

Results of the National Council elections : SVP becomes strongest center-right party

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SVP becomes strongest ce

Triumph for the SVP: the extent of the party's electoral gains exceeded even their most optimistic expectations. Thanks in particular to the support shown in Zurich for Christoph Blocher, the SVP won 15 National Council seats more than in 1995. In terms of voter share the SVP has risen to become the strongest party, with 22.6% of votes nation-wide.

Even in French-speaking Switzerland, the Ticino and hitherto "abandoned" German cantons like Basle City, the SVP achieved notable successes. The final result may trigger heated discussions on the magic formula which guarantees the SVP a seat on the Federal Council. Following the elec-

toral victory Christoph Blocher also made a vehement call for a second SVP seat in the national government.

Massive gain

Expressed in figures, the SVP's success is clear. Nation-wide the share of the

vote almost reached the 23% mark (+7.7% compared with 1995), exceeding even 30% in some German-Swiss cantons. The other government parties were not able to match this performance: The SP came second with a voter share of 22.5% (+0.7%), while the FDP dropped to 19.9% (-0.3%) and the CVP was relegated to fourth place with 15.8% of the vote (+1%), followed by all the other parties. With just on 5% of the vote, the strongest non-government party is the Greens. Although it did not overtake the SP in terms of seats, the SVP celebrated a major success by winning 15 additional seats. By contrast the SP lost three seats and the FDP two.

One minor surprise was the fact that the CVP gained a seat despite its lower

Commentary

Three things can be stated with certainty following the federal elections on 24 October: first, a slight swing to the right; second, a difficult future for concordance politics; and third, the failure of the Swiss Abroad candidatures.

It is necessary to talk of a swing to the right even if the Swiss People's Party achieved its sensational success at the cost of other right-wing parties. The

agrarians in the Blocher camp primarily grazed on the pastures of the Freedom Party and the Swiss Democrats. In terms of the left/right balance of power, only four seats changed sides. As far as the share of the vote is concerned, the SVP registered an enormous rise (+7.7%) to become the strongest party in Switzerland. But more than half of this gain is at the expense of small right-wing, non-government factions, and for part of the remaining half there is a mathematical explanation in that the SVP was present in more cantons than four years ago. In other words, while a swing to the right has occurred, it is only a slight shift.

The government parties account for 80% of votes and almost 90% of the seats. Nevertheless a tough time lies ahead for concordance politics, since the winners of the election – the populist wing of the SVP, spearheaded by the leading anti-Europe spokesman Christoph Blocher – have adopted an oppositional stance against what they disparagingly refer to as the "classe politique". A distinct strengthening of the

extreme right is discernible in the government camp, and the less constructive attitude of this populist movement will prove a major obstacle to consensus on the problems facing the country.

The defeat of the Swiss Abroad candidatures was a foregone conclusion. On the one hand these are hampered by a fragmentation of Swiss Abroad votes among 26 cantons, and on the other hand by the lack of a sense of community among Swiss Abroad. The example of Pierre-Alain Bolomey's candidature, supported by the Secretariat for the Swiss Abroad and promoted by the "Swiss Review", speaks volumes in this respect. The candidate captured less than 10% of the votes he could have won from his fellow expatriates. This lack of support gives pause for thought: it is neither sufficient to encourage future Swiss Abroad candidatures nor to strengthen the role of the Fifth Switzerland in federal politics!

Pierre-André Tschanz ■

Federal referendums

12 March 2000
Subjects not yet decided.

21 May 2000
Subjects not yet decided.

24 September 2000
Subjects not yet decided.

26 November 2000
Subjects not yet decided.

Centre-right party

share of the vote. Among the non-government parties the Greens defended their nine seats and the PdA their three, while the LPS lost a mandate and now boasts only six seats. The EVP gained a seat and now has three representatives in the National Council. Having lost two mandates, the LdU now holds only one seat. The same goes for the Swiss Democrats, while the Ticino League and their leader Giuliano Bignasca won a second seat. Finally, the EDU and the CSP successfully defended their seat.

FPS out

Among the clear losers in the elections was the FPS, which has disappeared

from parliament after losing all seven seats to the SVP. By absorbing all the FPS seats the SVP has also won votes on the extreme right as well as from the centre and the SP. In the canton of Zurich the Blocher party scored a spectacular success, winning four seats (13 in all). With a total of 143,046 votes, Christoph Blocher himself was the most popular candidate nation-wide.

The SVP also made gains in Aargau and St. Gallen (+2 seats) as well as in Basle City, Lucerne, Grisons, Solothurn, Thurgau, Zug and Vaud (+1 seat). By contrast, the party did not gain a single seat in Fribourg and Geneva. In the run-up to the elections the Geneva chapter of the party was embarrassed by the candi-

