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European Parties Elections
and Referendums Network

ELECTION BRIEFING No 39 EUROPE AND THE SWISS PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS OF 21 OCTOBER 2007

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Key points:

- *The election produced a fourth successive victory for the populist and anti European Swiss People's Party (SVP) which won 29% of the vote and 62 seats in the National Council. However, it suffered damaging reverses in the elections to the Council of States and then governmentally. The Social Democratic Party (SPS) was the loser, giving ground SVP and to environmentalists.*
- *Despite fragmenting, the mainstream Green Party (GPS) captured 19 seats and almost 10% of the vote, together with its first ever seats in the Council of States. A new centre right Liberal Green (GL) secession from the GPS, also did well in both houses.*
- *On the centre-right the Christian Democrats (CVP) went some way to halting their long decline though they still remained behind the fading Radicals (FDP) in the National Council. They did well in the Council of States House elections and went on to become kingmakers in the December governmental elections.*
- *The October campaign was both increasingly virulent and more directly concerned with government formation than in the past, and this led to an unexpected upheaval on 12-13 December when Blocher was ejected and replaced by a moderate SVP representative.*
- *Consensus politics are likely to become increasingly strained as a result of the elections, with two conceptions of democracy in conflict in what is a very divided country.*
- *The results mean that it remains most unlikely that Switzerland will apply for EU membership but, after 13 December, new conflicts with the Union and a retreat from Europeanization are less probable than at first seemed likely.*

Introduction

The 2007 elections were a tale of three surprises. Firstly, while on the eve of the elections there were no great expectations of change, since the People's Party surge seem to have peaked, reality was somewhat different. The Swiss People's Party (SVP) actually made striking new gains at the expense of the Social Democrats though not the Greens. A second

surprise was that, despite this, the Christian Democrats and the two Green parties did very well in the continuation of the elections for the Upper House, the Council of States, thanks to an anti Swiss People's Party groundswell amongst the electorate.

Then, thirdly, when most authorities expected, given the October results, that the existing government would be re-elected without difficulty, the Christian Democrats engineered a very Swiss coup to eject Blocher from the Federal Council. As a result, traditional consensus politics may well be reinforced. However, the country remains very divided and the next few years are likely to be difficult politically as the Swiss People's Party seeks to establish its new role as an 'opposition' party. Negotiations with the EU, notably over domestic tax strategies, which seemed, prior to December to be likely to become more tense, may now be slightly eased.

The Swiss and European Background

The initial elections took place against a background of economic revival and easing social tensions. And, if the political climate remained more adversarial than in the past, it was still more consensual and pacific than in most western countries. Indeed, it sometimes seemed as if the Swiss People's Party surge had run out of steam, despite, or because of, its perpetual campaigning. At cantonal level the party mixed gains and losses, the latter predominating in executive elections. Equally, the party failed to win all the votations in which it was involved. Opinion polls also showed it reaching a peak of 27% in 2007, but then falling until a further surge in September and October. And while Christoph Blocher, Minister of Justice & Police and the party's de facto leader, was always in the news, testing government collegiality to the limits, he remained one of the least popular Federal Councillors. Hence the belief that the party had reached its natural limits.

At the same time, the Christian Democrats (CVP) seemed to have turned the corner electorally. Conversely the Radicals (FDP) generally lost further ground. On the left the Social Democratic Party (SPS) saw its poll and electoral support slipping in 2007. The real gainers here, both in cantonal elections and polls were the Greens (GPS), and this despite losing their right wing in Zurich and St Gallen.

In policy terms domestic issues had been to the fore. Environmental concerns, tax and transport were much debated along with welfare provision. There was also much impassioned argument about the integration of foreigners with asylum policy becoming increasingly strict. In foreign policy the country, outside of the Swiss People's Party, came to terms with UN membership.

Europe remained a divisive issue. The attempt to join the European Economic Area had triggered off large scale populist resistance leading Blocher to be hailed as the man who prevented entry. This forced the government to freeze its application for EU entry and seek bilateral deals. This proved lengthy and difficult, with the first package of agreements being approved in May 2000 and only coming into effect in July 2002. And, while most of the second package of 2004 was uncontroversial, Swiss participation in the Schengen and Dublin Conventions was forcefully challenged. Nonetheless, the populace pragmatically upheld both

participation in June 2005 and the extension of free movement to the ten new member states in September 2005. Bilateralism was thus one of the successes of 2003-7 legislature.

