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Cover

Twilight at the Houses of Parliament: as one legislative term closes, the next begins. Will it bring a rosy new dawn for Switzerland? Bernese photographer Eduard Rieben shot the cover photo and the photos accompanying the election articles in this issue.

I M P R E S S U M

Swiss Review, the magazine for the Swiss Abroad, is in its 26th year of issue and is published in German, French, Italian, English and Spanish in more than 20 regional editions. It has a total circulation of over 355,000. Regional news appears four times a year.

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Everything is ready for 24 October, the day on which the last parliamentary elections of this century will be held. An important task awaits the electorate: the 1999–2003 legislative period looks set to be a decisive era for Switzerland.

Over the next four years the country must crystallise its relationship with Europe (negotiations with the EU) and the world (UNO adhesion).

The elections take place at a time when tensions have built up in our country. The recent rejection of the maternity insurance proposal, which re-opened the Rösti pit, is indicative of the climate. To plumb the situation within the cantons, this double issue presents an overview of the seven major regions of Switzerland. While the parliamentary elections are a national event, the sum of cantonal results will define the political map of the forthcoming legislature.

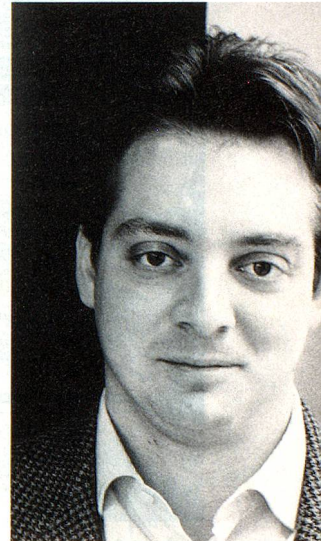
At the same time we have not lost sight of the national view. The first four pages of this issue are devoted to an analysis of the political trends at national level, and the official party responses to our survey. It is not only regional factors that are causing current tensions; even within the individual parties there is disagreement on certain matters. Such differences of opinion arise from issues which "Swiss Review" has addressed in the run-up to the federal elections: international organisations (UNO, EU), social unity, fiscal policy, energy, asylum policy and – in this edition – security policy.

The internal party splits are evident. Given the increasingly po-

larised nature of the political environment, centre parties in particular need to find an identity. Often the cantonal chapters hold an opposite view from the mother party. Here again the main bone of contention is maternity insurance, which split the FDP, as well as issues on Europe and abortion, which caused a rift in the CVP.

Europe and security policy are another two causes of tension within the SVP, particularly between the Bernese and Zurich sections. Given the results of the Zurich and Lucerne cantonal elections, Christoph Blocher's party appears to have stolen the lead on centre parties, not least due to its tough stand on asylum issues. Finally, recent discussions on the war in Kosovo have led to disagreement among the Social Democrats. Even if debates and differences of opinion within the parties play an important part in defining values, we are currently faced with a political landscape dominated by the quest for a new position.

What will be the role played by Swiss Abroad? Pierre-Alain Bolomey, National Council candidate for the Fifth Switzerland, states his position in this issue. A look at the international chapters of the various parties provides an additional insight into the importance accorded our compatriots abroad.



Dario Ballanti

Dario Ballanti