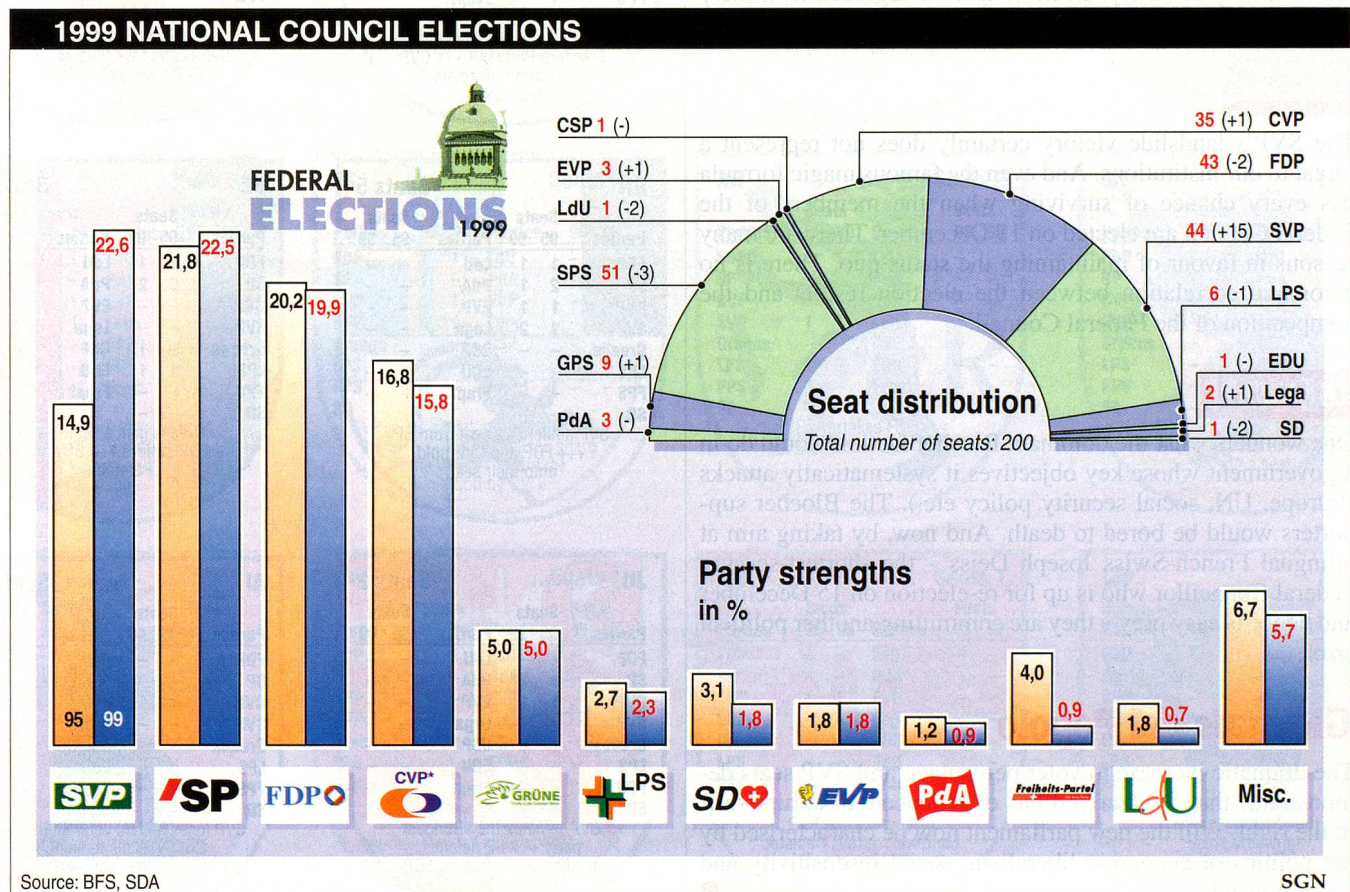
dature of right-wing extremist Pascal Junod.

Prominent losers

Among the well-known losers (31 were not re-elected) was Jean Ziegler, who tried for re-election under the Zurich Young Socialists after 28 years representing the Geneva SP on the National Council, Albrecht Rychen (SVP), Charles Friderici (LPS), Rudolf Keller (SD) and FDP representative Adriano Cavadini, who was National Councillor for Ticino for twelve years.

No luck either for Swiss Abroad candidate Pierre-Alain Bolomey, who with 13,411 votes ended up only ninth on the Vaud SP's list.

Dario Ballanti



Press Review

Walliser
☆☆ Boie

The new surge in support of the SVP can be compared with the strength of the old Catholic-Conservative People's Party. Such movements always occur following years of social mobility and an extension of individual and collective legal rights. For this reason and because they are a concrete threat to freedom and the zest for life, they are also called reactionary.

OLTNER TAGBLATT

On the surface, the age of sorcerers and sorcerers' apprentices who feel compelled to meddle with magic formulae may well have dawned. On closer inspection there is as yet no necessity for such experiments. And it is certainly not to be hoped – far less assumed – that the new parliament will conjure up spirits whose own momentum it can no longer control!

DIE SÜDOSTSCHWEIZ

The new parliament will offer fewer surprises than the old. Situations where an energy tax is suddenly proposed by the centre-right camp and even subsequently adopted, are a thing of the past. Such political spontaneity will cease to exist, since tooing the party line will become more important and any tendency to stray will no longer be regarded as a mere peccadillo.

Le Matin

The SVP's landslide victory certainly does not represent a threat to our institutions. And even the famous magic formula has every chance of surviving when the members of the Federal Council are elected on 15 December. There are many reasons in favour of maintaining the status quo. There is no automatic correlation between the election results and the composition of the Federal Council.

LA LIBERTÉ

One wonders what the dominant Blocher faction would do in a government whose key objectives it systematically attacks (Europe, UN, social security policy etc.). The Blocher supporters would be bored to death. And now, by taking aim at bilingual French-Swiss Joseph Deiss – the shortest-serving Federal Councillor who is up for re-election on 15 December and hence is easy prey – they are committing another political error.

Giornale del Popolo

The dramatic increase in voter percentage and SVP seats demonstrates that Switzerland has experienced an abrupt shift to the right. Will the new parliament now be characterised by the politics of economic liberalism, social insensitivity and isolationism?

The cantonal results at a glance

