Switzerland in great doubt, will soon renew its political institutions

From **Corinne Deloy**

translated by Helen Levy

ANALYSIS
1 month before the poll

The Swiss are being called to ballot on 23rd October next to renew their parliament i.e. 200 members of the National Council and the 46 members of the Council of States. 3,472 people including 32.6% of whom are women are standing in the National Council elections i.e. +12.4% in comparison with the previous elections on 21st October 2007 and 149 people are standing for a seat on the Council of States (136, 4 years ago).

Switzerland is governed according to a consensus. The main political parties form a government together; the national consensus is created thereby reducing the danger of protest by way of referendum, in a country where democracy is direct. Over the last few years the Swiss model has been put to the test, since participation in government does not guarantee greater consensus. Indeed the party with one seat on the Federal Council, the Swiss People's Party (UDC/SVP) plays the role of opposition and at the same time desires to win a second seat. Hence over the last four years all of the government parties have supported the Federal Council's position in only two popular votes out of 25 (abolition of the general people's initiative and special funding for air transport). The Socialist Party (PSS/SPS) has opposed the Federal Council 13 times and the UDC/SVP 12. This party, which has gained ground in nearly all of the cantons over the last four years, has increasing influence over policy content.

Two electoral campaigns in one

The integration of foreigners and more widely, immigration, are central themes in the electoral campaign but the international economic crisis also occupies a major place in ongoing debates. Although the economy of their country is bearing up well, the Swiss share the same concern as other Europeans about their future in a globalised world. Finally environmental issues are equally important in the campaign. "This is new. There is now a clear story behind the campaign. The influence of external events has replaced traditional issues. The campaign is drawing away from the usual framework and is turning into a national debate," analyses Claude Longchamp, director of the opinion institute gfs.berne.

On 7th September last, Micheline Calmy-Rey (PSS/SPS), the present president of the Helvetic Confederation and Foreign Minister announced that she was quitting her position as Federal Councillor at the end of her mandate in December.

The Federal Council, comprising seven members, elected for four years by Parliament, exercises executive power in Switzerland. For many years it has been customary that outgoing candidates are re-elected to their post, at least as long they agreed to taking up their position. Until 2003 the distribution of seats on the council was governed by the magic formula (2-2-2-1), i.e. 2 seats for the Free Democratic Party (PRD/FDP), 2 for the Christian Democratic People's Party (PDC/CVP), 2 for the PSS/SPS and 1 for the UDC/SVP. In that year the Federal Councillor Ruth Metzler-Arnold (PDC/CVP) was not re-elected – this was the first time that this had happened in Switzerland since 1872 - and her seat went to Christoph Blocher (UDC/SVP). After the federal elections of 21st October 2007, Samuel Schmid (UDC/SVP) and Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf (UDC/SVP), who replaced Christoph Blocher, not re-elected to his post – were banished from their party. They then founded the Conservative Democratic Party with other dissident party members (PDB). In 2009, Samuel Schmid resigned from office as Federal Councillor and was replaced by Üli Maurer (UDC/SVP).

To date the Federal Council comprises five parties: the Free Democratic Party (2 seats), the Socialist Party (2 seats), the Christian Democratic Party (1seat), the Swiss People's Party (1seat) and the

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Conservative Democratic Party (1 seat). The latter has five seats in the Federal Assembly and 1 seat on the Council of States.

In addition to the campaign to renew parliament, the successor to the present president of the Helvetic Confederation has to be chosen. For the very first time the result of the federal elections will directly affect the future composition of the Federal Council, a situation which brings Bern closer to other democracies of Europe.

Another sign of Switzerland's metamorphosis is that the Swiss political landscape has polarised and the electorate is extremely dispersed. The country's legendary consensus and stability are now being challenged. Switzerland has three political groups of equal strength: the nationalist right, the centre-right and the ecologist, socialist left. On the centre-right the Free Democratic Party and the Christian Democratic Party, united for the last 70 years with the liberals in the Entente Bourgeoise, are struggling and are somewhat paralysed because they are divided. Both have lost a great number of voters, who have joined the ranks of the Swiss People's Party, the Conservative Democratic Party and even the Liberal Green Party (GLP/VL). The left is more united, but the Socialist Party is still threatened by the Greens, who have had to reposition in the wake of the departure of some of their members.

As across all of Europe the government parties are the first to be criticised and all the more harshly in these times of crisis. Accused of not listening to the population's concerns or for not having known how to respond, they have been more affected by the electorate's discontent than the protest parties. The populists of the UDC/SVP are gaining ground in the ballot box, and every year they become increasingly radical.

