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ment has decided to increase this annual contribution to 61 million francs by 2027. The SP and the Greens were against the idea, arguing that Frontex wanted to establish a “bona fide army” to seal off “Fortress Europe”. However, the National Council and the Council of States both backed a stronger commitment to protecting the external borders of the Schengen Area – the consensus was that it benefits Switzerland.

That the Mediterranean had become a mass grave was a “European scandal”, said the Green Liberal National Councillor Beat Flach. But this was not the fault of Frontex, he added. They were the solution, not the problem. Responding to sceptics, Federal Councillor Ueli Maurer suggested that Switzerland would be better placed to help safeguard fundamental rights if it “played a role on the frontline”. His EU-sceptic SVP is split, however. Some party members welcome tighter controls on the

external Schengen borders as a bulwark against “economic migrants”. Others would prefer the extra millions to be invested in protecting Switzerland’s borders.

Against the “militarisation of borders”

This issue will now be decided by popular vote, after an alliance of some 30 organisations forced a referendum. The activists comprising the Migrant Solidarity Network are fundamentally opposed to the EU border regime, saying it “symbolises the militarisation of borders”.

Amnesty International does not belong to the alliance. Instead, the human rights organisation favours strengthening the very powers within the EU that would oblige Frontex to “focus on protecting refugees instead of threatening them further”. Resistance to migrants on the EU border mainly comes from the Eastern Euro-

pean member states. The vote on 15 May will not decide whether Switzerland contributes to EU border protection per se, but it could have implications in terms of Switzerland’s place in the Schengen Area, says Fabio Wasserfallen, who is a political scientist at the University of Berne. “You are either in or out when it comes to Schengen – with all the consequences that go with it.” Switzerland need not fear immediate expulsion if the electorate votes no, “but pressure to find a quick solution would be considerable”.

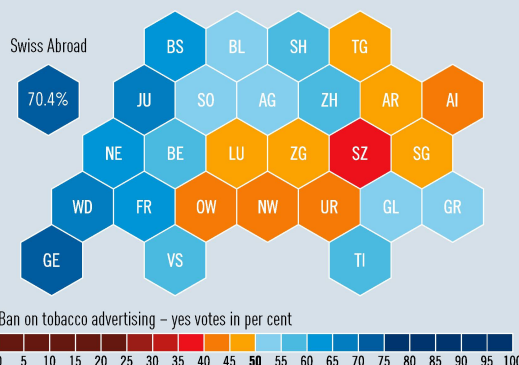
And it would cause irritation in Brussels, where Switzerland would no longer be regarded as a “reliable partner”, Wasserfallen explains. This could further complicate relations with the EU, which are already strained.



Review of the 13 February votes

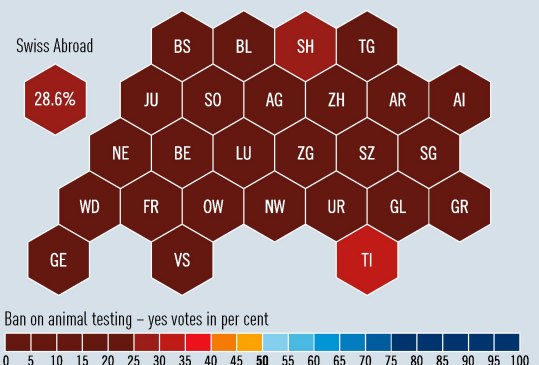
Yes to restricting tobacco advertising:

Children and young people are to be protected from all forms of tobacco advertising, after 57 per cent of voters and the majority of cantons approved an initiative submitted by health organisations.



No to a ban on animal testing:

An emphatic 79 per cent of the electorate rejected a popular initiative submitted by a citizens’ group calling for a radical change in current pharmaceutical testing practices. Not one single canton voted yes.



Fresh attempt to secure bilateral agreements

Since the abandonment of talks on a framework agreement in May 2021 (see edition 4/2021 of “Swiss Review”), the Swiss government has been looking for new ways to cooperate with the EU. The Federal Council has been preparing the outlines of a possible proposal.

At the time of our editorial deadline in mid-February, details of the new agenda were still unclear. What we do know is that Berne wants to continue pursuing bilateral deals with the EU, despite Brussels having ruled out this option until now. The focus is on sectoral agreements that would also involve the incorporation of EU law.

Berne wishes to secure exemptions on tricky domestic issues, such as wage protection and welfare benefits for EU citizens in Switzerland.

“We must stop viewing this purely as a technical and institutional issue,” said the foreign minister and president of the Swiss Confederation, Ignazio Cassis (FDP), in media interviews. “If policymakers and the public begin to realise what type of material benefits Switzerland can expect, then they will accept institutional rapprochement.”

A broader approach to the negotiations was necessary, “in which both sides are willing to compromise”. However, it may still be some time before Berne and Brussels are reading from the same page. The disadvantages of being left out in the cold are already being felt, with the Swiss scientific community having lost direct access to key higher education and research projects funded by the EU. (TP)

Overview of all the votes on 15 May

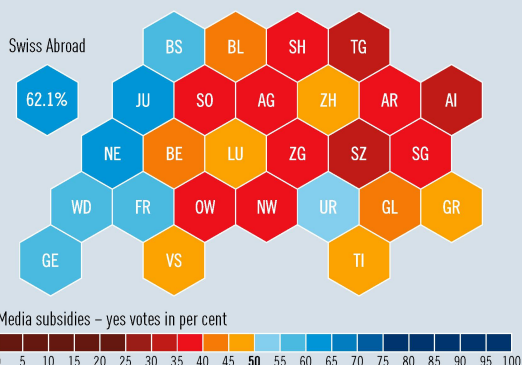
Frontex: As a member of the Schengen Area, Switzerland should contribute financially to the expansion of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, Frontex, says parliament. Left-wing activists have forced a referendum to contest this decision (see page 17).

Organ donations: Controversially, the Federal Council and parliament want to amend the Transplantation Act. In future, it would mean that anyone who does not wish to donate their own organs when they die must make this explicitly known during their lifetime (see pages 20 and 21).

Film Act: Under the revised Film Act, streaming platforms such as Netflix, Amazon and Disney+ will in future be obliged to invest four per cent of their annual Swiss revenue in Swiss film productions. The youth wings of the FDP, SVP and GLP have launched a referendum against the revised Film Act, which they fear will prompt streaming services to raise their subscription prices. (TP)

No to media subsidies:

Newspapers, online platforms, and news agencies will not be receiving additional public sector funding, after 55 per cent of voters rejected a package of measures to help the media.



No to abolishing stamp duty:

Companies will continue to have to pay stamp duty on equity capital, after 63 per cent of the electorate rejected a proposal that would have led to annual tax losses worth 250 million Swiss francs. (TP)

