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# The challenges facing the

**The members of parliament elected on October 22 should possess at least four qualities if they are to be up to the challenges which await them: perceptiveness, competence, willingness to serve and a sense of responsibility.**

In many ways Switzerland is today at a crossroads, and the parliament which will emerge from the ballot box in autumn will have to provide some answers to questions concerning the

*Pierre-André Tschanz*

very identity of the nation. It will also have to set in motion substantial reforms, boost the morale of a country

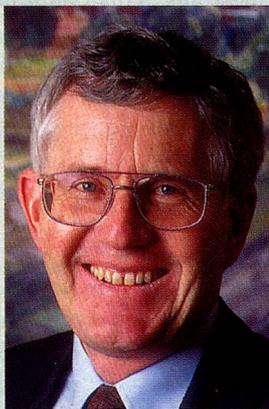
beset by doubts for over a decade now and regain the confidence of the population.

## Winning back confidence

The state of the nation is by no means good at the moment. Switzerland was greatly shocked morally at the end of the 1980s by the secret files affair which involved large-scale spying on its inha-

bitants by the federal police and military intelligence. At the beginning of this decade the malaise was supplemented by a deep and persistent economic recession; in just a few months the number of unemployed increased tenfold, reaching proportions not seen since the crisis of the late 1920s. As a result social and regional disparities increased. After that came the budget crisis and the long succession of austerity packages. Politically Switzerland has had problems recovering from the decision by voters not to join the European Economic Area. The gulf which opened up between French-speaking and German-speaking Switzerland on Decem-

## Message from the President of the Confederation



My dear compatriots abroad

Since July 1, 1992, you have been able to take part in federal referendums and elections by correspondence. In 1995 you have the first opportunity of voting by post in National Council elections. This extension of the political rights of the Swiss Abroad – which should go without saying – has an important political significance. It is a visible sign of the high estimation which the Federal Council, parliament and the population as a whole has of the Fifth Switzerland. And it is also a recognition of the economic and cultural contribution

which you, my dear fellow citizens, are making in every corner of the world.

On the occasion of a recent Congress for the Swiss Abroad I had the opportunity of meeting personally Swiss citizens from all five continents. I was most impressed by the enthusiasm shown by all those taking part in the discussions, which demonstrated how important Swiss politics are for our compatriots abroad. A subject of particular interest at present is of course Switzerland's relationship with the rest of Europe. However, in spite of our reserve the Swiss attitude should not be taken as a lack of concern for the destiny of our continent. Behind it lies an anxiety that by joining the EU our direct democracy with the unique right possessed by the people to be consulted might be adversely affected. For it is this right which binds citizens and minorities into the decision-making process on all important issues. The great interest in politics I have mentioned is also shown by the fact that so far about 60,000 Swiss Abroad have put their names on the voting register of a Swiss municipality. I hope that this number will increase yet again – not least because of the new and simpler procedure.

In Switzerland's system of direct democracy it is true that parliamentary elections probably do not have as much significance as in parliamentary democracies, where voters go to the polls at regular intervals but are not normally consulted on specific matters. But the importance of elections should not be underestimated. Over and above their legislative and decision-making functions, the two houses of the Federal Assembly are in fact the real driving force of our consensus democracy marked by federalism. In addition, parliament exercises important electoral functions. It appoints the members of the Federal Council and of the Federal Supreme Court and – in the event of war – a general.

It is certainly easier to reach a decision on practical matters than to acquire an overview of the whole electoral process. But elections are a central element of your voting rights, and I would encourage you now to take an active part in them. Face up to the democratic challenge. Put your experience of life at the disposal of our democracy. It is in your interest too.

**Kaspar Villiger**  
*President of the Confederation*

# new parliament

ber 6, 1992, has widened and now threatens national cohesion. In short, it is not going to be an easy task to get the country out of its present lamentable state.

The 246 members of parliament will not be able to do this alone. That much is certain, even if in addition to the four qualities I have mentioned we add a sense of imagination. On the other hand, what we do have the right to expect from the political representatives of the people and the cantons is a coherent analysis of the situation, a suitable reform of our institutions and a consistent attitude in all circumstances.

## Breaking the European deadlock

The main challenge awaiting the new parliament is without any doubt to break the present deadlock in European policy. This is a matter not only of the country's prosperity but also of national cohesion. Several popular initiatives have been put forward, two in favour of joining (either the EEA or the European Union), and one against any idea of rapprochement. Some time in the next few months we shall also hear the result of the branch-by-branch bilateral negotiations which should reduce the negative consequences of Switzerland not joining the EEA.

