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Switzerland shifts to the right

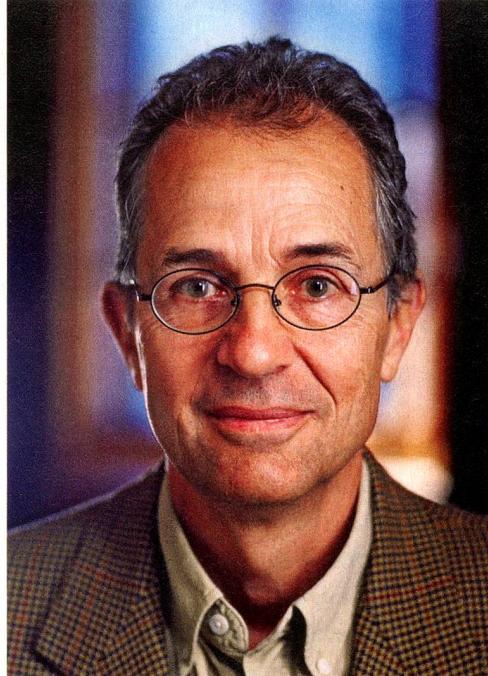
The Swiss People's Party (SVP), the largest political party, made significant gains while the small centre parties lost ground, with the left also emerging weakened from the federal elections.

JÜRG MÜLLER

Switzerland's political landscape is much changed after the parliamentary elections of 18 October 2015 – the 50th in the nation's history. The anniversary elections also proved historic as a single party has never achieved such a strong position in the National Council since the introduction of proportional representation in 1919. The SVP's overwhelming electoral triumph was topped off by the no less important increase in support for the Free Democrat-Liberals (FDP). Virtually all the other parties essentially collapsed. The election result is particularly bitter for the new centre parties which were amongst the winners at the last election in 2011. These are the Swiss Conservative Democratic Party (BDP), which split off from the SVP, and the Green Liberals (GLP).

The winners: SVP and FDP

■ The SVP increased its share of the vote to 29.4 %. At the last election in 2011, its share fell to 26.6 %, which meant it had lost ground for the first time since 1987. It has now won no fewer than 11 additional seats in the



National Council, making it the biggest party by some distance with 65 representatives. Two personal stories are indicative of events. The SVP candidate and newcomer to politics Roger Köppel, the publisher and editor-in-chief of "Weltwoche", enters the National Council with the highest personal number of votes in Switzerland ever. And the Blocher era con-

tinues in female form. Christoph Blocher's daughter Magdalena Martullo-Blocher, CEO of Ems-Chemie, has been elected to the National Council.

■ The FDP succeeded in turning its fortunes around after a 30-year period of decline. Its share of the vote increased from 15.1 to 16.4 %, and it now has 33 seats, having gained three.

More candidates, more lists

A National Council seat must be a really attractive proposition. Never before have so many men and women shown the desire to take on the onerous task of an election campaign. According to figures provided by the Swiss Federal Chancellery, 3,788 candidates (compared with 3,458 in 2011) stood for election in the 20 cantons with proportional representation, representing a 9.5 % increase. In addition, a further 14 candidates stood in the six cantons with a majority voting system, each of which is allocated just one National Council seat (Appenzell-Ausserrhoden, Appenzell-Innerrhoden, Obwalden, Nidwalden, Glarus and Uri). In total, 3,802 people sought a National Council seat.

The proportion of female candidates rose slightly compared to 2011, climbing from 32.8 % to 34.5 %. Since 2007, the figure has remained at around a third. The number of lists in the cantons with proportional representation has also increased, rising from 365 in 2011 to 422 lists.

A Swiss Abroad elected for the first time

The interest from the Swiss Abroad in a National Council seat declined slightly compared to the last election. This year 56 Swiss Abroad stood for election compared with 73 in 2011. Various parties offered "international lists". The SVP, which had international lists in 10 cantons, was ahead

in this respect. An element of disillusionment may explain the waning interest. While the political significance of the Swiss Abroad has grown since the introduction of postal voting in 1992, the chances of election have remained slim as most candidates are virtually unknown. The exception was the Social Democrat Tim Guldmann, a resident of Berlin who was a high-profile crisis situation diplomat and ambassador at important posts until his retirement in Germany in May 2015. He pulled off a coup in no time by becoming the first genuine Swiss citizen abroad ever to be elected to the National Council.

