

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 38 (2011)
Heft: 1

Artikel: Politics : warning shot for Calmy-Rey
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-907327>

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February referendum: Weapons initiative

cantonal tax rates for taxable income upwards of 250,000 Swiss francs and taxable assets of two million Swiss francs or more. However, 58.5% of voters and 22 of the 26 cantons rejected the initiative. The strongest opposition was found in the rural regions of central and eastern Switzerland which would have had to amend their tax rates had the initiative been approved. 80% of voters in Nidwalden, Obwalden and Zug voted against the proposal, while opposition in Schwyz was almost as high. With the exception of Basel-Stadt, all other German-speaking cantons also opposed the initiative. Ticino and the three French-speaking cantons of Fribourg, Vaud and Valais also rejected it. Those in favour, in addition to Basel-Stadt, were Geneva, Jura and Neuchâtel.

On 13 February, the Swiss people and the cantons will vote on the popular initiative entitled "Protection against armed violence". It calls for the storage of military weapons in an armoury and a national weapons register. It also demands evidence of the need to purchase and use weapons as well as competence in using them. The campaigners say that around 300 people die in Switzerland each year in incidents involving firearms. If these were not so readily accessible, fatal irrational acts could be avoided. The initiative also calls for a better system of control for the 2.3 million weapons kept in private households. The parties on the left and the Greens are backing the initiative, while the Federal Council and the conservative parties are opposed to it. They argue that existing measures aimed at protection against armed violence are sufficient. They say that weapons can be deposited at armouries voluntarily and that keeping weapons at home is part of Swiss military tradition and an expression of the state's trust in its citizens. RL

Warning shot for Calmy-Rey

Micheline Calmy-Rey is elected Swiss President by the tightest margin since the introduction of proportional representation.
By René Lenzin

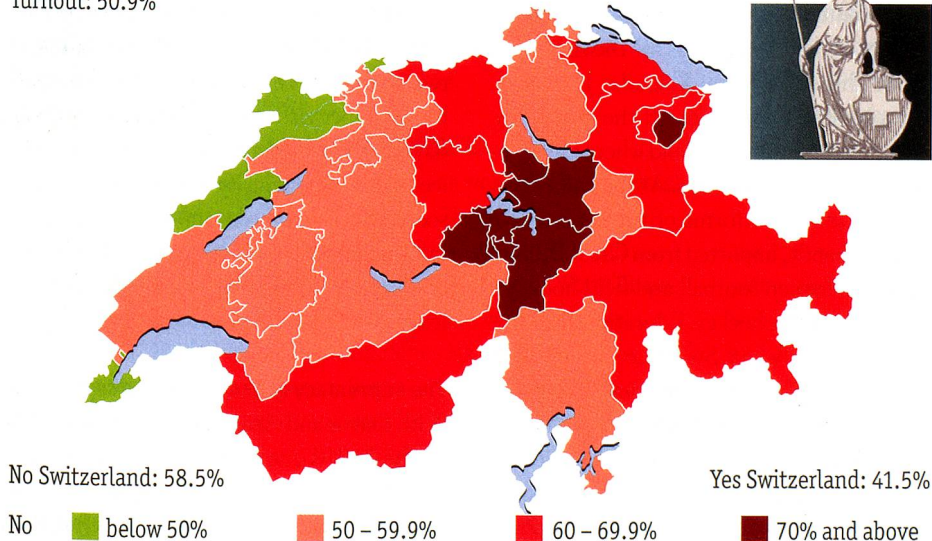
The complete re-election of national government and the election of the President of the Swiss Confederation are repeatedly used by Parliament to settle party-political and personal scores and to fire warning shots. However, no member of the Federal Council has ever been as badly hit as Micheline Calmy-Rey. The United Federal Assembly elected her Swiss President for this year with just 106 out of 246 possible votes. Only a large number of absences and invalid or blank ballot papers saved her the humiliation of a second round of voting. It is the tightest margin since the introduction of proportional representation in 1919.

The 65-year-old Social Democrat from Geneva was punished mainly for the Federal Council's handling of the affair concerning the two Swiss hostages in Libya. After Hans-Rudolf Merz, who has since stepped down, the Foreign Minister was seen as the person most responsible for an uncoordinated and disunited government policy on this issue. Conservative politicians in particular also levelled criticism at her for going it alone and demonstrating a lack of discretion in other matters as well. Calmy-Rey took the result in her stride and played it down as "insignificant political gamesmanship". Having already held office in 2007, she is serving as Swiss President for the second time. She is widely expected to stand down at the end of the year.

Parliament elected Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf as Vice-President. However, her re-election to the Federal Council in a year remains far from certain.

Referendum – Tax Fairness Initiative

Turnout: 50.9%



Source: Federal Chancellery, SDA (Swiss News Agency)

SDA