Just one month before the federal elections the Free Democratic Party, the Socialist Party and the Christian Democratic Party want to retain their seats on the Federal Council – the Swiss People's Party wants to win two and the Greens hope to win their first and the Conservative Democratic Party would also like to retain its seat.

The UDC/SVP is claiming Micheline Calmy-Rey's seat. "In line with the principle of "consensus" the Swiss People's Party has the right to have two seats on the Federal Council. It is likely that after the federal elections, the Socialist Party will also have the right to two seats. If the right of the Swiss People's Party to have two seats is acknowledged then we shall have no reason to attempt to take Micheline Calmy-Rey's seat," indicated Toni Brunner, chair of the UDC/SVP. Socialist Party Chair, Christian Levrat has acknowledged the UDC/SVP's right to have two federal councillors based on the rule whereby the three leading parties have the right to two seats. In this case the UDC/SVP may win the seat of Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf (PBD). If the populist party wins a second seat it may put forward Freiburger Jean-François Rime.

Micheline Calmy-Rey's replacement will be appointed on 14th December next.

The Swiss Political System

The Swiss system is qualified as being perfect bicameralism: the two chambers of Parliament – the National Council and the Council of State – have the same competences. The position of MP is not a profession in Switzerland; MPs undertake their mandate for which they receive compensation, alongside a professional activity.

The National Council represents the people and comprises 200 members elected every four years according to a proportional system. Each of the country's 26 cantons elects a number of MPs proportional to its population. The canton of Zurich has 34 MPs, the cantons of Appenzell Inner Rhodes, Appenzell Ausser Rhodes, Glaris, Nidwald and Obwald, one each.

The Council of States represents the cantons and comprises 46 members elected every four years according to a majority system (a relative majority in the canton of Geneva and an absolute majority in Vaud) except in the canton of Jura (proportional vote). The cantons each have 2 seats in the Council of States (except for the half cantons of Obwald, Nidwald, Basel-Stadt, Basel-Landschaft, Appenzell Ausser Rhodes and Appenzell Inner Rhodes which only have one seat each). A second round of voting is organised in the cantons electing their councillors by an absolute majority if no candidate wins the necessary number of votes in the first round. The second round takes place three weeks later; this time it will be on 13th November.

12 political parties are represented in the outgoing National Council:

– the Swiss People's Party (UDC/SVP), chaired by Toni Brunner, is the successor to the Farmers, Traders and Independents' Party (BGB). A populist rightwing party and the leading political movement since the federal elections on 24th October 1999; it has 62 seats;

– the Socialist Party (PSS/SPS), led by Christian Levrat, has 43 MPs;

– the Free Democratic Party (PRD/FDP) has always been represented on the National Council where it held all of the seats until 1891. Led by Fulvio Pelli it has experienced constant decline since 1983 and has 31 seats;

– the Christian Democratic Party (PDC/CVP), formerly the Conservative Catholic Party is the political body of the Swiss Catholics. Positioned on the centre-right of the political scale, it is led by Christophe Darbellay; it has been declining since the 1980's and has 31 seats;

– the Ecologist Party-Greens (PES/GPS), was formed in the wake of the ecologist movements which emerged in the 1970's and is led by Uli Leuenberger with 20 seats;

– the Liberal Party (PLS/LPS), was founded in 1913 and is led by Pierre Weiss, it rallies the liberal right. It has 4 seats;

– the Greens-Liberal Party (GLP/VL), founded in 2007 by Martin Bäumle, former member of the Greens, of which he is still the leader; it has 3 MPs;

– the Evangelical Party (PEV/EVP), a Christian party led by Heiner Studer; it has 2 seats;

– the Federal Democratic Union (UDF/EDU), a conservative party founded in 1975, led by Hans Moser with 1 seat;

– the Swiss Party of Labour (PST/PdA), a far left party which succeeded the Communist Party that was banned in 1940; it has 1 seat;

– the Ticino League (LEGA), a rightwing protest movement, founded in 1991 and led by Giuliano Bignasca; it has 1 seat;

– the Christian Social Party (PCS/CSP), founded in 1997 and successor to the 19th century Christian Social Movement. It is led by Marius Achermann, it has 1 MP.

6 political parties are represented on the outgoing Council of States: the Christian Democratic Party with 15 seats, the Free Democratic Party 12 seats, the Socialist Party 9 seats, the Swiss People's Party 7, the Ecologist-Greens 2 and the Green Liberal Party 1.