In fact the country evolved in contradictory ways. On the one hand, the country continued to Europeanize, as with the consultations on adopting the *cassis de Dijon* principle. And the government sought to consolidate its relationship with the EU through a framework agreement or agricultural free trade arrangements. On the other hand the Swiss People's Party and its allies, profiting from the presence of Christoph Blocher in the government, continued to criticize and demand the withdrawal of the frozen application for entry. This forced the government, in its 2006 Report on Swiss-European relations, to downgrade entry from the main aim of government policy to merely one option among many. The government also took a robust line when the EU queried the tax policies of some smaller cantons which it believed are in conflict with the 1972 Free Trade Agreement.

The Initial Campaign

Although the coming of elections raised the temperature amongst the political class, the campaign was, to begin with, no more lively than usual even though it attracted an increased number of candidates and alliances. It focussed on questions of environment, immigration and social security. Thus in July the Social Democratic Party launched a 'social offensive' to highlight alleged threats to the welfare state. However, the Swiss People's Party tended to set the agenda.

The parties had clear aims: the Swiss People's Party sought another 100,000 electors, the Radicals to rebuild their credibility and the Christian Democrats to move towards recapturing the Federal Council seat lost in 2003. On the left the Social Democratic Party wanted to become once more the largest party, the Greens to get four to six more seats, with 10% of the vote, and the far left to get enough seats to allow it to create a formal grouping. And there were hopes that increased use of technology would raise the level of participation.

At first the campaign was relatively low key, and focussed on domestic policy issues, but things began to change from August onward. Where Europe was concerned the right wing parties remained hostile to the Union, refusing not merely entry but, in the case of the Lega, bilateralism and the free movement of labour as well. The Swiss People's Party made withdrawing the application to the EU, and this blocking entry, one of the three points of its 1 August contract with the nation. And it was cautious about any new or cohesion bilateral deals, despite also claiming to be the force which had forced the government to go down the bilateral road. However, Europe was a relatively minor theme, simply part of a general resistance to change, outside entanglements and, especially, immigration, much of which was blamed on the left. Indeed, it claimed that the Social Democratic Party, failing to convince at home, was seeking support in the EU, hence its stance over tax. Hence the Swiss People's Party was the sole party to resist the EU.

The centre right parties were largely satisfied with the bilaterals, although some were open to the idea of entry. The Christian Democrats remained committed to membership. And, if

the far left was hostile to the Union, the two mainstream parties declared themselves fully in favour of entry. Indeed the Greens wanted early membership negotiations because the EU was involved in the big questions of the day like climate, energy and migration. The Social Democrats saw entry as a means of both preserving sovereignty and preventing isolation and economic stagnation.⁶

From August to October

From August onwards, a new aggressiveness and unpleasantness entered the campaign. This had three roots: Swiss People's Party publicity; debates about whether Blocher had been abusing his ministerial powers (or was the victim of a plot); and the riot in Berne sparked off by a Swiss People's Party. All this raised the question of government formation in new and threatening ways, reinforcing the focus on personality and power rather than issues. It led to both a change in voting intentions and an increase in foreign interest.⁷

The Swiss People's Party relaunched its campaign with a 'contract with the people, signed on Swiss National Day and echoing the country's alleged foundation document of 1291. This committed the party to blocking EU entry, expelling foreign criminals and cutting taxes across the board. And, in a speech on 1 August, Blocher attacked the interference of international (and by implication EU) law in Swiss life. This was accompanied by provocative posters including one showing white sheep ejecting a black sheep from the Swiss flag. The black sheep was allegedly a symbol for foreign criminals who needed to be deported, along with their families. However, the broader racist implications were clear to many, including most outside observers. Voters were also encouraged by posters and adverts to vote Swiss People's Party in order to reinforce Blocher's position in government. Until late September he was at the centre of national advertising. He was portrayed as the defence against a litany of dangers: EU entry, higher spending, heavier taxes, welfare and other abuses and foreign criminality. At the same time the party ran controversial videos on its website, which did not have the consent of those featuring in it.

The second factor was also Blocher centred because in September, a Sub Committee of the Parliamentary Administration Commission published a draft report on the resignation in 2006 of the then Public Prosecutor Valentin Roschacher, alleging that Blocher had exceeded his powers in forcing him to stand down. This was answered by the Swiss People's Party, who claimed there was a plot by the Christian Democrats to bring Blocher down. Tempers became very frayed and positions hardened, as a special session of Parliament showed. However, some of the charges appear to be somewhat flimsy and it seems that the attack rather backfired, allowing Blocher to portray himself as a victim of an unscrupulous opposition.

