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## By Jürg Müller

It is nevertheless obvious that the SVP no longer sees the bilateral approach as a top priority. Those on the right are seeking to seize the moment and steer the course of policy on Europe according to their own agenda. They are more than willing to accept further damage in relations with the EU. SVP parliamentary group leader Amstutz made this perfectly clear during the

The Campaign for an Independent and Neutral Switzerland (AUNS) group is lining up for a frontal attack. It is seeking to rescind the bilateral agreements and to simply govern relations with the EU by means of free trade agreements: "Both packages, 'bilaterals 1' and 'bilaterals 2', need to be replaced by an improved free trade agreement. We do not want any further bilateral agreements that are not in our nation's interests. And we

The Social Democrats wrote in their 2010 manifesto that they sought “the rapid introduction of accession negotiations with the

The centrifugal forces within the governing parties have therefore become much stronger. The SVP is distancing itself from the EU more clearly than in the past and the SP is no longer ruling out EU accession, while most of the other parties are attempting to fly the tattered flag of bilateralism. This represents a highly uncomfortable starting position for the government. The new

Initiatives are today no longer just used by the left and Greens but also by conservative and right-wing parties and institutions – in particular by the Swiss People's Party (SVP) and the organisations associated with it. Initiatives are also often clearly used as a marketing instrument for election campaigns and as a vehicle to generate public outrage or to assert vested interests.

"It is a kind of paradox," explains Silja Häusermann: "The increasingly frequent use of the instruments of direct democracy is an indication that Switzerland's political system is working less effectively." Swiss democracy is after all geared towards consensus. The rights of the people were initially intended to have a "preventative effect": The political players were to reach viable compromises so that referenda and initiatives did not have to be deployed. There is now a "spanner in the works" of this fragile mechanism, says Häusermann. She sees this as the "consequence of polarisation and the much more intense competition between the political parties".

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