## From the trans-Alpine tunnels to Expo 2001

The new parliament will also have to find a way of funding transport infrastructure in general and the new trans-Alpine railway lines in particular. In the economic sphere it will have to redirect regional policy and pursue agricultural reform (the meat, cereals and dairy markets in particular). It will have to consider a draft for a complete revision of the constitution (which has been held up for 30 years!). It will have to reconsider taxation policy and the reform of the financial offsetting system between the federal government and the cantons. And all this will have to be done while continuing to reduce government borrowing. Many other important issues

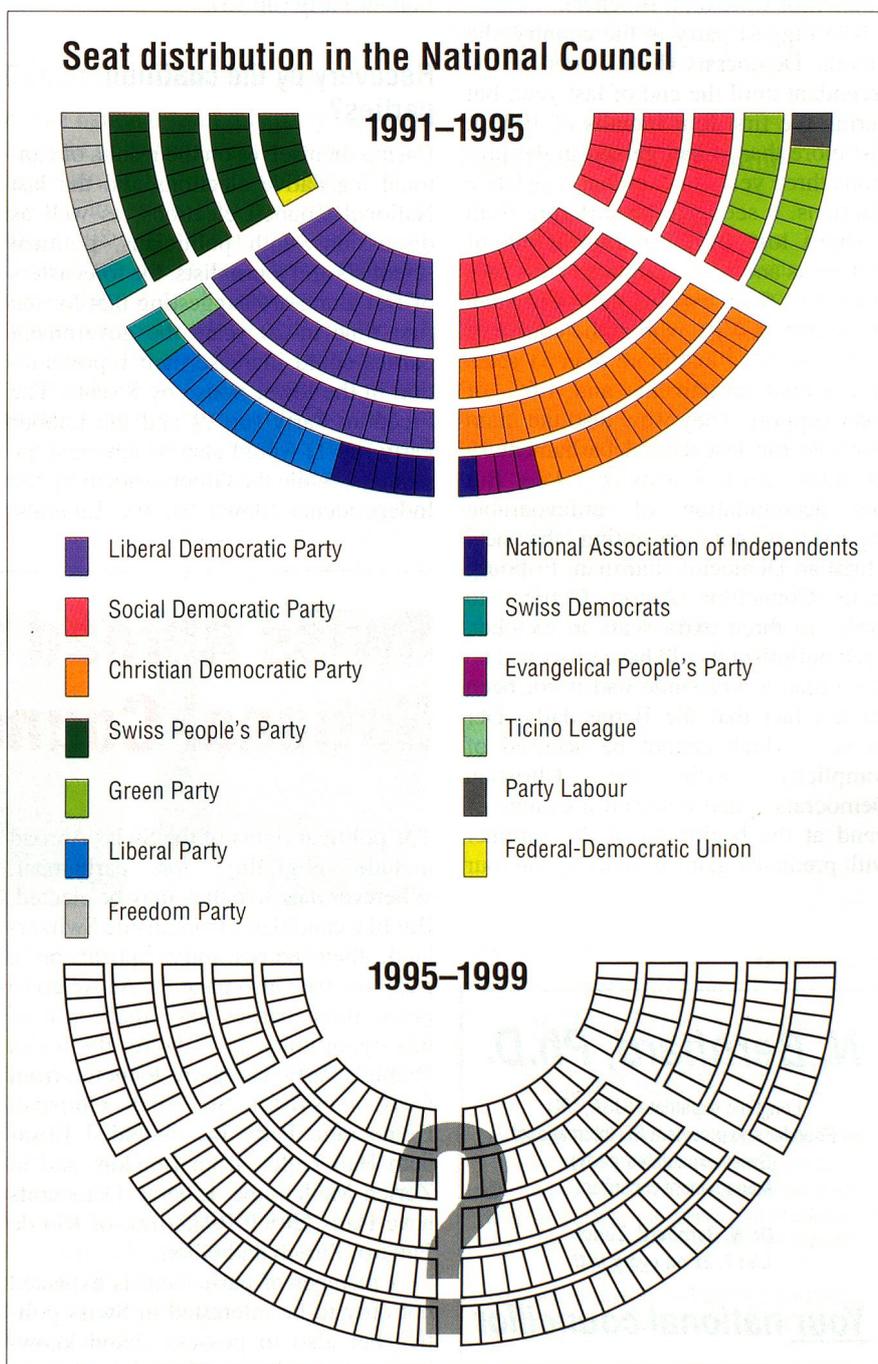
are lying in wait, such as anti-drug policy, maternity insurance, the whole question of arms exports, whether to decree a tax amnesty, a new system of public administration and Expo 2001.

The political makeup of the new parliament is not likely to be much different from that of the present one. The Swiss political system does not allow for revolutionary changes. But the next legislature

should in principle have an average age slightly lower than the present one. We may expect that more than one-third of the seats will have a new occupant. Will there be more women in the new parliament than were elected in 1991 (39 out of 246, or about 16%)? The reply to that question will play a role in what happens to the popular initiative which aims at introducing quotas for the participation of women in government and parliament.