This was intensified when, on 6 October, a Swiss People's Party march to the Bundesplatz in central Berne for a rally and fête was threatened by masked protestors, claiming to be the 'Black Sheep'. They prevented the marchers from reaching their objective, clashed

⁶ As argued in the party's new *European Platform*, approved in March 2006, and available at <http://www.sp-ps.ch/index.php?id=30&L=1>

⁷ This started with P.Vallely's 'Switzerland: Europe's new heart of darkness?', in *The Independent* of 17 September 2007 and led to unprecedented coverage in the British press and elsewhere.

with an overwhelmed police force and did much damage to property. This caused outrage and was turned to its advantage by the People's Party. For the Swiss People's Party it showed that it too was the innocent victim of an oppressive and violent left which denied it both the right of free speech and proper police protection.

All this reinforced the party's warnings of the harm likely if the left came to power and clearly influenced public opinion, making many people change their minds after opinion polls ceased to be taken. It also divided the government, with members swapping public accusations. This then focussed attention on what would happen to the government after the election. Talk of not re-electing Blocher, or of not nominating him as Vice-President (and therefore President in 2009) was given renewed emphasis. The Greens thus made it clear that they would not serve in a government of which he was a member. The position of the other Swiss People's Party Minister, Samuel Schmid was also queried while the Swiss People's Party in turn thought of a right wing government created by excluding the two Social Democrats.⁸ So thoughts of what might happen to government came to play an unusually large part in voters' calculations.

All this made for a charged and bitter atmosphere in the run up to election day. Other issues such as foreigners rather got crowded out by the concerns over Blocher and the make up of the next government, issues which rarely figured in previous election campaigns. However, UN reports on climate change helped to raise environmental concerns. Tax reform was also pushed by the last session of the old parliament and arguments over cantonal and other shifts to flat tax strategies. This linked in with EU relations, since the Union was still unhappy about cantonal tax rates.

Party Performance in the National Council Elections

The heated atmosphere seems to have increased turnout, to 48.9%, a level not reached since 1979. It marked a third successive rise since 1995 when it fell to its lowest ever rate of 42.2%. Within this, of course, there were considerable differences amongst the cantons. More significantly, the results came as a real surprise to most observers although, the Swiss People's Party's gains, at 2.3%, were within the normal margin of error for polling. Much of this was due to the last minute shift in opinion which came too late for pollsters.

As the table below shows there were five main outcomes to the National Council election: the renewed gains by the Swiss People's Party (coupled with the decline of the old far right), the poorish performance of the centre right parties, the heavy losses on the left and the good showing of both Green formations. Most significantly, the Swiss People's Party recorded its fourth successive gain, adding not merely 100,000 but 140,00 new votes, taking its total to virtually 700,00, a share of 29%. This completed both its move away from its fourth party status of the 1980s and its process of hoovering up the old far right, the Freedom Party (FPS) failing to register and the Swiss Democrats (SD) seeing their support halved and their one seat lost.

⁸*Basler Zeitung*, 19 October, p. 4 'SVP träumt vom Bundesrat ohne SP'

TABLE I : PARTY REPRESENTATION IN THE NATIONAL COUNCIL

	1983	1987	1991	1995	1999	2003	Seats	2007	Seats
<i>FPS</i>		1.4	5.1	0.4	0.9	0.2	-		
<i>SD</i>	2.9	2.5	3.4	3.1	1.8	1	1	0.5	-
<i>Lega</i>			1.4	0.9	0.9	0.4	1	0.5	1
<i>EDU</i>	0.4	0.9	1	1.3	1.3	1.3	2	1.3	1
<i>SVP</i>	11.1	11	11.9	14.9	22.5	23.3	55	29	62
<i>FDP</i>	23.3	22.9	21	20.2	19.9	17.3	36	15.6	31
<i>LPS</i>	2.8	2.7	3	2.7	2.3	2.3	4	1.8	4
<i>CVP</i>	20.2	19.6	18	16.8	15.9	14.4	28	14.6	31
<i>GL</i>								1.4	3
<i>EVP</i>	2.1	1.9	1.9	1.8	1.8	2.3	3	2.4	2
<i>LdU</i>	4	4.2	2.8	1.8	0.7	-			
<i>PCS</i>	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.4	1	0.4	1
<i>SPS</i>	22.8	18.4	18.5	21.8	22.5	23.3	52	19.5	43
<i>GPS</i>	1.9	4.9	6.1	5	5	7.4	13	9.6	20
<i>PvDA</i>	0.9	0.8	0.6	1.2	1	0.7	2	0.7	1
<i>PoCH</i>	3.3	3.7	0.2						
<i>PSA</i>	0.5	0.6	0.6						
<i>AVF</i>			1.3	1.5	0.3	0.5	1	0.2	-
<i>SolS</i>				0.2	0.5	0.5	1	0.4	1
<i>Other</i>	3.3	2.9	2.7	2.4	2.4	1.6	-	1.8	-

