

Commentary : elections without change

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Aubert and Schlumpf depart

Two Federal Councillors step down at the end of 1987: Federal President Pierre Aubert and Federal Councillor Leon Schlumpf. The Neuchâtel Social-Democrat Aubert headed the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and the SVP (Swiss People's Party) politician, Schlumpf, a native of the Grisons, presided over the Federal Department of Transport, Communications and Energy.

Revision of Citizenship Act

Eight-year wait

In future, a foreign woman who marries a Swiss will no longer automatically obtain Swiss nationality. The Federal Council has submitted an appropriate Message to parliament on the second stage of the citizenship act revision.

The second stage of the revision – the citizenship of children of a Swiss parent has already been newly determined, as from 1st July 1985 – is a further step towards the equal treatment of man and woman in regard to nationality. The foreign wife of a Swiss will herself not automatically become Swiss upon marriage to him. This manifest injustice *vis-à-vis* the foreign marriage partner of a Swiss woman will now be put right in favour of a sexually-neutral assimilation in status of the foreign marriage-partners of Swiss citizens. Incidentally, Switzerland is the only European state that recognizes the automatic acquisition of citizenship by the foreign wife through marriage.

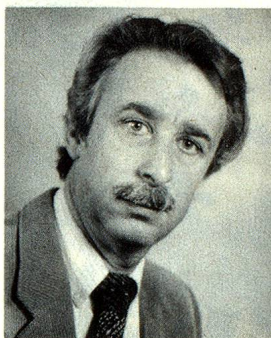
According to the submission, the foreign marriage-partner of a Swiss woman or a Swiss man can in future apply for facilitated naturalization after a five-year period of domicile (in Switzerland) and a three-year duration of the marriage. Preconditions are that the applicant be integrated into the Swiss environment, respects the Swiss legal system and does not expose the internal or external security of Switzerland to danger. Facilitated naturalization should be available to foreign spouses of Swiss abroad too, but only after an eight-year period of marriage as well as on the basis of close ties with and attachment to Switzerland.

The preliminary draft of the bill contained a clause relating to a 12-year period of marriage. In the submission-stage hearings, the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad spoke out quite clearly against this proposed qualifying period.

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Commentary

Elections without change



The elections in the National Council and the Council of States have changed little. They have not realized the hopes often expressed in the glacié of the political infighting – in the electoral campaign – for a new «green-red majority». Apart from some admittedly not insignificant shifts within the Helvetic party patterns, they have, at the most, confirmed how stable political relationships are in this country. The three bourgeois ruling parties – the Free-Democratic Party (FDP), the Christian-Democrats (CVP) and the Swiss People's Party (SVP) – will, together with the Liberal Party, be able to safely determine the political course of Switzerland in the coming four years.

Even the massive gain in votes and seats made mainly by the

«Greens» (GPS) – the moderate «green» party not ensconced on the left wing – is unlikely to change anything much. Although the «Greens» were able to increase the number of their seats in the National Council threefold, they will have to face the fact that their influence on the work in parliament will remain limited for the time being.

The big losers, not only in the small but also in the large chamber, are the Social Democrats (SP) who again (as in previous elections) had to put up with marked losses in votes of between six and ten per cent, above all in the large towns and industrial zones. Once more, the traditional party of the workers and employees sees itself let down by the voters – a trend which apparently continues. The SP, given to political analyses, is the party most strongly affected by social upheavals; it loses the classical regular voter, the worker in dungarees, and is evidently hardly in a position to appeal either to the new middle classes and occupational groupings, or to youth and intellectuals, notwithstanding its clear political message as stated in the election campaign.

On the other hand, contrary to expectations, the losses of the FDP stayed within limits, and its parliamentary group remains the strongest faction in the federal assembly.

Surprisingly, the CVP was able to maintain its strength, being able to more than make up for its losses in the Swiss mittelland particularly by gains in the Ticino, in eastern Switzerland and in French-speaking Switzerland. It was even less to be expected that the smallest ruling party – the SVP – would have increased its standing with a respectable gain in votes – a result that its party strategists certainly never reckoned on.

In the electoral campaign, however, the SVP was given a rough time and its credibility as a ruling party was called in question; it had been rashly labelled as a loser, and voters had speculated on new majority circumstances in parliament. In so doing, the electorate had inevitably – and as it has now turned out, mistakenly – challenged its seat on the Federal Council (the government). The inescapable conclusion is that the SVP, forced to such an extent on the defensive, still succeeded in mobilising its voters – yeoman farmers and trades-folk alike. In any case, the bourgeois parties have once again managed to mobilise their voters more successfully.

The work of parliament and government could well be more difficult in the new legislature. New relative strengths did not emerge from the ballot on the third Sunday in October; rather, were political strengths dissipated: the smaller parties (not those belonging to the government camp) have become stronger in the larger chamber, whereas in the Council of States the trend towards the enduring strengths has evidently crystallized.

This development will not make governing easier; the fronts are hardening in the federal assembly. In view of the fact that the country is faced with grave political decisions, the future is in no way auspicious. The points must be set, irreversibly, for social policy, energy policy, environmental protection and, not least, for the relationship of the Confederation to the European Economic Community.

These questions were to the fore in the election campaign, yet they failed to shake the electorate out of its lethargy. For, once again, voting turnouts sank to a new low. That makes you think.

Bruno Schlaeppli