The executive power is exercised by the Federal Council, comprising seven members elected for four years by Parliament. The Federal Council represents the country's various regions and linguistic communities and works according to the collegial principal; all decisions are taken according to a consensus. The Swiss government is not therefore the result of a majority parliament elected according to a government programme, but results from an agreement between the main political parties. The idea of political alternation is does not exist therefore.

The Helvetic Confederation is led by a President, elected for one year by the federal councillors. The role of the Head of State is mainly symbolic and honorary. Traditionally each federal councillor is elected alternately according to the time he/she has spent in the office. The post is presently occupied by Micheline Calmy-Rey.

Some political leaders support a reform of the political system so that it would be more in line with the weight of the votes of the Swiss people. The UDC/SVP has put forward an initiative which the Swiss will certainly be called to vote on in the near future. The text plans for the election of the Federal Council by direct universal suffrage – an old claim made by the Socialist Party – and the organisation of federal elections every four years according to a majority system within one national constituency. The candidates that win the absolute majority in the first round would be declared elected. In the second round the simple majority would be enough. Two seats would be set aside for people living in the French speaking areas, in Ticino and in the Italian speaking Grisons. The Federal Assembly would elect the Chancellor of the Confederation and the judges of the Federal Court. The Federal Council and not the Parliament would appoint the President and the Vice-President of the Helvetic Confederation for one year. The Swiss have already rejected this initiative twice (in 1900 and 1942).

135,000 of the 695,000 Swiss living abroad are registered on the electoral rolls for the election on 23rd October. 21,000 of them will be able to vote by internet. The Council of Swiss living abroad has asked for an extension of the electronic vote. 17 of them were candidates in 2003, 44 in 2007; there will be 81 of them this year. Some political parties reserve seats for expatriates. Their vote differs generally from that of the Swiss living in the Helvetic Confederation itself. They mainly vote for the Socialist Party, followed by the Free Democratic Party, the Greens, then the Swiss People's Party and finally the Christian Democrats. These results explain why the socialists grant so much attention to the Swiss living abroad. Christian Levrat's

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party wants to guarantee their representation by granting them the status of being the 27th canton and by reserving 2 seats on the Council of States. The socialists have launched a petition to facilitate their participation via the internet and are presenting expat candidates in several cantons.

Will the Swiss People's Party continue its Ascension?

The UDC/SVP has set the goal of winning one third of the Swiss electorate. To do this its candidates have signed a triple commitment on three points: "We do not want to join the EU, we want to stop mass immigration and we want to expulse foreign criminals." The heart of its programme differs from the one it had in 2007 which included a reduction of State spending and a reduction in taxes. "The UDC/SVP wants to turn the electoral campaign into the trial of the Council of States, the chamber which is turning away from our country, which is taking a left turn and demonstrates a determined trend towards the EU," declares Toni Brunner. "Switzerland cannot offer a place to everyone and receive all of the poor in the world," reads the party's manifesto. "There has been too much immigration in Switzerland. It makes our rents go up, overloads our transport system and puts wages under pressure," stresses Christoph Blocher. "Over the last five years there has been a net immigration rate equal to a town the size of Zurich. It is leading to pressure on our infrastructures, trains and roads. Unfortunately we have removed the mechanisms that allowed us to regulate immigration," maintains Toni Brenner. The UDC/SVP which is an anti-European party is against immigration and is economically liberal – its slogan "The Swiss vote UDC/SVP" supports the re-introduction of border controls and that of immigrant contingents that are strictly linked to the work that is available, a system that was applied in Switzerland before the agreement on the free movement of workers signed with EU (and which did not reduce the number of immigrants in the country). "The more people there are in Switzerland, the more the State needs nurses and teachers. In a way immigrants come to Switzerland to take care of other immigrants," says Toni Brunner, regretting that immigrants work in the social, administrative, healthcare and teaching sectors and not in industry.

The Strategies of the Parties in the Centre

The Free Democratic Party and the Christian Democratic Party have the same goal: to retain their two respective seats on the Federal Council. "Whether we win or lose we will remain the third party in Switzerland," declared Vincenzo Pedrazzini, head of the Free Democratic Party's campaign, who is often considered as the successor to the present leader, Fulvio Pelli. "The Free Democratic Party is always held responsible for everything, we are still seen as the mainstay of the State but this is false, we are no longer that. Today it is the Swiss People's Party; with its 30% in the National Council it should take on this role but it does not do it because it still presents itself as an opposition party," he added. Hence he has made sure that there is a distance between his party and the UDC/SVP with whom he say he "really has little in common" and whom he accuses of "blaming foreigners for everything." Fulvio Pelli has condemned the UDC/SVP's isolationism which "intends to put Switzerland in a bubble and go back on agreements that are vital to our prosperity." These positions are not to the taste of all of the party's members. Pierre Weiss, the party's Vice-President for example supports an alliance with of the Free Democratic Party and the Swiss People's Party. In his opinion his party cannot do without the support of the hard right.