AVF = Alternative Left formations (various), CVP= Christian People's Party, DS= Swiss Democrats, EDU = Confederate Democratic Union, EVP= Evangelical People's Party, FDP = Radicals, FPS = Freedom Party, GPS = Swiss Green Party, Lega= Lega dei Ticinesi, LdU = Alliance of Independents, LPS = (Old) Liberal Party, GL= Liberal Greens, PCS = Christian Social Party, PoCH = Progressive Organizations of Switzerland, PSA = Autonomous Socialist Party, PvDA = (Communist) Labour Party, SolS = Swiss Solidarities, SPS = Swiss Social Democratic Party, and SVP = Swiss People's Party.

With 62 seats the Swiss People's Party is now the largest formation in Swiss political history since 1919 when PR was introduced. It lost no seats this time but gained in seven cantons, including in the Suisse Romande, thus leaving clear water between itself and the Social Democrats. As a result it is now the strongest party in twelve of the 26 cantons and half cantons,

its share of the vote rising as high as 43.6% in Schwyz. And, even if its support was no more than 8.3% in the Jura, it still won a seat there, breaking the seemingly impregnable Christian Democrats-Social Democratic Party duopoly. The implication of all this was that the Swiss People's Party could be within sight of becoming a majority party.

The Radicals failed to make anything like the impression they had hoped and recorded their worst ever result. They have lost a third of their voters since 1983 and are the largest party only in three smallish cantons. This time around they conceded seats in Schaffhausen, Solothurn, St Gallen, Vaud and Zurich without any compensating gains. As a result they are now only 1% ahead of the Christian Democrats compared to a 3-4% gap a few years ago. The latter may even have halted their long drawn out decline since, while they only added slightly to their percentage, they still won five seats, in Aargau, Solothurn, Vaud, Valais and Zurich. However they lost seats in both Obwald and their erstwhile fief of Jura while remaining leaders in four others. The LPS failed to strengthen its position despite the loose alliance with the Radicals.

The most striking losses were suffered by the left. The various far left formations lost half their seats and some of their vote. More significantly, the Social Democrats, in one of their worst performances since 1959, gained not a single seat while losing nine, three in Zurich and two in Berne, largely to Green formations. In Zurich they saw 6% of their vote disappear. And their share of the overall vote fell below 20% which is seen as a significant level. Only in Basle City, Glarus, Jura and Neuchâtel are they the largest party. This was a long way from their hopes of again becoming the biggest party.

There were two other victors. On the one hand, the mainstream Greens continued their recovery from their stagnation in the 1990s, and almost fulfilled their aims. They might well have passed the 10% mark, as well as gaining the extra seats, if it had not been for the emergence of the Liberal Greens in German speaking Switzerland. The Greens lost no seats, others than those which had gone by secession, and it won seats in Basle City, Berne, Geneva, Solothurn and Vaud. The secessionists also did well in their stronghold of Zurich and, in so doing, strengthened the centre. In Zurich they won as many votes as the EVP which itself lost ground. The Christian Socials (PCS) also failed to gain the extra seat for which they had hoped.

Overall, while the Social Democratic Party was rightly seen as the main loser, the balance between left and right as such did not change much. In 2003 the right claimed 63.3% of the electorate, in 2007 63.5%. However, the share of the minor centre parties went up from 4.2% to 6.1%, thanks in part to the Liberal Greens. More significantly, the left saw its share fall 2.1% to 30.4%. So imbalanced polarization continued to the advantage of the dynamic People's Party.

As a result of these changes 50 new members were elected while 23 sitting members were defeated. There was also an increase of nine in the number of women elected, largely on the left. Hence women now account for 29.5% of the Lower House. And, ironically the election also saw the first black man returned to Parliament. This was Ricardo Lumengo, an Angolan by birth, who was elected on the Social Democratic list in canton Berne.