(JM)

■ The Swiss Social Democratic Party (SP) remains the second-strongest party with its share of the vote remaining absolutely stable (2011: 18.7 %, 2015: 18.8 %), but the party lost three seats. Even Andy Tschümperlin, the chairman of its parliamentary group, was voted out in the canton of Schwyz.

■ On the left, the Green Party was dealt a blow. It was already one of the losers at the last election, and its share of the vote has now fallen from 8.4 % to 7.1 %. The Greens now have just 11 seats as opposed to 15.

■ The CVP also lost ground as part of the downward trend of the centre parties. The party, which has a rich tradition, saw its share of the vote slip from 12.3 % to 11.6 %. Having lost just one seat, the party escaped with a black eye and now has 28 representatives. It nevertheless suffered its worst election result of all time.

■ The Swiss Green Liberal Party (GLP) had a major setback, especially in light of its spectacular gains in 2011 when it increased its number of seats from 3 to 12 after securing 5.4 % of the vote. It has now slipped back to 4.6 % and has seen its number of seats, now standing at 7, almost halved.



Presidents of the conservative parties await the election results: Toni Brunner (SVP), in front, and behind him Philipp Müller of the FDP

■ The Swiss Conservative Democratic Party (BDP), the party of Federal Councillor Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf, which was also amongst the winners in 2011, endured losses too. Its share of the vote dropped from 5.4 to 4.1 %, with its seat count falling from 9 to 7.

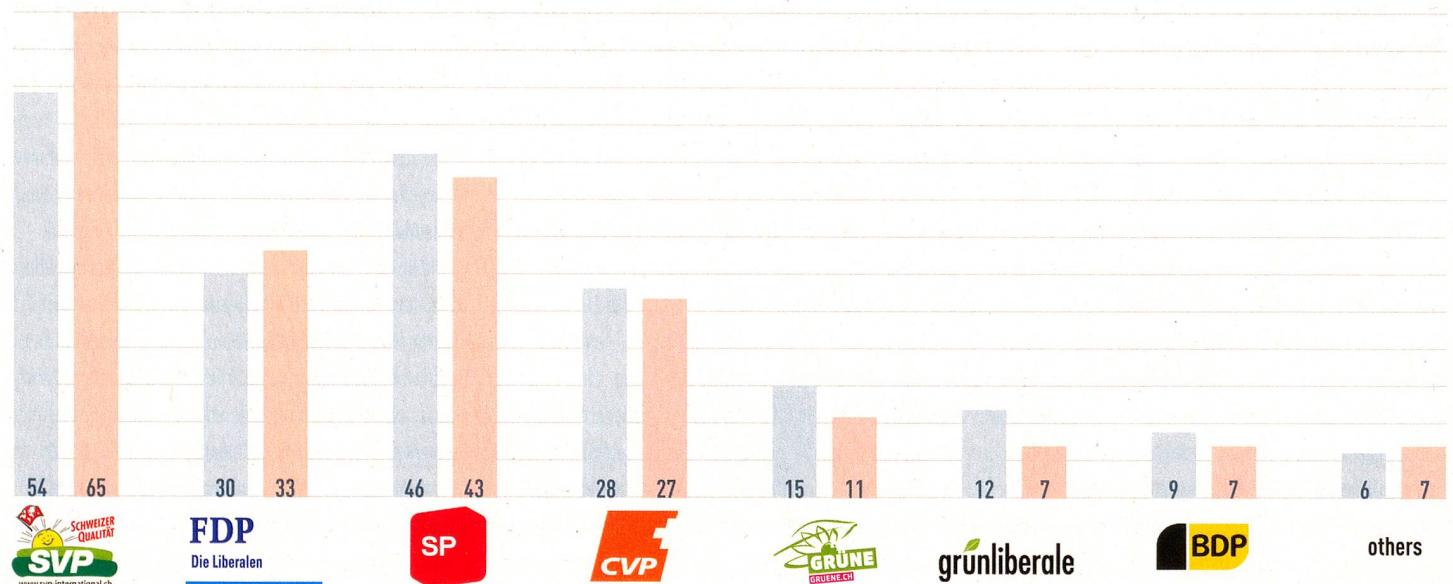
The conservative camp regroups

The spectacular election victory of the SVP and FDP is further accentuated by the fact that the right-wing conservative block in the National Council, in-