In the last federal elections in 2007 the Free Democratic Party signed an agreement with the Swiss People's Party in eight cantons, which upset some of its electorate. This year the two parties are standing separately even though they might sign some local agreements. The Free Democratic Party hopes to assert its own values; "The more you adopt extreme positions, the more difficult it is to create alliances. This is the price paid by the Swiss People's Party for a more radical stance which brought it votes," analyses Pascal Sciarini, a political expert from the University of Geneva who adds "the Free Democratic Party has everything to gain from relinquishing its follow-my-leader attitude and play its own cards, it is a question of survival."

The Free Democratic Party wants to distinguish itself from the Christian Democratic Party; "We do not need a rapprochement with the Christian Democratic Party either," declared Vincenzo Pedrazzini. The creation of the Conservative Democratic Party in 2008 and the rise of the Green-Liberal Party have changed power relations on the centre-right. Christian Democratic leader, Christophe Darbellay suggested, in order to counter a loss of ground by the party and to provide new impetus to the centre, that a holding in the centre should be created to rally the Green-Liberals and the Conservative Democratic Party around the Christian Democratic Party. The Evangelical Party (PEV/EVP)

answered favourably to this initiative.

Christophe Darbellay says he does not understand why the Free Democratic Party wants to distinguish itself at all costs, since his party shares "80% of common ground" with the FDP. "It is a mistake and a missed opportunity. The Free Democratic Party and the Christian Democratic Party have always maintained an informal, but historical relationship. This is how Switzerland was built but the free democrats prefer a rapprochement with the UDC/SVP," he added. Urs Schwaller, leader of the Christian Democratic Party's Parliamentary group said that the Free Democratic Party had to choose between the UDC/SVP and a constructive centre. "If it cannot identify with the policy of the centre then its second seat on the Federal Council will come under discussion," he said. "Our place is on the right," answered Fulvio Pelli.

Some political analysts perceive in Christophe Darbellay's proposition to create a holding for the centre, a strategy on the part of the Christian Democratic Party to recover the seat held by Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf (BDP) on the Federal Council.

Christophe Darbellay set 17% of the vote as the goal for his party in the federal elections. He says he is certain that his party will remain the leading force on the Council of States. Olivier Mewly, an historian at the University of Geneva denounces "the inability of the Free Democratic Party and the Christian Democratic Party to see the problems facing society. "People like to be governed in the centre but not by the centre," he says.

The Green-Liberal Party (GLP/VL) is taking part in the federal elections for the second time. It will be standing in 15 of the 26 cantons. The party sets itself apart from the Greens in that it does not share the same economic beliefs. As its name suggests it supports economic liberalism. "Ecology and economy are not incompatible," indicates Sandra Gurtner-Oesch, the party's secretary general. The Green-Liberals who have just launched their first popular initiative on replacing VAT by a tax on renewable energies, is targeting eight seats in the National Council which would enable them to have a parliamentary group (five members minimum).

And what about the left?

"Our aim is to make progress in both chambers," indicates Christian Levrat, leader of the Socialist Party. More united than the right, the left is struggling to position itself with regard to immigration, whilst polls show that some of its electorate are concerned about rising rents, and the decrease in wages, due to competition on the part of foreign labour. "The free movement of people has led to economic growth but this benefits only a few. Most of the population is especially affected by the disruption caused by this growth in terms of transport, housing and employment. If we want to maintain free movement we have to act in these sectors by stepping up compensatory measures," declared the Deputy Chair of the Socialist Party Rudolf Strahm (PSS/SPS) who has readily criticised the "negative effects of permeable borders." Conversely during the celebration of the National Day on 1st August the President of the Helvetic Confederation Micheline Calmy-Rey vaunted the merits of an open, optimistic, tolerant Switzerland and yet at the same time she said that she "understood the fears of her fellow countrymen."

"The problem is that the socialists will never be credible on themes that the UDC/SVP has become expert in. There is nothing to gain by the party on this issue. No one, especially its electorate, is expecting it to act on this. Contrary to social policy on which its positions are understood, patriotism, migration and youth violence are not federating issues for its electorates in popular wage earning milieus and also amongst the middle classes, who are tempted by the UDC/SVP," analyses political analyst Yannis Papadopoulos.