Elections to the Council of States

Given the results in the Lower House, observers could be forgiven for expecting that the Upper House, which has exactly the same powers as the National Council, would go the same way. However, it is elected mainly on the French two round mode, most elections taking place at the same time as those for the Lower House although Zug elects its candidates the preceding autumn and the Inner Rhoden of Appenzell at its April Landesgemeinde. The exception is the canton of Jura where election is decided by PR. In 2007 the Social Democratic Party polled 32.8% and the Christian Democrats 29.9% of the total and thus gained the two seats.

In 2009 the two round system was, in a second surprise, to produce very different results from the National Council. In 2003, only four parties had been represented in the Upper House, the Christian Democrats having 14 seats, the Radicals 13, the Social Democrats 9 and the People's Party 8. On 21 October the elections produced 10 seats for the Christian Democrats, 9 for the Radicals, 6 for the Social Democrats, 7 for the Swiss People's Party and, for the first time, one for the Greens in Geneva.

In theory there should have been second rounds in eight cantons, but in three of these poorly placed candidates soon renounced. This brought the Christian Democrats two more seats, in Lucerne and Valais, and the Social Democrats gained one in Fribourg. This left five cantons to have second rounds, whether between two or, less commonly, three candidates. Neuchâtel and Vaud held theirs on 11 November, Ticino on 18 and both St Gallen and Zurich on 25 November. Here, in large, mainly urban cantons, there was a surprising countervailing tendency to that visible on 21 October.

In the first rerun, which like all save Zurich, was for both seats, while the Social Democrats lost a seat in Neuchâtel, thanks to the Swiss People's Party standing down in favour of a Radical, they held on to one in Vaud. And there too, the Greens surged upward to take a seat held by the Radicals since the foundation of the Confederation. The latter now have only one seat in the whole of the Suisse Romande although, like the Christian Democrats, they held on to their seat in the Ticino. In the former there was a pronounced anti-Swiss People's Party movement which left its candidates trailing badly.

This was also the case in Zurich where a Social Democrat stood down in favour of a Liberal Green despite being better placed in the first round, feeling was that the latter was more likely to pick up the votes from the centre right needed to defeat the Swiss People's Party. The strategy proved a winning one for anti Blocher forces as Veronica Diener swept past Party President Ueli Maurer even though he had come second in the first round. Here, and in St Gallen, virtually all the parties again rallied against the Swiss People's Party's controversial candidate. In the latter the sitting members were returned so that, overall, the Swiss People's Party finished one seat down on 2003. The final figures for the Council of States were Christian Democrats 15, Radicals 12, Social Democrats 9, People's Party 7, and the various Greens 3. The results both showed up the limits of the Swiss People's Party's potential and the growing appeal of Green formations and issues. This was to influence the formation of both groups and government.

Analysis and Implications

Even if it did not make comparable gains in the Upper House, and even if the general right/left balance did not greatly change, the overall initial results, despite later events, have to be regarded as a treble victory for Swiss People's Party. They showed that the party's growth had not come to an end, as had been assumed. Swiss electors are continuing to change and as many as 57% only made up their minds in the last three weeks of the campaign, 29% at the last moment.¹⁰ This suggests the riot in Berne, and the way it seemed to threaten Blocher's position, played a major role in their decisions. 18% of Swiss People's Party voters were new, a figure only exceeded by the Greens with 37%.

It also showed that politics had become truly national and not a congeries of cantonal elections. And in this new arena, the Swiss People's Party was truly the largest and most 'national' party. Moreover, its rivals were gravely wounded. So both the reasons for its victory and its implications are significant for Swiss politics.

The reasons for the Swiss People's Party's continuing progress are to be found in its machinery, its marketing and its social appeal. It is clearly the best managed and resourced of all Swiss parties, with expert committees and specialized support services. This is partly because it is also the only hierarchically organized party, run centrally by its Zurich branch, and notably by a small team round Blocher. This, which now involves a number of young, able and hardline aides, insists on strict adherence to party lines though this is rarely needed, such is the commitment of its large membership. In resource terms, although the size and origin of party funds are somewhat obscure, it is clearly much better financed than most. Centrally, it may have spent up to 20 million CHF in 2007, plus whatever cantonal parties spent.

In any case it is the best electoral machine in the country, adept at simple but effective and unscrupulous marketing. And this is appreciated by the electorate. 17% of those quizzed by the GfS gave its style as a reason for voting for it, following behind personality (23%) and party stances (21%). Only the Christian Democrats came near this with 15% of its supporters being motivated by its style. The Christian democrats were also the only other party to receive a boost from personality, the so called 'Leuthard effect'. But this is far exceeded by Blocher's charisma and the way the media is fascinated with him, so that even criticism is helpful. In fact 11% of Swiss People's Party voters chose the party in order to support him in government, when he came under attack, verbally from other politicians and, more concretely, from the 'Black Sheep' rioters. This made the elections much more executive related than is normally the case. And the violence in Berne seemed to justify party claims that the left was the villain of the piece, engaged in a plot against its leadership, claims which played very well in the last weeks of the campaign.

