

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 38 (2011)
Heft: 5

Inhaltsverzeichnis

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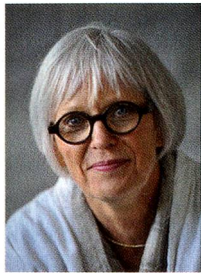
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The course has not yet been set

SWITZERLAND HAS VOTED, and we now know the winners and losers. However, the results of the elections on 23 October do not tell the whole story of Switzerland's political future. The situation will become clearer after 14 December following the Federal Council election. The key issue at the moment is whether the system of concordance will be revived by a newly negotiated magic formula or whether it will be abandoned. In the September edition of "Swiss Review", Professor Georg Kohler outlined how this could result in political deadlock with unforeseeable consequences for Switzerland. One thing is for sure and that is that ever since CVP Federal Councillor Ruth Metzler was voted out of office in 2003 the magic formula that had existed with stability since 1959 has been consigned to history. Read about the possible scenarios for the Federal Council election and how the parties and candidates are positioning themselves on page 13 onwards.

This election also raises the question of what the parties actually understand by concordance. Is the magic formula a purely mathematical model according to which Federal Council seats are distributed by share of the vote? Or does concordance require a degree of agreement on issues, values and ideas about how a state should function?



The de-selection of Federal Councillor Christoph Blocher in 2007 resulted in considerable intense and sometimes absurd debate in Switzerland and ultimately led to an initiative for the popular election of the Federal Council. Blocher has still not come to terms with the humiliation of this defeat. In an interview with the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" two months before the elections, when asked to comment on his present frame of mind, he said: "Of course I am bitter." This bitterness has provided him with the incentive to carry out a tireless campaign over the past four years and he has succeeded in making himself the centre of attention, whatever happens in politics. Blocher provides his party with political ideas and principles and – together with his extremely wealthy friends – he possesses the financial means to engulf Switzerland, from Romanshorn to Geneva, with propaganda. The Swiss People's Party (SVP) is increasingly adopting the approach of playing popular rule off against the rule of law. Opponents are defamed and simplistic solutions are put forward to complex problems. Populism is experiencing a boom. This was one of the main issues for debate at the Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Lugano in August (page 24).

Much was written during the election campaign about how right-wing conservative politicians, with the support of industry federations, were specifically setting out to bring about a fundamental transformation of Swiss politics. A book by Oswald Sigg and Viktor Parma (page 5) provides an insight into this. The loss of solidarity within society and the egotism of a decadent upper social stratum – not just in Switzerland but worldwide – should not be overlooked. This has already led to revolt and unrest in many places. Let's hope the new and re-elected politicians comprehend that the growing number of disillusioned and frustrated who have no prospects is also a threat to social harmony and prosperity in Switzerland.

BARBARA ENGEL

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5

Mailbag

5

Books: Democracy and the people

7

Images: Changes in China

8

Switzerland has been committed to development aid for 50 years – some controversy over how much and what type of aid to give

12

Foreign Minister Micheline Calmy-Rey steps down – a review of her term in office

13-16

Parliamentary elections

Regional news

17

Didier Cuche – already a legend, but he has postponed his retirement

20

The role of the media – critical analysis from Professor Kurt Imhof

21

Swiss writers – unable to survive on a domestic readership alone and often overlooked abroad

22

The legendary Alps – an archive containing images and documents spanning several centuries

24

OSA news

27

Notes from Parliament

30

Treasures

31

Echo

Cover image: The construction of bridges is part of Swiss development aid work. Ghana, where this photograph was taken, is a priority country for Switzerland. Photo: Keystone

IMPRINT: "Swiss Review", the magazine for the Swiss abroad, is in its 38th year of publication and is published in German, French, Italian, English and Spanish in 14 regional editions. It has a total circulation of 395,000. Regional news appears four times a year. The ordering parties are fully responsible for the content of advertisements and promotional inserts. These contents do not necessarily represent the opinion of either the editorial office or the publisher.

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■ **E-MAIL:** revue@aso.ch ■ **INTERNET:** www.revue.ch ■ **PRINT:** Swissprinters St.Gallen AG, CH-9001 St.Gallen. ■ **CHANGE OF ADDRESS:** Please advise your local embassy or consulate. Do not write to Berne. ■ All Swiss abroad who are registered with a Swiss representation receive the magazine free of charge. Anyone else can subscribe to the magazine for an annual fee (Switzerland: CHF 30 / abroad: CHF 50). Subscribers are sent the magazine direct from Berne. Copy deadline for this edition: 26.10.11