Just one month before the election the Socialist Party is in the lead in the campaign due to the rise of economic themes (crisis of the strong franc, the population's concern about rising unemployment etc.) "For everyone, without privileges" is the party's slogan as it fights for the introduction of minimum salaries. The socialists repeat that if foreigners and the Swiss stood on an equal footing in terms of wages, employers would employ the Swiss. Cédric Wermuth, the Party's Deputy Chair

qualified the UDC/SVP as "the billionaires' party" and accused it of neglecting real issues, such as wages for example.

On August 1st last the President of the Helvetic Confederation Micheline Calmy-Rey also attacked the high salaries earned by top executives.

The Ecologist Party-Greens (PES/GPS) want win their first seat on the Federal Council. However this must not, on any account, occur to the detriment of the Socialist Party, since this would allow the right to hold the ecologists to ransom. The Greens hope to increase their seats on the Council of States and rise to the 6 seat threshold. To do this the party has to win at least 10% of the vote. The ecologists are counting on their message of opposition to nuclear power. They are suggesting the abandonment of nuclear power by 2029. Environmental issues which were at the forefront just a few weeks ago have now been surpassed by socio-economic issues. The Greens are extremely critical about the present financial system, based, in their opinion, on speculation, which they hope will be challenged.

The federal elections on 23rd October should not lead to any major change in terms of political power relations. According to the most recent poll by gfs.berne, the UDC/SVP is due to win with 28% of the vote, followed by the PSS/SPS with 20.5%, the PRD/FDP, 15.6% and the PDC/CVP 14.5%.The PES/GPS is due to win 9.5%, the GLP/VL 4.5% and the PDB 3.1%

Those close to the PSS/SPS are the most motivated (65% of them say they are ready to go and vote for their party) ahead of the UDC/SVP supporters (55%). However less than half of the PRD/FDP supporters (45%) say they will vote.

Reminder of the Federal Election Results on 21st October 2007 in Switzerland

Turnout : 48,8%

National Council

Political Parties	No. of votes won	% of votes won	No. of seats won
Swiss People's Party (UDC/SVP)	672 562	28,9	62
Socialist Party (PSS/SPS)	451 916	19,5	43
Free Democratic Party (PRD/FDP)	364 736	15,8	31
Christian Democratic Party (PDC/CVP)	335 623	14,5	31
Ecologist Party- Greens (PES/GPS)	222 206	9,6	20
Evangelical Party (PEV/EVP)	56 748	2,4	2
Liberal Party (PLS/LPS)	41 682	1,9	4
Green - Liberal Party (GLP/VL)	33 104	1,4	3
Federal Democratic Union (UDF/EDU)	29 914	1,3	1
Swiss Party of Labour (PST/PdA)	17 218	0,7	1
Ticino League (LEGA)	13 031	0,6	1
Social Christian Party (PCS-CSP)	9 984	0,4	1
Others	69 187	3	0

Source : Internet Site internet of the Federal Statistics Office http://www.politik-stat.ch/nrw2007CH_fr.html

Council of States

Political Parties	No. of seats won
Christian Democratic Party (PDC/CVP)	15
Free Democratic Party (PRD/FDP)	12
Socialist Party (PSS/SPS)	9
Swiss People's Party (UDC/SVP)	7
Ecologist-Greens Party (PES/GPS)	2
Green-Liberal Party (GLP/VL)	1

Source : Internet Site internet of the Federal Statistics Office http://www.politik-stat.ch/nrw2007CH_fr.html

The Swiss People's Party still in the lead in the polls just one week before the Swiss Federal Elections

Around 5 million Swiss are being called to renew the 200 members of the National Council and the 46 members of the Council of States on 23rd October next.

The electoral campaign is thought to be "flat" by political analysts in comparison with the previous federal elections on 21st October 2007 which took place in an extremely polarised context. Immigration was then the focus of debate. The Swiss People's Party's campaign against immigration caused lively response in Switzerland and beyond. Electoral posters featuring three white sheep chasing out a black one, together with the text "For more security" and a veiled woman illustrating a question "Aarau or Ankara?" was also the source of polemic. "The federal elections in 2011 are not taking place in a climate like this nor is it being personalised to such a great extent," declared Claude Longchamp, director of the opinion institute gfs.berne. "The debate is not as hard, there is less explosiveness and energy in the political debate," indicates historian Jakob Tanner. "I can see that people are weary of politics," suggests Gerhard Schwartz, director of the think-tank, Avenir Suisse.