¹⁰ Figures from the GfS Electoral Report: 'Konzentrat Recht, Sammlung in der Mitte, Umgruppierung Links' available at http://www.gfsbern.ch/pub/Bericht_Wahltagsbefragung_2007.pdf, especially pp. 3, 16 & 21 for the date of voters' decisions. Cf also the Federal Statistical Office analysis Elections au Conseil national de 2007: L'évolution du paysage politique depuis 1971 available at <http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/fr/index/themen/17/22/publ.html?publicationID=2979>

Thirdly, it is able to rely on social support across Switzerland, and not just in German speaking Switzerland. This usually comes from losers from globalization, in the country or small and medium towns, and often deriving from the elderly, small businessmen and employees. They are very open to its combination of cries of alarm about today and its evocation of happier past times. This was not just a simple matter of racism though some authorities think the party has now crossed the line from mere populism.¹² Certainly the party monopolized the immigration issue and has played up the differences between newcomers and 'real' Swiss society, now emphasizing the Islamic element amongst the former. However, the party is best regarded as nationalist, conservative and populist rather than an out and out racialist formation such as the Front National.¹³ As Swiss People's Party MP Yvan Perrin said, people who dislike the EU, want lower taxes and who are worried about crime voted for them.

Its own strengths were, moreover, aided by the problems of the other parties. For while the Christian Democrats were holding their own until the outbreak of the Roschacher affair, this reflected badly on them. The Greens were on the upgrade, even though some of their potential support, notably in Zurich, was siphoned off by the new Liberal Green party. Concerns about climate change were clearly crucial here. The other parties were in an even worse state. Not merely could they not match the resources and dynamism of the Swiss People's Party but they suffered from two other problems. On the one hand, so much of their energy had to be devoted to countering Swiss People's Party initiatives that they often succeeded only in giving the latter more publicity.

On the other hand, they also had inherent weaknesses of their own. The Radicals have, for instance, failed to develop an effective remedial strategy after the losses in 2003, still clinging to the idea that they are the establishment and business party. Moreover, their liaisons with the Swiss People's Party were a two edged weapon, winning votes in some places but losing them in Vaud and Zurich. They will have to decide whether to move back towards the centre. If the reforming element gain from the defeat, this would be more likely. And both Radicals and Old Liberals, will have to decide to make something more meaningful of their present loose alliance.

The Social Democrats were even more divided, between the largely French speaking trade union wing, and the more moderate wing, often German speaking. Clashes between the two exploded immediately after the elections with the left accusing the latter of being insufficiently combative and of unsuccessfully relying on an appeal to middle class 'bobos'. The latter felt that the left was still stuck in the 1968 era. The party also found it hard both to profile itself on the environment and to take seriously ordinary peoples' concerns about crime. It looks as if the union linked left wing of the party is likely to take over the party which could prevent a move to the centre. The Greens may also have to choose between their left wing and pragmatic wings, especially in view of the challenge from the Liberal Greens.

All this intensifies the often overlooked changes in party architecture and political style which started in the early 1990s, partly in line with wider European trends. This is likely to affect

¹² Cf J.Jamin quoted in «Certains tabous européens nourrissent le populisme» *Le Temps* 28 November 2007

¹³H. Simonian, 'How Switzerland's far right pulled further ahead' *Financial Times*, 30 October 2007, p. 16

domestic politics, as well as government formation and European policy. Domestically, parties face a real challenge in modernizing themselves in the required way: centralizing, simplifying and professionalizing and personalizing their campaigning. Equally they will need to defend the present checks and balances more effectively.

And, while the Radicals' leadership is largely staying put, that of the Social Democratic Party immediately stood down. That of the Greens is required to retire next spring. But personnel changes may not lead to organizational and programmatic effectiveness. Ironically the Swiss People's Party is also going to lose its President and Secretary General who have decided to retire in January.

One very significant factor was the way in which the parliamentary groups were reformed for the 48th legislature. This time all 246 MPs initially committed themselves to a group, so that there were only five in the new parliament, the Swiss People's Party, the Radical/Liberals, the Social Democrats, the Greens and, most importantly, a new stronger centre formation, bringing together the Christian Democrats, Liberal Greens and Evangelicals. This gave it a larger share of committee seats, something the Greens also managed by recruiting other outliers. This restructuring was to be important in the final stage of the electoral process.