cluding the small right-wing parties Lega dei Ticinesi (2 seats) and Mouvement Citoyens Genevois (1 seat), now has an absolute majority with 101 seats. However, that does not mean an automatic majority. This majority may be significant in economic, social and tax policy issues, but it is meaningless in other areas. The FDP's position differs greatly from that of the SVP over policy on Europe as the Free Democrats firmly support the bilateral approach.

However, one thing should not be forgotten as regards the election result:

The distribution of seats on the National Council before and after the elections of 18 October 2015



Switzerland has always been a typically conservative country with a clear conservative to right-wing majority. The political landscape was previously dominated by the once powerful Free Democrats and the no less dominant Catholic Conservatives, the CVP's predecessor party, in alliance with the smaller Farmers', Trades' and Citizens' Party (BGB, today the SVP). The political forces have now regrouped after a process lasting many years. The right-wing conservatives are hugely strengthened today in the form of the populist, right-leaning SVP and are thus following a Europe-wide trend.

The collapse of the centre parties is primarily explained by their lack of clear profile. They were also unable to join forces with the CVP. The surge of the Green Liberals and BDP may also turn out to be a flash in the pan. There have always been parties in Switzerland that have achieved remarkable success for a period before disappearing again. A shining example is the Alliance of Independents.

The current refugee crisis and the consequent accentuation of immigration policy proved disastrous for the SVP's rivals. All other areas of politics, such as environmental issues, withdrawal from nuclear power and social matters, were overshadowed, and this also had an adverse impact on the Greens' electoral performance. Uncertainty over the future of the economy probably brought the FDP votes, attracting many people to the business-oriented party with its long tradition.

Stability in the Council of States

A second round of voting will be required in many cantons: 19 seats were not allocated in the first round.

The final party-political make-up of the Federal Assembly will not be decided until the still pending second round of voting, required in 12 cantons for the Council of States, has taken place. Only 27 of the 46 seats were awarded on 18 October. The Free Democrats secured eight seats, the CVP seven, the SP six and the SVP five. Thomas Minder, an independent candidate from Schaffhausen and the figure behind the successful fat-cat initiative, was also re-elected. The CVP and Green Liberals each lost a seat.

The situation in the Council of States is generally very stable; no huge shifts are anticipated nor significant moves to the right, like in the National Council. However, it is very possible that the FDP will challenge the CVP's

traditionally dominant position. It remains to be seen whether the SP can hold the 11 seats it won four years ago in the subsequent rounds of voting. There are nevertheless some realistic chances of success: The SP candidate Daniel Jositsch surprisingly secured election in the first round of voting in Zurich. The SVP can also hold out hope of making gains. However, in the canton of Berne National Councillor Albert Rösti, the head of the SVP's national election campaign, only finished in third place behind the current Council of States members Werner Lugimbühl (BDP) and Hans Stöckli (SP). The SVP generally finds it more difficult to win seats in elections based on majority voting systems and personality. (JM)

Tensions run high over the Federal Council elections on 9 December

The complete re-election of the Federal Council promises to be exciting. The victorious SVP is demanding a second Federal Council seat. This may happen if it puts forward moderate candidates. The election will be made easier if Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf decides not to stand for re-election. The Federal Councillor elected in 2007 is under tremendous pressure owing to the poor performance of her party, the BDP. If she stands again, the SP, Greens, CVP, BDP, GLP and

EVP could attempt to defend her seat. This would be based on the argument that the centre is also entitled to a Federal Council seat. The SVP and FDP are however in favour of a "mathematical magic formula" according to which the three largest parties would each be awarded two seats on the Federal Council and the fourth-largest party one seat in government. That would mean two seats for the SVP, two for the FDP, two for the SP and one for the CVP.

The distribution of seats in the Council of States before the elections of 18 October 2015

