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Federal referendums of March 7, 1993

Yes to new federal revenues

The Swiss people and cantons accepted all the recommendations of their government and parliament in the federal referendums. The two new taxes required to reduce the federal budget deficit were accepted, while the popular initiative to prohibit all experiments on animals was rejected with a large majority. Voter participation was over 50%.

Higher petrol tax

54.6% of voters said Yes to the 20 cent-

ime per litre increase in the basic tax on petrol. This should give the federal government extra revenues of about Sfr. 1.3 billion, half of which will be spent on the road network. The measure was fought by part of the automobile lobby and employers' organisations, and there was a majority of No votes in French-speaking and Italian-speaking Switzerland, which are traditionally against any measure limiting the rights of car-owners.



Voters also followed the advice of government and parliament on the question of animal experiments. (Photo: Keystone)

Federal Referendums

June 6, 1993

- 40 military depots are enough – environmental protection for the army too.
- For a Switzerland without new fighter aircraft.

September 26, 1993

November 28, 1993

Subjects not yet decided.

Ban on casinos

Since 1928 the federal constitution has prohibited the existence or operation of gaming houses. The Swiss people and cantons have now voted to end this ban by 72.5%. New legislation on casinos will have to be drawn up, and the federal government will levy taxes on the gross income of casinos, which is expected to bring in about Sfr. 150 million in extra revenue from 1996. This will be used exclusively to replenish the coffers of the old age and disability pension scheme.

Experiments on animals

Voters were asked for the third time in 8 years to prohibit all experiments on animals. Both the people and the cantons again came out with a very clear No – 72.2% of voters and all the cantons. The originators of the initiative immediately said they would soon return to the war-path with a new draft.

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Commentary

Common sense triumphed all along the line on March 7. The government will get the billion and a half francs in new tax revenues which have already been included in the federal austerity package; and scientists will be able to continue testing new medicaments and new methods of medical treatment on laboratory animals. Swiss civil servants can breathe again. Their shock defeat of December 6, 1992, on Switzerland's membership of the European Economic Area was made up at least to some extent on March 7, 1993.

Unlike the European Economic Area Treaty, the three referendum subjects of March 7 were very straightforward and easy to comprehend. No one denies that

the federal budget deficit has to be reduced, and everyone knows that this cannot be done only by cutting costs. Even though they said No to the new 20 centime petrol tax, the French and Italian speakers are just as well aware of this as everyone else. The new split along language lines is not really considered very dramatic by political analysts.

The March 7 referendum results show that when the coast is clear Swiss voters do not listen to siren songs – whether these appeal to populist views, high principles or simple selfishness. In May 1992, they accepted Switzerland's membership of the Bretton Woods institutions, in September of that year they agreed to the huge project for new railway tunnels through the Alps, and now they have said Yes to higher taxes. In the

light of these three decisions, the No to the EEA three months ago seems more likely than ever to have been due the perceived vagueness of the issue.

On March 7 Swiss voters made both themselves and their elected representatives happy. But those responsible for running the federal government will be well advised to be very careful about how they set about restructuring the budget, since in a few months time voters will again have the last word. Clarity of purpose is much appreciated at the polls.

Pierre-André Tschanz

If you too would like to sign an initiative, please refer to page 10.