Government Formation

Despite the talk of governmental shifts which had so marked the last days of the campaign, after the event there was much less expectation of change even if some Greens still talked of excluding Blocher from the government. This was despite Maurer's election night suggestion that the three oldest members of the Federal Council should stand down, implying a willingness to see the back of Samuel Schmid. Right up to the eve of the elections on 12 December most observers did not expect changes in government. The price of expelling him after 21 October, which seen as something of a plebiscite on him, seemed to be far too high. Moreover, the status quo was supported by 39% of those questioned in the exit poll far more than supported other solutions.

In late November, because since nobody else would, the Greens put up its own candidate for the Federal Council, mainly to protest against the Blocherite line. Like the Social Democrats they made it clear they would never vote for Blocher. The Swiss People's Party's answer was to threaten to leave government for opposition if their sitting candidates were not returned. And it made support for other candidates conditional on their parties voting for its ministers.

Events were, however, to take a third surprising turn. Thus on the eve of the elections the Christian Democrat based group announced that it would not seek a second seat on the Federal Council, even though it felt its size justified this. It would, however, look to take a seat from the Radicals when the next vacancy arose. In the meantime, it announced that, while it did not contest the Swiss People's Party's right to two Ministers, and would not support the Green candidate, it would not vote for Blocher. This suggested over half the Assembly would stand aloof when his election came round, suggesting he would get in by default. Almost over the evening and night of Tuesday 11 December the group, in alliance with the left, found a more suitable, and less abrasive, Swiss People's Party candidate in Mrs Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf, Widmer Schlumpf, Finance Director of Canton Graubünden and the daughter of a former Swiss People's Party Bundesrat. Her

name had earlier been floated as a possible third Swiss People's Party Minister. It was felt she would accept nomination even though this meant a breach with her party.

On the morning of Wednesday 12 December the Swiss People's Party, while refusing to vote for the two Social Democratic Party Ministers, who were still endorsed easily enough, successfully supported both the senior Radical and its own Defence Minister, Samuel Schmid. Before it came to Blocher's turn, the Greens withdrew their candidate and threw their weight behind Widmer-Schlumpf. As a result she finished ahead of Blocher although without an absolute majority. This was achieved at a second ballot, by 125-115, leaving the left demonstratively jubilant, and the Swiss People's Party shell-shocked. The two remaining Ministers were then re-elected, albeit without Swiss People's Party votes in the case of the Christian Democrats's Doris Leuthard. And the latter, which emerged as the kingmaker, scored a further victory in securing the election of its candidate as Chancellor, the head of the Civil Service.

However, it was not clear whether Mrs Widmer-Schlumpf would accept what was something of a poisoned chalice. It was not till the Thursday morning, after a brief period of reflection, that she formally accepted the post. She did this in order to stop the Swiss People's Party losing its second seat. But the Swiss People's Party leaders claimed there was now a centre-left government, though in fact the new Minister is notably right wing in her views. It also made it clear both that it was going into opposition and that the two Swiss People's Party Ministers were excluded from the Parliamentary group although not from the party. And Blocher in a bad tempered, and badly received speech, made it clear he would stay in politics, probably as President of the Swiss People's Party.

His dismissal was due both to the way the Swiss People's Party tried to dictate choices to Parliament and to his own role. Many MPs felt that he had been provocative, refusing to obey the rules and generally acting more as a party leader than a collegial minister, thus undermining Swiss institutions. In a way his defeat was the revenge of Parliament and traditional Swiss consensus democracy over a fiercely partisan belief in the divine right of party.

Blocher's exclusion suggests that in future the Federal Council will be a more harmonious place than it has been. However, it will be under pressure, firstly because two of its members will have difficulty in getting parliamentary support from the Swiss People's Party. Secondly, there are likely to be incessant public denunciations of a government allegedly held hostage by the left. Finally, there will be continuing tension about what may happen when sitting Ministers stand down, assuming that they do so over the next four years.

More generally, it is unclear what the Swiss People's Party's 'opposition' role will involve. Initial extremist threats gave way to a commitment to be constructive, especially when it became clear that many in the party were unhappy about some of the initial threats. The party has thus withdrawn from talk of blocking all legislation not in its programme. What the future is likely to see is yet more aggressive perpetual media based campaigning, targeted on the government; more use of direct democracy; and boycotts of some forms of public collaboration. This is likely to mean more strife in political life but it may not greatly change policy. Some authorities believe this will change the whole system others suspect that the party's bluff has been called since opposition does not fit easily into Swiss politics.