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7 days before the poll

The Swiss People's Party (UDC/SVP) has however tried to focus on the theme of immigration and the asylum policy again. The Christian Democratic Party (PDC/CVP) and the Ecologist Party-The Greens (PES/GPS) have taken strong positions against nuclear energy, the Socialist Party (PSS/SPS) is focusing on social issues. All of these subjects have been overshadowed however by economic themes, notably the valuation of the Swiss Franc.

The strong Franc is threatening around 120,000 jobs. In the summer company heads asked several times for the intervention of the Swiss National Bank. On 17th August

the Federal Council released 2 billion CHF to help exporting companies and the hotel sector. This plan comprised two parts: a first immediate payment of 870 million CHF and the rest to be paid in December if necessary. On 6th September the Swiss National Bank announced that it would not tolerate an exchange rate below 1,20 CHF for 1 € and said it was ready to purchase currency in unlimited quantities.

However the strong franc does not benefit any specific party. Given the present crisis the Free Democratic Party (PRD/FDP) and the Democratic Christian Party have pro-

moted their image as responsible parties, the Socialist Party (PSS/SPS) has requested social guarantees and the Swiss People's Party is suggesting a reduction in VAT to provide renewed purchasing power to all Swiss. The latter wonder about their future and are worried about Switzerland's economic slowing, fearing that it will transform into a real recession.

The Swiss People's Party is no longer the only one to talk of immigration. "We are finally addressing real issues: what foreigners contribute or not to our economy, housing, wages and demography. These are real issues that everyone is asking questions about," said Ada Marra Ada Marra (PSS/SPS). Bastien Girod (PES/GPS) thinks that the leftwing should be more aggressive on this issue. "The left plays at "pick-up sticks" with this theme. It fears that it will lose if it moves. But if we do nothing to support migration policy better, people will be against the free movement of populations in the end. It is not a question of closing the borders but of giving up trying to attract foreign business at all costs," he declared. The association Ecology and Population (Ecopop) hopes to launch a popular initiative to limit immigration to 0.2% (against the present 1.3%) in order to reduce the effects on the environment caused by demographic growth. "We do not want the far right to be only ones taking care of migratory policy," indicated Ecopop's spokesperson, Albert Fritsch. In order to implement quota restrictions on immigrants entering Switzerland, the country will however be obliged to cancel or re-negotiate certain treaties that it has signed in the past.

The UDC/SVP programme highlights 11 points, including the rigorous application of the asylum law that was enhanced in 2006 in order to send out a clear message to smugglers, to step up procedures and to restrict the possibility for appeal, the conclusion of a number of re-admission agreements to expulse rejected asylum seekers together with retaliation measures for countries which do not sign agreements or which do not respect what they have signed. "We must have the possibility to expulse people who refuse to give their identity towards third African countries by means of new agreements (possibly with financial compensation)," says Hans Fehr, a UDC/SVP National Councillor, who talks of "abolishing the right to family reunion to be replaced by provisional admission," is requesting the cancellation of the Schengen Agreements and those of Dublin; he has asked the Federal Council to put pressure on the European Agency, Frontex.

With regard to the new popular initiative presented by the UDC/SVP (the means for expulsing foreign criminals would be included in the Constitution), Christoph Blocher said: "We just want to bring subjects up that interest the Swiss. Apart from us no one addresses the real issues," adding, "international law is a pretext for not implementing what the people want," saying that the initiative is necessary to implement a constitutional modification that was accepted by the people and the cantons on 28th November 2010. The Swiss did indeed accept the modification of article 121 of the Constitution by referendum to deprive foreigners of their residence permit and to ban their entry into Switzerland for a period ranging from five to fifteen years if they were convicted for serious crimes and if they received social benefits illegally. The UDC/SVP hopes to make the expulsion of foreigners convicted for any crime automatic. Finally on 28th September last the National Council adopted 101 votes in favour, 77 against, and against the opinion of the government, the ban on the burqa in certain public places including on public transport systems.

The majority vote in application for the election of the Councillors of the States obliges the UDC/SVP, which wants to increase the number of representatives (at present 7) it has, to adopt a more conciliatory stance. The party is trying to convince the electorate in the centre, which is forcing it to tone down the provocative declarations which brought it success.

"Our goal is to do as well as four years ago (28.9% of the vote) in spite of the difficult context with the scission of the Conservative Democratic Party (PBD). Whatever happens we will not have the right to more than two seats on the Federal Council," declared Christoph Blocher.

The rise of the UDC/SVP has been a vital element of Swiss political life for the last ten years. The stabilisation of the populist party – at a high level – after the federal elections cannot be ruled out however.

The Free Democratic Party led by Fulvio Pelli is standing as the party of the economy, able to foster employment and further the creation of business. He is opposed to a minimum wage and the capping of high salaries. He hopes to foster the activity of SMEs and promote research and development in the energy sector.

