

Election campaign subjects. Part I, Switzerland and the international organisations : Europolicy divides the parties

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Election campaign subjects (1): Switzerland and the international organisations

Europolicy divides the parties

The relationship between Switzerland and the European Union will be one of the hottest subjects in the coming election campaign. The fronts cut right through most of the parties.

In the run-up to the parliamentary elections of autumn 1999 European integration will be one of the central questions in dispute. The attitudes of the parties to the international organisations will have a decisive effect on the

Dario Ballanti

new power relationship in Parliament, and there is no doubt that the debate on EU adhesion will be hot and will split the parties, even if a fairly clear majority of politicians will speak out in favour of EU membership: this in contrast to public opinion, which does not yet seem to have reached a conclusion. Three of the four Federal Council parties have a positive attitude to adhesion: Social Democrats, Liberal Democrats and Christian Democrats, albeit with differing intensity and with many sceptics in their own ranks.

SVP: majority for going it alone

Amongst the government parties only the SVP argues in favour of Switzerland going it alone. But even this party is divided within itself. While the so-called Zurich wing of the party is in

«The Federal Council must accept the verdicts of the people.»

CHRISTOPH BLOCHER, SVP

favour of a special way for Switzerland, other cantonal parties (i.e. Berne) are more open towards a possible rapprochement between Switzerland and the EU.



Will Switzerland lose its identity if it joins the European Union? Spirits are divided on this question right across the country and right through the parties. (Photo: Keystone)

In the opinion of national councillor Christoph Blocher, the leader of the Europe opponents, "the Federal Council must accept the verdicts of the people. In the last four years they have said no three times: to the EEA, to the UN, and to the Blue Helmets. This obliges the government to maintain independence and neutrality, said Blocher on the occasion of the last collection of the campaign for an independent and neutral Switzerland (CINS). The anti-EU/UN group also consists of the Freedom Party (formally the Automobilists' Party), the Swiss Democrats and the Lega dei Ticinesi. The Eurosepts are afraid Switzerland's accession to the EU would mean the end for direct democracy.

CVP: on course for Europe

On the other hand the CVP is a decided supporter of membership. On the occasion of the extraordinary Party Congress held last April in Basle the CVP delegates approved with an overwhelming majority a resolution which explicitly demanded negotiations on EU entry. "We must become EU-compatible and adapt our legislation"

said Party President Adalbert Durrer. Above all delegates from French-speaking Switzerland put themselves in the balance in favour of the EU, amongst the most vehement being

«We must become EU-compatible and adapt our legislation.»

ADALBERT DURRER, CVP

Geneva National Councillor Jean-Philippe Maitre and his Jura colleague François Lachat. For them there is absolutely no more time to be lost.

A pragmatic view is represented by Zurich National Councillor Rosmarie Zapfl: "We must take seriously the fears of a part of the population about the EU, and the discussion must shift from the polemical to the practical level". Within the CVP the Central and Eastern Swiss sections above all are rather sceptical about a rapprochement with Europe. Amongst the greatest critics is Schwyz Councillor of States Bruno Frick. In his view the time for entry is not yet ripe, not least for reasons of electoral tactics.

Too much of a European attitude could earn the Party substantial losses amongst conservative voters.

FDP: two speeds

With the Liberal Democrats too one can talk of two currents or at least of two speeds. Together with Ticino's Fulvio Pelli and Dick Marti the French speakers opt more clearly for a rapprochement with the EU than their Swiss-German colleagues. The German-speakers – with Berne's National Councillor Jean-Pierre Bomny as one of the strongest Eurosepts – have their foot on the brakes and are in favour of awaiting the conclusion of the bilateral negotiations and the integration report demanded from the Federal Council by the end of the year.

On the whole the attitude of the FDP seems to be dictated more strongly by pragmatism than that of the CVP: enter yes, but without rushing and only after careful weighing-up of the pros and

«If a further cooperation treaty falls through, entry is the only alternative.»

