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Election result: Switzerland has become that much more difficult to govern.

We Need the Help of a Wider Europe

Politicians and statisticians, analysts and journalists – all will be engaged in interpreting and commenting on the recent election results for many a long day. However, one thing is already clear: governing Switzerland will be even more difficult in the wake of these elections, for the decision-making capacity of the federal government has yet again been weakened.

There has been little change in the general positions of the two main camps – the traditional right on the one hand, and the reds and greens on the other. But within each of them the parties represented in the governing coalition have lost ground. On the left the greens have now become the most important opposition party in numerical terms, while on the right the eccentric Automobile Party has ridden home to a victory which is quite sensational in Swiss terms.

Amongst the four coalition parties, it is the two which have most frequently expressed disapproval of government policy – the Social Democrats and the Democratic Union of the Centre – which have come off relatively lightly. The Radicals and the Christian Democrats, more closely identified with government policies, are the real losers.

Some commentators have described this as a protest election, in which voters have tried to express their uneasiness at the lack of decision and real leadership shown by the country's Cabinet.

But this interpretation contains only part of the truth. It is also a fact that the position of the governing parties has been crumbling slowly but surely ever since the famous «magic coalition formula» was first adopted in 1959. And during the same period the number of citizens voting in elections has also been falling more or less continuously. So this last vote may be taken as showing that the famous Swiss creeping sickness – or Swiss malaise – which was diagnosed decades ago is simply continuing along its allotted course.

Support for government policies has dropped by practically half since 1959. This means

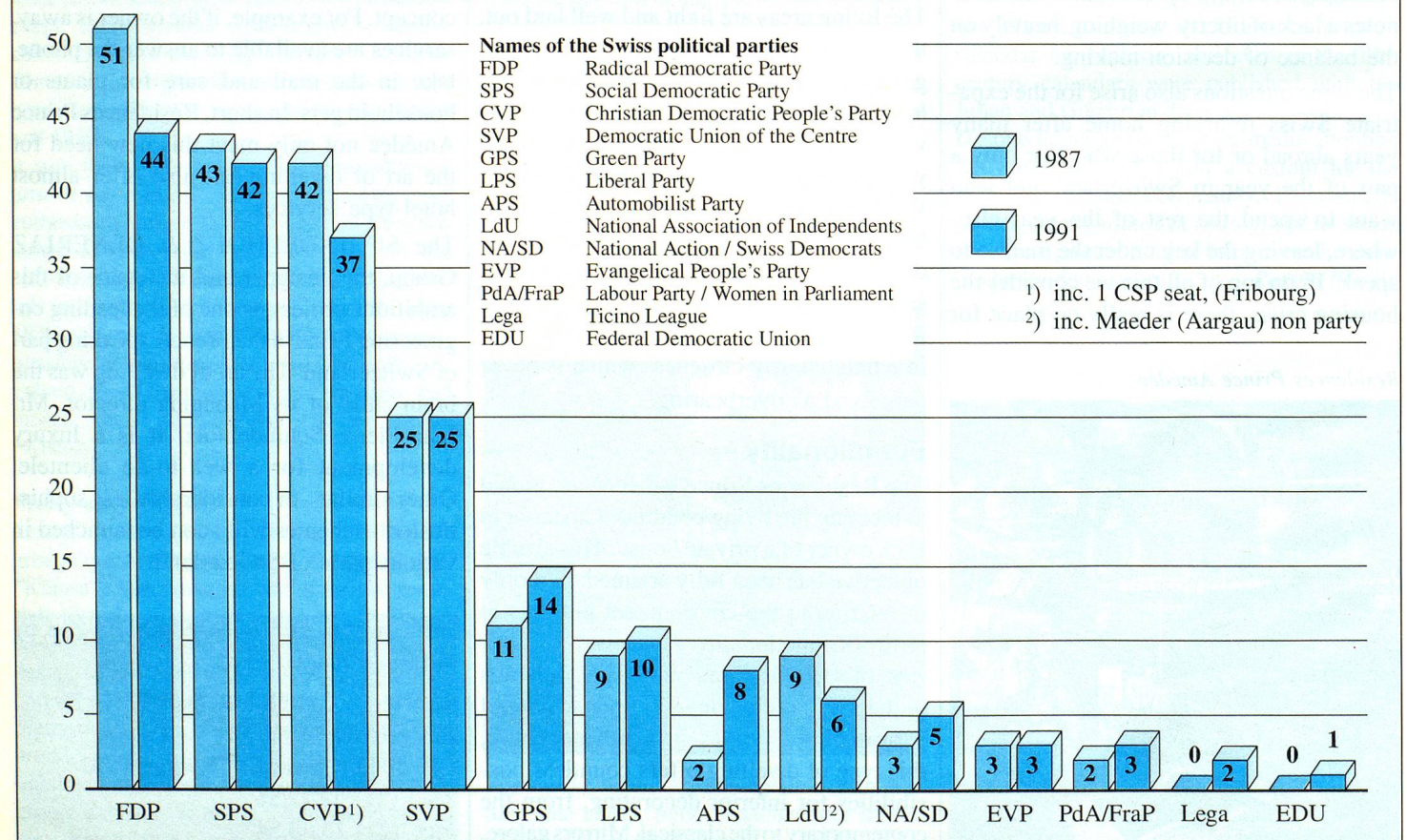
that decisions taken by the Federal Council – or Cabinet – now receive the active support of less than a third of the Swiss electorate. One of the most worrying things about this situation is the fact that the «magic coalition formula» (which brings together the Radical Democratic Party, the Christian Democratic People's Party, the Social Democratic Party and the Democratic Union of the Centre) was originally created for the precise purpose of giving responsibility for government to the widest possible spectrum of the people. In a political framework composed entirely of political minorities it seemed important to bring the majority of these minorities together to share responsibility.