## How the parties are doing

Political stability is virtually built into the system. But there are of course a few changes every time. Some useful infor-



mation about swings in the mood of the electorate and how the political parties are doing is supplied by the results of the various parliamentary elections in the cantons. Over the last four years the slow erosion of the traditional parties has continued, while opposition movements on both the left and the right of the political chessboard have achieved successes which have sometimes been spectacular, like that of the Swiss People's Party (SVP). This obtained 11 seats in Lucerne last April in the first election in which it had participated there. (The Lucerne branch of the SVP is part of the populist wing of the party which agrees with the views of the chairman of the Zurich branch, National Councillor Christoph Blocher).

The biggest party in the country, the Liberal Democrats (FDP), was on the ascendant until the end of last year, but during the first four months of 1995 it lost more than it had gained in the previous three years in cantonal legislative elections. It seems to be suffering from a slight loss of ground in terms of both seats and votes. But this is less pronounced than with the Christian Democrats (CVP), who in the course of four years have lost more than 51 seats in cantonal parliaments and 1.6% of voter support. They were also the main losers in the last federal parliamentary elections (down 5 seats or 1.4%). But this accumulation of unfavourable auguries is not preventing the new Christian Democrat chairman, Fribourg State Councillor Anton Cottier, to aspire to three extra seats in October. Such optimism would have provoked no more than a wry smile had it not been for the fact that the Berne daily, *Der Bund* – which cannot be accused of complicity with the Christian Democrats – had detected a change of trend at the beginning of the summer with predicted gains in seats by the four

coalition parties (FDP: up 2; CVP: up 1; SP: up 4; SVP: up 1).

Looking at cantonal legislative elections the performance of the various parties would suggest a high degree of stability for the Liberal Democrats and the Social Democrats (SP), a marked drop for the Christian Democrats and a considerable advance for the Swiss People's Party (up 21). As for the parties outside the coalition, the Greens are clearly in decline, while the right, the Liberal Party and the Freedom Party are likely to move ahead (the Liberals being up by 12 seats in recent cantonal elections and the Freedom Party up by 26). In the French-speaking cantons there has also been a marked advance for the Labour Party (up 15).

### Recovery by the coalition parties?

Basing themselves on the results of cantonal legislative elections and the last National Council elections, as well as discussions with politicians, political scientists and journalists, the forecasters of *Der Bund* are suggesting that for the first time in 20 years the government parties could increase their representation in the lower house by 8 seats. The Freedom Party (up 2) and the Labour Party (up 1) would also be amongst the winners, while the Greens (down 5), the Independents (down 3), the Liberals,

the Swiss Democrats and the Evangelicals (down 1 each) would be the losers.

In any case it must be emphasised that the Swiss political system does not allow for tidal waves. Fluctuations exceeding 5 seats have to be considered substantial. We should not forget that the four parties which have shared the responsibility of government since 1960 obtained 69.7% of votes four years ago, giving them 149 of the 200 seats in the National Council. And they also hold 41 out of the 46 seats in the Council of States.

Keeping all this in mind it is obvious that we are unlikely to see swings big enough to result in a change in the present distribution of seats in the Federal Council (2 FDP, 2 CVP, 2 SP and 1 SVP). One of the first acts of the new parliament will indeed be to elect the seven members of the executive. This will be done by the Federal Assembly – the two houses of parliament meeting in joint session – at the first meeting of the new legislature in December. Some on the right of the political spectrum dream of throwing the Socialists out of the government, others to the left think the same about the Swiss People's Party, which differs from the other coalition parties particularly on European policy. But an upset is most unlikely. The Swiss system of consensus is based on integrating the main political forces of the country into the government. ■

## Swiss Abroad for the National Council?

The political rights of the Swiss Abroad include eligibility for parliament. Wherever they live they may be elected. But like candidates from inside Switzerland, their names must appear on a party list (see also page 8). As we go to press, three parties have made use of this opportunity. In Fribourg the Swiss People's Party has Pierre Jonneret, from Paris, on its list; in St. Gall the Christian Democratic Party has included Elisabeth Hall-Zeller, from London; and in Zurich-Meilen the Liberal Democrats have Hans Ulrich Pestalozzi, of Rio de Janeiro, Zurich and Glion.

A member of parliament is expected not only to be interested in Swiss politics but also to possess sound knowledge of the Swiss political landscape.

Candidates from abroad must also measure up to this standard. Mr. Jonneret (70) is the publisher of a monthly magazine for Swiss residents in France and a member of the Council for the Swiss Abroad (CSA), so he has no problems in this regard. Nor does Mr. Pestalozzi (54), who is also a member of the CSA and has been partly living in Switzerland again since 1991. Mrs. Hall-Zeller (53) lived in Switzerland from 1989 to 1994 and was very much involved in politics during that period. All three take an active part in the Swiss associations of the countries where they live and are putting themselves forward as representatives of the Fifth Switzerland. This means that if elected they will concentrate particularly on the con-

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