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The struggle over concordance

A freshly elected Parliament, a new Federal Council, new faces and new political forces – so does this also mean a new beginning? In the six weeks between the parliamentary elections on 23 October 2011 and the Federal Council election, endless discussions took place on various bodies about the right composition of the Swiss government. The notion of concordance was at the heart of all these talks. The debate became so intense that it seemed as though the future of Switzerland depended solely on the system of concordance, also known as the magic formula. This principle of power distribution among the four strongest parties in the Federal Council according to their number of seats in Parliament, which the FDP, The Liberals and the Swiss People's Party (SVP) wanted to uphold, was ultimately rejected by the Federal Assembly (report on page 14).

However, the magic formula's power distribution principle is certainly no guarantee of concordance or successful government. The word "concordance" contains the Latin terms *con* (with) and *cor* (heart). *Concordare* means "to reach agreement". A body committed to concordance in this sense of the word requires people who act together in heart and mind as far as possible, and who are willing and able to cooperate with their political adversaries in the interests of the common good. The search for widespread majority support and the involvement of minorities in the decision-making process are fundamental to the success of this form of government.

The vast majority of Swiss people clearly favour this type of government. A Federal Council at loggerheads and dominated by mistrust and machinations, as we have seen in the past, would be disastrous in light of the financial and economic crises and the challenges that lie ahead in global politics over the coming years.



In view of this situation, it is questionable whether it was a wise decision to deny the Swiss People's Party (SVP), which still has the largest number of votes, the second seat on the Federal Council that it is entitled to under the magic formula or mathematically under the concordance system. Only time will tell. The SVP clearly contributed to Parliament's refusal to grant it a second Federal Council seat with its unsuccessful candidate selection and

its approach to the Federal Council election on 14 December, which was driven by anger and vengeance. If the SVP, which has been humiliated for a second time, following the de-selection of Christoph Blocher in 2007, now focuses on a policy of opposition and obstruction, government will become a difficult task. This will certainly not be in the best interests of the nation, and the new beginning will be destined to fail.

Besides politics in Berne, the second major issue this edition of "Swiss Review" focuses on is "intangible cultural heritage". This awkward and not immediately transparent term has been coined by UNESCO. It refers to traditions practised worldwide, such as Mongolian folk songs with circular breathing, yodelling, fondue and Malian wisdom rites. The article on well-known and less familiar Swiss traditions on page 8 contains plenty of surprises.

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BARBARA ENGEL

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Echo

Cover photo: As she herself says, Christine Lauterburg's roots are in alpine folk music. The 56-year-old from Berne is also called a "techno yodeller". Her unconventional interpretations constantly meet with disapproval from traditionalists. Photo: donated