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In today's climate, there are two broad elements which bring into question the capacity to govern of the parties involved in the «magic coalition formula»:

1. The four parties in the coalition no longer share opinions on the most important questions of the day, such as Europe, security, finance: the consensus on which the coalition was originally based has largely disappeared.
2. While the four parties do still represent a majority of those who actually vote, for many

Seat distribution in new National Council





years now the falling turn-out has meant that this is nevertheless a minority of those entitled to vote. The growing number of protest voters and abstainers suggests that the decisions of the government and parliament will in future be increasingly called into question in referendums. This means that decisive and efficient direction of the affairs of state will become more difficult, that the general state of uneasiness will grow and that the number of protest voters and abstainers will continue to increase. The situation has turned into a vicious circle.

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Such a merciless analysis suggests there is a need for new recipes to deal with a situation which can only be described adequately in these highly critical terms. The main challenge is to the three centre-right parties participating in the Cabinet. But it is precisely the two biggest of these, the Radicals and the Christian Democrats, which have come

out as the main losers in the elections. It is unlikely that they will be able to summon up either the courage to expel the social democrats from the coalition or the strength they need to take real heed of their leading roles. They simply do not possess the inner cohesion which is necessary for this.

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In view of all these considerations, the chances of bringing the erosion process in the government camp to an end now seem slimmer than ever. It is not hard to predict that the parties participating in the Swiss Cabinet will once again suffer losses in the next general elections – due in 1995. Unless, that is, the political system receives a significant new shakeup before that date.

Konrad Stamm, Editor, «Der Bund», Berne.

Editor's Note: This article has been slightly adapted for inclusion in the «Swiss Review».

Portraits of Switzerland's Main Political Parties

The Radical Democratic Party (FDP)

Founded: 1894

Membership: About 150,000, of whom a quarter are women

Chairman: National Councillor Franz Steiner, Uri

Election slogan: "Freedom wins"

Policies: Total revision of the federal constitution, armed neutrality, speed-up of equality between the sexes, improved business conditions, strict application of laws on asylum, emphasis on public transport.

The Christian Democratic People's Party (CVP)

Founded: 1912

Membership: About 80,000, of whom 25–30% are women

Chairman: National Councillor Eva Segmüller, St. Gall

Election slogan: "A better future for everyone"

Policies: European Community membership, more money for drug therapy and care, tackling asylum problem in countries of origin, creation of federal centres for asylum-seekers combined with strict exclusion of those refused, rents to be worked out on market rather than cost basis.

Social Democratic Party (SP)

Founded: 1888

Membership: About 40,000, of whom a quarter are women

Chairman: National Councillor Peter Bodenmann, Valais

Policies: More new apartments, attention to new-style poverty, reform of sickness insurance, improved old-age and disability pensions, equality between the sexes, European Community membership, environment, transport and land policy reforms, halving military expenditure and active peace policies abroad.

Democratic Union of the Centre (SVP)

Founded: 1919

Membership: 80,000

Chairman: State Councillor Hans Uhlmann, Thurgau

Election slogan: "Facing the future with courage"

Policies: Environmental protection, including CO₂ emission control, equality between the sexes in the workplace, increased training facilities for farmers, new agricultural techniques based on the environment and animal protection.

National Association of Independents (LdU)

Founded: 1936

Membership: About 5,000, of whom one third are women

Chairman: National Councillor Franz Jäger, St. Gall

Election slogan: "Recipe for a meaningful future"

Policies: Total revision of the federal constitution, development of an ecological and social market economy, European Community membership application in 1992, just and peaceful stability abroad.

Evangelical People's Party (EVP)

Founded: 1919

Membership: About 4,000, of whom about 1,500 are women

Chairman: National Councillor Max Dünki, Zurich

Election slogan: "Evangelical policy means clear goals"

Policies: Tackling asylum problem in countries of origin, promoting community centres to combat drugs, against abortion.

Liberal Party (LPS)

Founded: 1913

Membership: About 15,000

Chairman: Former National Councillor Claude Bonnard, Vaud

Policies: European Community membership, introduction of asylum quotas.

Green Party (GPS)

Founded: 1983

Membership: About 5,500, of whom more than 45% are women

Election slogan: "Green Party – ahead of the times"

Policies: Centred on the environment, ecological market economy, equality between the sexes, new social policies, minimum old-age and disability pensions regardless of input, against present European Community constituted as centralised economic system.

Automobilist Party of Switzerland (APS) – "The Libertarians"

Founded: 1985

Membership: about 13,000, including 15%–20% women

President: National Councillor Jürg Scherrer, Berne

Election slogan: "Liberty, Prosperity, Enjoyment of life"

Political views: Opposed to "nanny", taxation and interdiction State. In favour of tough policy regarding asylum seekers and drugs problem. Deregulation: privatisation of Federal Posts and Telecommunications and Federal Railways no taboo. Transport policy: opposed to impediments to individual transport. In favour of free choice of means of transport.