

November 30, 2020

Corporate Responsibility Initiative: A true Swiss nail-biter!

A voting weekend ends satisfactorily, but it is not the end of the story

Dear members and friends,

Yesterday, Swiss voters rejected two initiatives detrimental to the Business Location Switzerland and internationally active companies based here. The Initiative Against Weapons Export found a strong 57% “NO”, strengthening Switzerland’s industrial base and ability for self-defense. The Corporate Responsibility Initiative (CRI), however, was a different story.

CRI was directionally right and appealed to many people who wanted to do good. Unfortunately, many people only saw the correct direction, but not the many and massive negatives of this wrong tool to achieve the goal. In a nail-biter, the initiative got a majority in the popular vote and was only defeated thanks to the cantonal votes (“Ständemehr”). Only 8.5 cantons voted “Yes” to the CRI instead of the necessary 12 (half vote depict the half-cantons). A mere 5953 votes in four cantons made the difference. Way too close for comfort! Swiss Amcham would like to thank all members and friends who took action and talked to their employees, families and friends. Your effort was critical for success!

The result is a relief and allows to implement the indirect counter-proposal which is technically convincing: It defines broad reporting and transparency obligations into law and combines progressive instruments against child labor and financing conflict minerals. It is in tune with other leading countries’ legislation and will make Switzerland one of the leading countries with regards to corporate responsibility. And it will give internationally active companies a sufficient degree of legal certainty.

But let’s not fool ourselves. This is not the end of the story. The initiators of the CRI – some 120 NGOs, broad parts of the Church and many progressive political parties – will try again. We cannot go back to “courant normal” and wait for the next initiative. We have to start a continuous campaign explaining two key elements:

- Swiss companies abroad overwhelmingly create positive effects where they operate. They create good and much needed jobs, support education and local knowledge building, help with key infrastructure and uphold human and environmental laws. These companies are widely welcomed wherever they operate. We need to give specific examples and personal reports from local people.
- Internationally active companies create enormous value in Switzerland. They provide many high-value jobs (26% of the total), pay 47% of federal corporate taxes, contribute 36% of GDP, massively further the development of the Swiss knowledge economy and are a major contributor to the Swiss retirement system.

These truths are not self-evident. They must be factually explained and repeated over and over again. Swiss Amcham will continue to do its part. We encourage our members and friends to join the effort.

Thank you for your partnership and support. Before we start the next voting campaign against the next well-meant, but extreme and unviable initiative, let us finish this year with equanimity and great Holiday spirit.

Happy Holidays
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