin vision. Unlike other occasions, therefore, it was impossible to counter-balance the weight of conservative Switzerland, even with the entire might of the vote in the Ticino and Western Switzerland. The severe blow against maternity insurance is the type that leaves its mark and makes history.

DB

Registration form for Swiss Abroad entitled to vote

(please write clearly in block letters and send to your embassy or consulate)

Addressee

To the Swiss diplomatic post at _____

Sender

Surname _____

First name _____

Maiden name _____

Precise address abroad _____

Date of birth _____

Place of birth _____

Marital status _____ since _____

Place of origin _____

Canton _____

Postcode _____

Surname/First name of father _____

Surname/First name of mother _____

On the basis of the Federal Law of December 19, 1975, and the Ordinance of October 16, 1991, on Political Rights for the Swiss Abroad I wish to exercise my right to vote in federal elections and referendum and to sign popular initiatives and demands for referendums.

As voting municipality I wish to choose:

Place _____

Canton _____

Postcode _____

* because this is my municipality of origin
* because I resided here from 19..... to 19.....
(* Cross out where not applicable)

Language of voting documents:

German French Italian

Place/Date _____

Signature _____

Commentary

A referendum result with two different faces, as reflected by the two female Federal Councillors on their first appearance following the vote: on the one hand was Ruth Metzler's evident satisfaction at the approval of two proposals on the delicate issue of asylum, which instills in the general population fears of a stream of purely economic refugees. The Kosovo crisis probably contributed to the comfortable majority the young Federal Councillor was given for the new asylum law and the urgent measures against abuse of the asylum system.

Ruth Metzler's joy was in sharp contrast to the disappointment of Federal President Ruth Dreifuss, who had to witness the foundering of «her» maternity insurance. Rejection of this proposal again raises the issue of national unity. On this matter Switzerland was split into two distinct camps – the German-Swiss Nos and the Latin Yesses. Ruth Dreifuss had to swallow another defeat with the rejection of a revision of the

disability insurance law which would have abolished the quarter-pension. Added to this, the proposal to extend the heroin programme by permitting the medically-prescribed dispensation of heroin was accepted only by a narrow margin. Two years ago, at the time of the «Youth without Drugs» referendum, the electorate's support for government drug policy was more convincing.

A result, then, with two faces: satisfaction (Ruth Metzler) and disappointment (Ruth Dreifuss). If one looks only at the votes on maternity insurance and asylum policy – the two most important issues – then the centre-right parties, and above all the SVP, have most reason to be satisfied. Apart from the proposal to revise the disability insurance law and the vote on drug policy, voters followed the party line. Does this means we can expect a right-wing shift in federal policy? A fair question, the answer to which should be provided by the federal elections on 24 October.

Dario Ballanti