Much will depend, on the one hand, on whether public opinion will calm down or remain bitterly polarized. On the other, the parties have to solve their own problems: the Radicals to decide whether to remain the Swiss People's Party's key allies, the Christian Democrats to defend their courageous new centrism and the two left wing parties to overcome their internal divisions. Finally the Swiss People's Party will have to preserve its own unity and to convince the public that its hostility to the new Ministers is not just unSwiss sour grapes. The upcoming changes in leadership may give some indication of how things will work out, even though Blocher will not retake the Presidency of the Swiss People's Party. Toni Brunner now seems the likely candidate.

The Future of Swiss European Policy

Europe is likely to remain a divisive issue at the heart of Swiss politics. The arrival of Mrs Widmer-Schlumpf is unlikely to spark a reactivation of the 1992 application. Her background, as a Finance Director and leader of a cantonal revolt against central fiscal proposals, suggests she will be implacable on the tax issue. Nor is she likely to persuade the Federal Council to give way to the hardliners and formally withdraw the application for entry. To this extent relations the EU could be easier than seemed likely in late October.

However, the Swiss People's Party and AUNS/ASIN [Action for an Independent and Neutral Switzerland] will continue to press for a detailed analysis of the effects of existing rights to free movement, and a renegotiation of the terms of its membership of the EU's MEDIA programme. Hence there will be much resistance to extending free movement and cohesion policies to Bulgaria and Romania. Indeed the two sides have already found it hard to agree the modalities of this. And there is a very strong likelihood of a challenge to the whole system in 2009 when the agreements come up for review.

Similarly the Swiss People's Party has echoed Blocher's complaints about the way that European law was undermining popular democratic rights. This has led the party to reject any agricultural free trade deal with the Union. It has also sworn to uphold fiscal competition and banking secrecy, something which will lead to further opposition to any concessions where cantonal tax rights are concerned. While the EU has given up the idea of formal negotiations on these, it is keen on getting action and is willing to dialogue. A first meeting took place on 12 November and more are expected in January.

The real question is how far the party will shift its line on bilateralism and how far it will be able to push this. The government has just issued a policy statement on this, highlighting the development of existing bilateral deals, the contribution to enlargement and the exploration of new bilateral arrangements.¹⁴ And EconomieSuisse, the employers' organization, has argued that the elections have strengthened bilateralism and is pressing the Swiss People's Party to support it in future. In fact talks have already started on a bilateral deal which would allow Switzerland to enter the EU electricity market, and a defeat on this would be a real complication. Equally there may have to be new negotiations on Swiss participation in the MEDIA programme because this would

¹⁴ Politique européenne de la Suisse – prochaines étapes, of 22 November 2007 available in pdf format through <http://www.europa.admin.ch/index.html?lang=fr>

involve opening Swiss TV etc to hitherto rejected advertising on religion or alcohol. The Swiss People's Party is very critical of the existing proposals as it is of the adoption of an EU directive on the recognition of professional qualifications.

So, while Simonian has suggested that the relative success of bilateralism may force the Swiss People's Party to put more stress on immigration at the expense of Europe, the latter issue will not go away. And any increase in free movement generated by the EU is likely to play into the Swiss People's Party's hands, allowing it to play on its successful themes of threats to cultural and national identity. Friction over tax policy, which also menaces federalism, will do much the same. As one Swiss People's Party leader said, the October elections mean that the idea of joining the EU should now disappear from the public mind. The government may well tailor its policies to meet Swiss People's Party fears even though party is in a weaker position to influence collective government policy than before 13 December.

Europeanization is therefore likely to continue. Thus the country is already applying EU rules on air security and is under pressure to apply EU data transmission provisions. And, much to the annoyance of some, the Union is pressing for the Swiss to allow the transport of live animals across its borders, something presently banned. Attempts may also be made to pursue the bilateral road.

Nonetheless, Eurosceptic, and indeed Europhobic, discourse will continue even if electoral pragmatism and the now reinforced checks and balances of the system prevent this having a dramatic impact. In this, ironically, the Swiss People's Party's stances and style are reminiscent of wider Europe trends towards conservative, isolationist and anti-immigration stances. The former are unlikely, however, to help the Swiss image abroad since the October election campaign made some outsiders describe the country as a model to be avoided, not followed. However, the third surprise showed that traditional views of Swiss democracy are still surprisingly strong.

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