

## SWITZERLAND

**Date of Elections:** 20 October 1991

### **Purpose of Elections**

Elections were held for all the seats in the National Council and for 37 of the 46 seats of the Council of States on the normal expiry of the members' term of office.

### **Characteristics of Parliament**

The Swiss Federal Assembly is bicameral, consisting of the National Council (*Nationalrat*) and Council of States (*Ständerat*).

The National Council is composed of 200 members elected for 4 years. The Council of States comprises 46 members, two from each of the Confederation's 20 cantons and one from each of the 6 half-cantons. All *Ständerat* members are elected for 4 years except for those from the canton of Glarus, whose term of office is 3 years. *Ständerat* elections generally coincide with those for the *Nationalist*.

### **Electoral System**

While the electoral laws for the National Council are drawn up on the federal level, those for the Council of States are drafted by the cantons. In elections to the National Council, citizens at least 18 years of age and residing in Switzerland are entitled to vote unless they are insane, have been deprived of their civil rights or (in most cantons) are under guardianship. Electoral registers are compiled on the constituency level and revised continuously. Voting is compulsory only in a small number of cantons, where those abstaining without a justifiable reason are subject to a small fine.

All qualified electors who are laymen may be candidates for the National Council. Membership thereof is incompatible with membership of the Federal Council (Cabinet) or the post of federal judge or official appointed by the Federal Council. Membership of the Council of States is incompatible with that of the Federal Council and the Federal Tribunal. Lists of candidates for the National Council must be supported by 15 electors; candidates are, in practice, nominated by political parties.

For purposes of elections, Switzerland is divided into 26 constituencies - one for each canton and half-canton. The number of seats allotted to each is based on the constituency's population. Candidates in multi-member constituencies appear on party lists and are elected through

\* See *Chronicle of Parliamentary Elections and Developments XXV* (1990-1991), p.22.

proportional representation calculated according to the Hagenbach-Bischoff method, with remainders being distributed by strongest quotient. Each elector can vote for a list as is or modify it by crossing out or repeating names appearing on it: he can moreover split his vote between different party lists (*panachage*) or select names from different lists in forming his own list on a blank ballot paper.

In the five single-member constituencies (two cantons, three half-cantons). National Council members are elected by simple majority vote.

Cantonal law governs election to the Council of States. Members are generally chosen by simple majority vote.

If a seat in the National Council becomes vacant between general elections it is filled by the individual who is "next in line" on the list of the party which formerly held the seat or by means of a by-election in constituencies which elect only one member. By-elections are also generally held to fill vacancies in the Council of States.

## Background and Outcome of the Elections

In the 1991 general elections, a record number of 2560 candidates (including 832 women) from 248 lists contested the 200 National Council seats, while nearly 100 vied for the Council of States. For the first time, the electorate included 18 and 19-year-olds.

Noteworthy campaign issues concerned Switzerland's relations with the European Community (a divisive question both between and within the contending parties) and the country's immigration policy. Polling day was once again marked by a low voter turnout, a recurring national phenomenon. Final results returned to power the four-party coalition that has governed the country since 1959 through the "magic formula". These four groups - the Radicals, Social Democrats, Christian Democrats and Swiss People's Party - share the seven seats on the Federal Council (governing executive). Gains by smaller extremist parties nevertheless reduced the coalition's overall National Council total from 160 to 147 seats. Prominent among these was the right-wing Automobilists' Party, which campaigned, *inter alia*, for curbing those seeking asylum in Switzerland. Altogether 66 successful candidates were newcomers to the National Council. With respect to the Council of States, the coalition lost one seat, dropping its total to 41.

On 4 December, the Federal Assembly re-elected the seven outgoing members of the Federal Council for four years. Mr. Rene Felber, Head of the Department of Foreign Affairs, was elected President of the Swiss Confederation for 1992.

## Statistics

### 1. Results of the Elections and Distribution of Seats in the National Council

Number of registered electors. . . . .	4,510,784
Voters. . . . .	2,076,886 (46.04%)
Blank or void ballot papers. . . . .	32,777
Valid votes. . . . .	2,044,109

Political Group	Votes obtained	%	Number of Seats
Radical-Democratic Party	424,802	21.0	44 (-7)
Social-Democratic Party	385,622	19.1	42 (=)
Christian-Democratic People's Party	368,405	18.2	36 (-6)
Swiss People's Party	240,353	11.9	25(=)
Ecological Party	140,824	7.0	14 (+5)
Automobilists' Party	103,541	5.1	8 (+6)
Swiss Democrats*	68,454	3.4	5 (+2)
Independent Alliance	61,176	3.0	6 (-3)
Liberal Party	61,093	3.0	10(+ 1)
Evangelical People's Party	38,222	1.9	3(=)
Ticino League	28,181	1.4	2 (+2)
Federal Democratic Union	20,143	1.0	<b>1(+1)</b>
Labour Party	14,806	0.7	2(+1)
Christian Social Party	7,903	0.4	1 (+1)
Women in Politics	<b>5,143</b>	0.3	1 (+1)
Progressive Organizations of Switzerland/Green Alliance	4,526	0.2	-(-4)
Others	48,658	2.4	-(-)
			200

Formerly the National Action party.

## 2. Distribution of Seats in the Council of States

<u>Political Group</u>	<u>Number of Seats</u>
Radical-Democratic Party	<b>18 (+4)</b>
Christian-Democratic People's Party	<b>16 (-3)</b>
Swiss People's Party	<b>4(=)</b>
Social-Democratic Party	<b>3 (-2)</b>
Liberal Party	<b>3(=)</b>
Independent Alliance	<b>K(=)</b>
Ticino League	<b>1(+1)</b>
	46

3. *Distribution of Members of the Federal Assembly according to Profession*

	National Council	Council of States
Lawyers, notaries . . . . .	34	17
Teachers. . . . .	25	6
Employers in industry and business. . . . .	24	6
Farmers. . . . .	25	2
Engineers, architects. . . . .	13	3
Journalists, editors. . . . .	14	
Liberal professions (non-legal). . . . .	5	2
Party officials. . . . .	1	
Others (including officials of employer or trade union organizations. State councillors, mayors). . . . .	<u>59</u>	<u>10</u>
	200	46

4. *Distribution of Members of the Federal Assembly according to Sex*

	National Council	Council of States
Men. . . . .	165	42
Women. . . . .	<u>35</u>	<u>4</u>
	200	46

5. *Average Age of Members of the Federal Assembly*

National Council. . . . .	50 years, 3 months
Council of States. . . . .	53 years, 9 months