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Switzerland's Search for a New Anthem

Switzerland has chosen a new national anthem – sort of. Two years after the start of a contest to create a new hymn, the winner was announced on 13 September at the Swiss National Folk Music Festival in Aarau. Now the next phase – convincing the country to adopt the hymn – will begin.



The winning composition, written by Werner Widmer of Zurich, creates new lyrics for the 170-year-old original melody by Alberik Zwyssig. The organisers had made clear early on that their preference would be for composers to stick to the original music, which is more popular than the original lyrics, as closely as possible.

Although a contest winner has been selected, “we’re not going to storm the parliament building,” said Jean-Daniel Gerber, president of the Swiss Society for the Common Good (SSCG), which organised the contest. Rather, the organisers will seek out various ways to promote the winning piece, for example, among schools and choirs and sports clubs.

It will be necessary to obtain approval for the new anthem from the Swiss cabinet or parliament, or in a national vote, since there is no official procedure for replacing a national anthem. But there is no fixed timetable for the next steps. “When it has reached the tipping point in the population – which could take months, or even years – then that will be the moment to take it to the parliament or the cabinet,” Gerber said.

... “White cross on a red background” was the winning composition, submitted in German by 62-year-old Werner Widmer of Zurich, a healthcare director, professor and economist with a diploma in teaching music theory from the Bern Conservatory.

Widmer spoke with swissinfo about what the win means to him.

At an awards ceremony following the broadcast, Widmer said he was motivated to enter the contest because he thought the national hymn needed a new text.

The challenge of combining the values in the preamble to the Constitution with the old melody “to create something new and complete” was what appealed to him. “It was a very creative and playful undertaking,” he said.

For Widmer, the fact that the contest focused on values was an important point.

“We’re a land of minorities,” he clarified. “Unlike many other countries we don’t have a single language that unites us. We don’t have a state religion that unites us. We’re not surrounded by the sea, like in England. That means that our values are very important. Our shared values have been a bit neglected, I think. Our values brought us to where we are today, and they should help us solve problems together in the future.”

The Contest

During the first half of 2014, competitors submitted 206 usable entries: 120 in German; 69 in French; ten in Romansh; and seven in Italian.

A 30-member jury, representing Switzerland’s four language regions, then reviewed the entries.

The jury chose six semi-finalists and had their works translated into all four Swiss national languages. The Swiss Youth Choir prepared four videos for each of the six contributions. Voters online could choose from among the videos from the end of March until mid-May.

Organisers announced the three finalists at the end of May. The second round of voting lasted from June to September.

Source: swissinfo.ch For further information please go to <https://www.chymne.ch/de/beitraege>

Lyrics in the four national languages

Deutsch

Weisses Kreuz auf rotem Grund,
unser Zeichen für den Bund:
Freiheit, Unabhängigkeit, Frieden.
Offen für die Welt, in der wir leben,
woll’n wir nach Gerechtigkeit streben.
Frei, wer seine Freiheit nützt,
stark ein Volk, das Schwache stützt.
Weisses Kreuz auf rotem Grund,
singen wir gemeinsam aus einem Mund.

Français

Hissé là-haut dans le vent,
notre drapeau rouge et blanc
nous appelle à l’unité, à la paix.
Soyons forts et solidaires,
que la liberté nous éclaire,
ouverts et indépendants,
pour le bien de nos enfants,
devant le drapeau d’antan,
renouvelons nos engagements.

Italiano

Rosso e bianco in unità,
la bandiera svizzera,
simbolo di libertà, pace.
Forti e solidali siamo
per la libertà lottiamo.
Sia la nostra società
luogo di pluralità.
La bandiera svizzera,
simbolo di solidarietà.

Rumantsch Grischun

Sin fund cotschen ina crusch,
Svizr’unida, ferma vusch.
Pasch, independenza e libertad.
Ferm in pievel che dat grond sustegn
a tut ils umans che han basegn.
Per mintgin la libertad
e per tuts l’egualitad.
Sin fund cotschen ina crusch,
Svizr’unida cun ferma vusch.

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e per tuts l’egualitad.
La bandiera svizzera,
simbolo di pace ed unità.