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Concordance – a synopsis with question marks

Georg Kohler, professor emeritus of political philosophy at the University of Zurich, is conducting observation and analysis of the election campaign in Switzerland throughout 2015 on behalf of the Swiss Abroad.

First of all, three observations on the Swiss federal parliamentary elections in autumn 2015. Since the introduction of proportional representation in 1919, never has a party won such a large share of the vote as the Swiss People's Party (SVP), which secured almost 30 %. That is a fact worthy of being described as historic.

Secondly, despite everything, in the main things remained within Swiss norms, even at these elections.

Maximum gains and losses of just under 3 % are nothing out of the ordinary even in Switzerland's stable political landscape. It was a different story in terms of the gain of seats. Eleven additional seats for the SVP, a 20 % increase – that is undoubtedly remarkable (for a major party). This outcome is explained not least by favourable circumstances with the distribution of the remaining seats, known as "proportional luck". A familiar picture nevertheless emerged with regard to turnout. Just under half of those eligible cast a vote.

Thirdly – and most importantly – these elections have not proven decisive for the major issues facing the nation, indeed quite the opposite. What will happen regarding relations with the EU, international law and the supranational institutions that implement human rights law remains open as either-or decisions require a further turn of the screw. Why is that? Quite simply because the positions held by the second-largest party in the alliance of the "conservative" National Council majority, the Free Democrat-Liberal Party (FDP), on the issues mentioned contrast starkly with those of its partner to the right. They tend to be more laissez-faire and rather complex.

What does that mean for the next four years? The short-term forecast is straightforward. The SVP will in all likelihood obtain its desperately sought-after second Federal Council seat, and Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf, despite performing well, will not be part of Switzerland's next government. The decisive factor here is not the position of the FDP but the fact that the severely reduced "centre" (CVP and GLP, above all) is not united in support of Widmer-Schlumpf's third term in office – the condition which would have to be met to seal victory for the Fed-



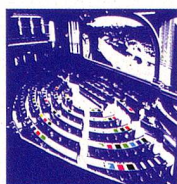
eral Councillor from Grisons is therefore null and void.

A medium-term prognosis is not too difficult either. It can be defined simply by the voting ratio on Switzerland's most powerful executive body. On all the issues that concern the nation's relationship with international or transnational legal obligations and treaty communities, such as the extremely importunate problem of certainty over the previously predictable viability of the bi-

lateral approach between Switzerland and the EU, voting in the Federal Council might no longer be 1:6, but instead 2:5 or even 3:4. However, the majority (regardless of the SVP's electoral success in 2015) will continue to lie with the "centre-left" – to once again use this actually unsuitable categorisation.

What is the upshot of this analysis? As the FDP has clear commitments, it needs no further discussion. Consideration should instead be given to whether the SVP finds itself in a cul-de-sac that is uncomfortable for both itself and our nation. With its policy of high-risk and ruthless renationalisation of state sovereign powers and all its strategic issues in terms of foreign policy, it can unquestionably count on a third of the electorate. That constitutes a veto power which has continually been deployed during this decade – in directly democratic referenda – as part of Switzerland's isolationist model and which the party promotes and defends with increasing tenacity.

To pursue such an approach is nonetheless only possible at the expense of any substantive concordance which in its time, when the magic formula was created in 1959, was a self-evident requirement. In short, arithmetical concordance, which the SVP will successfully call for at the Federal Council elections in December, is essentially nothing short of the denial of the form of concordance that characterised Switzerland during the post-war period and saw it flourish. But, given that the recipe for success put forward by the SVP, Switzerland's most strongly supported party by far, as previously mentioned, is the exact opposite of this, we must brace ourselves, whether we like it or not, for difficult times and major turmoil.



ELECTIONS
2015