

National Council proposal on implementation of initiative for avoidance of mass immigration

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On February 9 2014 Switzerland accepted the initiative regarding the avoidance of mass immigration with a 50.3% majority. The initiative requires that immigration be restricted by means of quantitative limits and quotas. Since then, the Federal Council and Parliament have been trying to implement this initiative by changing the law.

In March 2016 the Federal Council finally submitted a proposal for new legislation to the National Council in order to have the initiative implemented. The National Council's debate on the content of the proposed new legislation took place on September 21 2016.

However, the National Council decided that no restrictions by means of quantitative limits and quotas should be implemented, as doing so would contradict the Free Movement of Persons Agreement between Switzerland and the European Union. In principle, nothing that runs contrary to the agreement should be implemented.

The proposal contains a light version of the provision for the priority of local workers, meaning that if immigration becomes too high, job opportunities must be reported at regional unemployment agencies so that domestic workers (Swiss nationals and foreign nationals already admitted to the Swiss labour market) have priority. The Federal Council may determine a threshold on when immigration is deemed too high. However, at present there is no concrete figure for such a threshold. The Federal Council might also implement further remedial measures in case of severe economic problems due to immigration. Further, the National Council proposed that in case such remedial measures run contrary to the Free Movement of Persons Agreement, the joint committee of Switzerland and the European Union should find a solution which is acceptable to both parties.

According to initial feedback from the European Union, the proposed law is probably incompatible with the agreement. However, the Council of States will still have to debate the National Council's proposals. This debate will take place between late November and early December 2016.

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