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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.

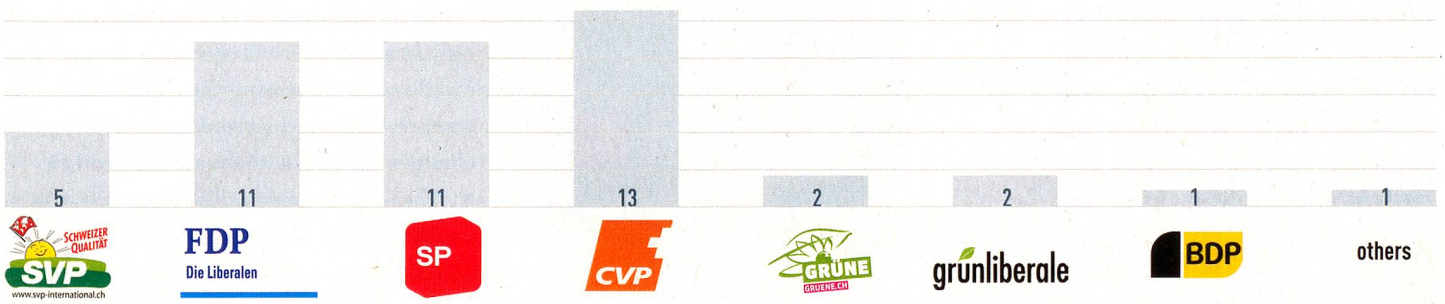
Stability in the Council of States

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 Luginbühl (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