PETER TSCHOPP, FDP

cons. Amongst the so-called Eurotorbus is Geneva's National Councillor Peter Tschopp: "If a further cooperation treaty falls through, entry is the only alternative". Vaud National Councillor Christiane Langenberger takes a positive attitude to the European future: "An active contribution to the development of a democratic and federalist EU would without doubt enrich the identity of Switzerland by a dimension". On the other hand Berne's National Councillor François Loeb sees a second EEA referendum as the most efficient and quickest way. The danger of Switzerland's being isolated would be averted, particularly with respect to the labour market.

SP: yes to EU and UN

"The EEA does not allow for joint decision-making. In my opinion those in favour of a second EEA referendum are against adhesion", says Social Democrat National Councillor Peter Vollmer, who is against the idea. The Social Democrats support the initiative yes to Europe, launched by associations friendly to Europe. "We can approach the entry negotiations calmly at the moment, in view of the fact that the referendum will not be held for a number of years", states the Berne politician. His Zurich counterpart, Andreas Gross, who also commits himself to a

«We can approach the entry negotiations calmly at the moment.»

PETER VOLLMER, SP

popular initiative in favour of joining the UN, expresses himself even more clearly. "It needs a threefold yes: to direct democracy, to the EU, and to democratisation of the EU."

Liberals and Greens for the EU

Liberals are clearly in favour of joining the EU. This is mainly due to the fact that with one exception their members of parliament come from French-speaking cantons which in general are more positive towards an opening-up of Switzerland than other parts of the country. Also Europe-friendly are the Independents, the Evangelical People's Party, the Labour Party and the Greens, although the last named include a small group of pronounced opponents of EU adhesion.

Parties in brief (I)

Federal Democratic Union (EDU)

Seats in the National Council: 1; in the Council of States: 0
President: Christian Waber (BE)
Address: PO Box 717, CH-3607 Thun
Tel. +41 33 222 36 37, Fax +41 33 222 37 44
The EDU on itself:
"The EDU is a Christian-centred party with social aims. Of all the non-government parties, it has the spread structure in surface terms. In its thinking, speaking and dealings, it bases itself on the eternally valid statements of the Bible as the Word of God. In view of the dramatic indebtedness and out of responsibility to future generations, the state should not take on ever more duties."

Christian Social Party (CSP)

Seats in the National Council: 1 (member of the Greens group); in the Council of States: 0
Address: Beat Bloch, P.O. Box, CH-8038 Zurich
Tel. +41 1 482 01 73, fax +41 1 201 21 14
The CSP on itself:
"The Christian-Social Party of Switzerland is an favour of an open society, marked with the basic concept of solidarity. Comprehensive and guaranteed old-age care, together with a humane foreigner and refugee policy, and a genuine social partnership are at the center of the policy of CSP-Switzerland."

Women make policy! (FraPi)

Seats in the National Council: 1 (member of the Social Democratic group); in the Council of States: 0
Address: PO Box 9353, CH-8036 Zurich
Tel. and Fax +41 1 242 44 18
FraPi on itself:
"Political participation by women in all social fields. Radical and just distribution of paid and unpaid work, together with a guaranteed livelihood. A migration policy which guarantees women a residence and labour law in independence from the husband. Security against violence and the same training opportunities for all."

League of the People of Ticino (Lega)

Seats in the National Council: 1 (forms a group together with the Swiss Democrats and Massimo Pini, FDP/TI); in the Council of States: 0
President: Giuliano Bignasca (TI)
Address: PO Box 2311, CH-6901 Lugano
Tel. +41 91 971 30 33, Fax +41 91 972 74 92
The Lega on itself:
"Ticinese Abroad should vote for the Lega dei Ticinesi for two reasons: a) because they had to leave their much-loved homeland due to a politically and economically unfavourable climate; b) because the Lega campaigns to ensure that every Ticinese is able to work and live well in Ticino in freedom and democracy."