"Voters like to elect moderates, who are rather pragmatic in the canton elections but in the federal elections they prefer clear positions," declared Pascal Sciarini, a political expert at the University of Geneva. Since 1979 many voters have left the Free Democratic Party in preference to the UDC/SVP and also the Liberal Green Party, and the Conservative Democratic Party. "Taking 20% is still our goal" says Isabelle Moret, Vice-President of the Free Democratic Party.

The Christian Democratic Party has swung to the left somewhat, signing agreements with the Greens-Liberal Party led by Martin Bäumle and even with the Evangelical Party (PEV/EVP) led by Heiner Studer. The latter launched his electoral campaign by presenting 10 theories on the migratory policy: stepping up asylum procedures, the respect of human dignity in legal decisions, extension of the competences of the migration services and of the police, the application of measures planned for in the Schengen and Dublin Agreements.

Christophe Darbellay, the Christian Democratic leader likes

to recall the role his party played in "the most important decision to be taken in the last 25 years, and that is exiting the nuclear sector." On 28th September last the Council of States indeed confirmed the end of the construction of any further nuclear power stations without however banning the development of technology and by guaranteeing the future of research. "A decision like that cannot be taken in the middle of a crisis," stresses Adrian Amstutz (UDC/SVP). The Swiss People's Party and the Free Democratic Party are both supporters of nuclear energy.

Christophe Darbellay has asked the UDC/SVP candidate standing for the Federal Council to step back from the popular initiative (on the expulsion of foreigners), a text that in his opinion "would be damaging to Switzerland's economic position" and which "would imply the re-negotiation of the agreement on the free movement of people". "Switzerland needs foreigners. Without them Switzerland would not exist," he declared indicating that "Switzerland would not last long if it isolates itself and withdraws into a hole." The announcement on 7th September last by Micheline Calmy-Rey (PSS/SPS), the present president of the Helvetic Confederation and Foreign Minister, that she intended to quit the Federal Council at the end of her term in office in December next has led to a unique situation.

The Federal Council comprises 7 members elected for four years by Parliament. It exercises the executive power. Run according to the collegial principle, all of its decisions are taken in consensus. In 2003 the failure of Ruth Metzler-Arnold (PDC/CVP) to be re-elected – an all time first in Switzerland since 1872 - modified the traditional magic formula (2-2-2-1) which governed the distribution of seats in the assembly. The Federal Council rallies five parties: the Free Democratic Party (2 seats), the Socialist Party (2 seats), the Democratic Christian (1 seat). This year the result of the federal elections will therefore have direct repercussions on the composition of the future Federal Council for the very first time.

The Free Democratic Party, the Socialist Party and the Democratic Christian Party hope to retain their two respective seats, the Swiss People's Party hopes to take a second, the Ecologist-Greens (PES/GPS) hopes to win one and the Conservative Democratic Party hopes to retain its seat.

The most recent poll undertaken by the institute gfs.berne for the Swiss radio and TV company (SSRT) puts the Swiss People's Party (UDC/SVP) in the lead in the federal elections on 23rd October next with 29.3% of the vote, ahead of the Socialist Party (19.9%), the Free Democratic Party (15.2%), the Democratic Christian Party (14.2%) and the Ecologist-Green Party (9.3%).

Decline of the UDC/SVP and breakthrough by the "small" centre parties in the Swiss federal elections

On 23rd October, for the first time in 20 years, the Swiss People's Party, which was running favourite, recorded a decline in the Swiss federal elections. The populist party, led by Toni Brunner, won 25.9% of the vote, which was below the 30% target it had set, a result that no Swiss party has ever achieved since 1919, the year when proportional voting came into force. With 55 seats on the National Council (7 less than in the previous federal elections on 21st October 2007), the Swiss People's Party is still Switzerland's leading political party. "*The rise of the Swiss People's Party over the last few years has now come to a halt,*" declared Gilbert Casasus, political expert at the University of Fribourg. In his opinion "*the first lesson to be learned in this election is that the Swiss political system is stable. There has not been any great change,*" he said.

The Socialist Party (PSS/SPS) led by Christian Levrat came second. It won 18.1% of the vote and 44 seats (+1). The party is therefore the only one not to have suffered due to the emergence of new parties in the centre.

