Council of States : SVP offensive fails

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seeks solutions acceptable to a majority of the people. One example is an issue that Switzerland will focus on intensively over the coming years: the BDP and Green Liberals are unconditionally committed to the bilateral agreements with the EU and, above all, to the free movement of persons – accomplishments that EU opponents on the right and some advocates of EU accession on the left call into question.

In the past, the FDP and CVP were the political forces that put their stamp on legislation with their solution-oriented, pragmatic policies, sometimes cooperating with the left and sometimes with the right. Both parties made up for their numerical inferiority in the National Council with their dominance in the Council of States. Together with direct democracy, the characteristics of the Swiss bicameral system ensure that radical proposals are hardly ever adopted.

Now, the BDP and Green Liberals also belong to this consensus-oriented centre, which has become broader overall. In combination with the weakening of the poles, this strengthening of the centre should ensure more issue-based politics. However, at the same time the centre is at risk of fragmenting, which may make the search for solutions more difficult. Aside from personal animosity between the party representatives, different interests and priorities exist, which will be reflected in the Federal Council elections on 14 December (see page 16).

There are issues for which common solutions are not possible because differences on policy are so great. These include nu-

clear power, on which the FDP holds a different view to the CVP, BDP and Green Liberals, which all favour withdrawal. A centre-left alliance, which has been strengthened overall by the elections, will have a major bearing on this issue over the coming four years. In addition to energy policy, Europe, old-age pension provision and the future of the financial centre will be among the big issues of the forthcoming legislature. Healthcare will also remain a key project. Foreigners and immigration will continue to be topical, not least because of the SVP's popular initiative in this area. It remains to be seen whether majority support can be achieved for these issues, and in what form.

The political poles retain the power to block proposals
In light of the ongoing international financial and economic crises, the new Parliament will have to act quickly to deal with the strength of the Swiss franc and the problems this is causing many export companies. The election results suggest that the electorate will seek concrete, implementable solutions in this difficult situation rather than back parties with absolute demands. The trend towards party-political polarisation, which had been ongoing since the 1990s, has come to a halt. The bottom line is that both the left-green camp and the SVP were losers on 23 October. However, both political factions continue to hold around 60 National Council seats each and can block projects together, albeit for different reasons. This occurred during the previous legislature

A look at the National Council chamber: the new distribution of seats with numerous centre parties will not make government easy.

with the planned reform of the old-age pension system.

The appeal of new, fresh parties
The question remains as to why two traditional parties, the FDP and CVP, are continuing to decline while the "new centre" gains ground. Certain shifts, such as from the FDP to the Green Liberals, can be explained by environmental reasons. But overall the differences are negligible. In some cantons the BDP is a kind of protestant

CVP, whereas in others it can hardly be differentiated from the FDP in terms of policy. The Green Liberals previously belonged to the CVP faction without any significant conflicts arising. So, there can be only one conclusion: the winning parties are appealing particularly because they are new and fresh.

Together, the BDP and Green Liberals have almost an 11% share of the vote. That is significant, yet their success should be put into perspective. These parties started virtually from zero, which makes the gains appear large. Their success is also partially explained by bold list combinations. New parties that achieve astonishing short-term success have often appeared in Switzerland. For example, the Alliance of Independents (Landesring der Unabhängigen) won more than a 9% share of the vote and 16 seats in 1967 – in the same area as the BDP and, above all, the Green Liberals today.

The Green Liberals and BDP are not yet established parties. They are still developing structures and agendas. In some cases, they will be sending representatives with little or no political experience to Parliament. The next election and the one after that will show whether they can set themselves apart from the competition over the long term and consolidate or even build on their success.

Council of States: SVP offensive fails
Only 27 of 46 Council of States seats were decided in the first round. However, it has already become apparent that the Swiss People's Party is unlikely to be able to increase its number of seats.
By René Lenzin

The Swiss People's Party (SVP) put forward its top candidates to contest the seats on the Council of States, including former Federal Councillor Christoph Blocher in Zurich, faction leader Caspar Baader in Baselland, Party President Toni Brunner in St. Gallen and former Federal Council candidate Jean-François Rime in Fribourg. None of the four was successful. Baader and Rime have been eliminated, while Blocher and Brunner must enter the second round of voting. As the SVP has lost its seat in Grisons and is also in danger of losing the one in Aargau, it may actually end up with fewer seats in the smaller chamber than in the previous legislature.

The SVP refused to concede it had failed. Party officials said that greater presence in the Council of States was a long-term project. However, the fact remains that the party struggles to get its candidates elected in majority elections based on personality.

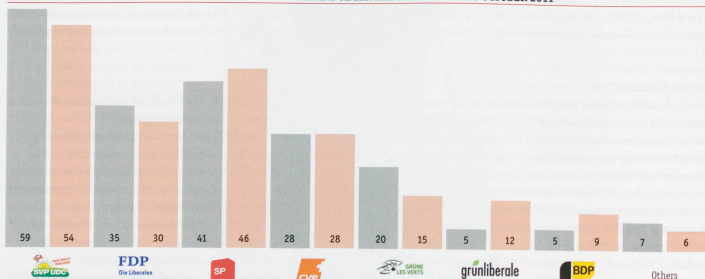**Second round of voting in 13 cantons**
The final result of the Council of States elections and therefore the exact distribution of power in Parliament will not be known until 4 December when the second round will have taken place in Solothurn. A second round will be held in 13 cantons in all between 6 November and 4 December, when the electorate will decide on 19 of the 46 seats. This additional round is required because the Council of States election is based

on a majority system rather than proportional representation, except in the cantons of Jura and Neuchâtel. Candidates have to win over half of all votes cast to be elected in the first round of voting. The hurdle of achieving an absolute majority is not removed until the second round.

Even before the second round of voting, it is evident that the Social Democratic Party (SP) is one of the winners in the Council of States election. They have already won eight seats, which is more than any other party. Former National Council President Pascale Bruderer helped the SP to break the conservative dominance over Aargau and to take a Council of States seat there for the first time in 60 years. As the SP looks set to hold its seat in the canton of Vaud, it should win nine seats in the smaller chamber.

The Christian Democratic People's Party (CVP) will win 12 to 15 seats, and the FDP. The Liberals 10 to 13. Together the two parties are likely to continue to make up the majority. The CVP and FDP often represent the same positions, particularly on the issues of finance, economics and social policy. The Greens and Green Liberals could win up to five seats. A centre-left majority will therefore continue to exist in the Council of States, above all on family and energy policy. The definitive make-up of the smaller chamber may also have a major impact on the complete re-election of the Federal Council on 14 December (see page 16).

DISTRIBUTION OF SEATS IN THE NATIONAL COUNCIL BEFORE AND AFTER THE ELECTION ON 23 OCTOBER 2011

SVP UDC	FDP Die Liberalen	SP	CVP	GRÜNE LES VERTS	grünliberale	BDP	Others
59 54	35 30	41 46	28 28	20 15	5 12	5 9	7 6

DISTRIBUTION OF SEATS IN THE COUNCIL OF STATES BEFORE THE ELECTION ON 23 OCTOBER 2011

SVP UDC	FDP Die Liberalen	SP	CVP	GRÜNE LES VERTS	grünliberale	BDP	Others
7	12	8	16	2	0	1	0