Results

Some parties in the centre continue to decline. The Liberal Party (PRD/FDP) won 15.3% of the vote and 31 seats (=). Its chair Fulvio Pelli, was only just re-elected in Tessin. "*The Swiss have punished us. There is a problem in how we see things. Our party works pragmatically, but the population has negative pre-conceived ideas,*" he declared when the results were announced. The Christian Democratic Party (PDC/CVP) led by Christophe Darbellay won 13.1% of the vote 28 sets (- 3). The change in the party's strategy, which recently decided to give up nuclear energy, did not succeeded in preventing its decline that has been ongoing for the last few years. Voters are turning away from the parties that are gradually drawing away from their base and which do not carry a clear enough message that is out of in line with the way society is developing.

The major winners in this turbulence has been the Green-Liberal Party (GLP/VL), an ecologist movement that supports liberalism in the economic domain, established in 2007 by Martin Bäumle, and the Democratic Conservative Party (PBD/BDP), a party that was formed after it split from the Swiss People's Party, established in 2008 and led by Hans Grunder. The two parties won 5.9% (12 seats, + 9) and 5.2% of the vote (9 seats, + 9) respectively.

The Liberal Greens, who have an especially high profile in German speaking Switzerland (only one MP in the French speaking part) may form their own parliamentary group now. "These parties are attractive because they are new and they still haven't done anything bad," stresses Georg Lutz, a political scientist from the Centre of Competences in Social Sciences at the University of Lausanne. "*These parties share 80-90% of the same policies as the Christian Democratic Party, but they are new and therefore very attractive,*" adds the party's chair, Christoph Darbellay. "*I hope that we shall be able to continue working constructively with these new parties,*" he added. The Liberal Green Party and the Democratic Conservative Party can now play the role of king-makers.

Another surprise in these federal elections was the defeat suffered by the Ecologist-Greens Party (PES/GPS), led by Ueli Leuenberger, notably in the German speaking cantons. It won 7.9% of the vote, far from the 10% and the 13 seats (- 7) it had been targeting. This result seems to herald the end of its ambitions as far as the Federal Council is concerned. With the ecologists' score the left emerges weakened from the federal elections that took place on 23rd October.

"*Between the socialists on the left and the Swiss People's Party on the right, a new trend is emerging in the centre. This brings the polarisation that has marked Swiss politics over the last decade, to an end. This is a first in the Confederation's history, for which the Greens and the government parties have paid dearly,*" reads an editorial in the Swiss daily La Tribune de Genève. In these times of international economic crisis the Swiss have therefore shown their rejection of the traditional parties. The newspaper, Le Temps, explains the decline of the Swiss People's Party as follows: "*The party reflects the image of the hard right at a time when the country sees that it will have to come up with solutions in the centre to face an economic situation that is becoming increasingly difficult and uncertain.*"

Turnout totalled 49.76%, nearly 1 point more (0.96) than that recorded in the previous federal elections on 21st October 2007. Moreover this is the highest turnout in 36 years.

The stagnation of the Swiss People's Party is, in part, a result of the split it suffered in 2008. Under the impetus of Eveline Widmer Schlumpf, the party's moderate wing quit the SVP to form the Democratic Conservative Party. The populist party also seems to have suffered the competition of two local nationalist parties: the Ticino League (LEGA), a right-wing protest movement led by Giuliano Bignasca, which won 2 seats at the National Council and the Geneva Citizens' Movement (MCG), which is against the presence of French trans-border workers, which has won 1 seat.

At the Council of States the results of the 1st round of voting granted 8 seats to the Socialist Party, 7 to the Liberal Party and 7 to the Christian Democratic Party. The Ecologist-Greens Party won 4 seats. The Swiss People's Party sent in several of its heavyweights – Christoph Blocher, Toni Brunner and Caspar Baader – to the elections at the Council of States. But the voting majority voting method – in the upper chamber does not favour the extremist parties. In Zurich, former Federal Councillor and Vice-President of the SVP failed to win a seat. In Saint Gall the party's chair has to run again.

A second round will take place in 13 of the country's 26 cantons: Valais, Tessin, Bern, Zurich, Luzern, Vaud, Schaffhouse, Argovia, Uri, Schwyz, Soleure, Thurgovia and Saint-Gall.

The new parliament will be responsible for electing the 7 members of the Federal Council on 14th December – this is the executive body in Switzerland. After the results of the federal elections this election will be an extremely open one. We should remember that the head of the federal department (ministry) for Foreign Affairs and present President of the Republic, Micheline Calmy-Rey (PSS/SPS) has announced that she does not intend to stand again. The seats of two Liberal federal councillors - Johann Schneider-Amman, present head of the federal department for the Economy and Didier Burkhalter, head of the federal department for the Interior – are now in danger whilst Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf (head of the federal department for Finance) (PBD/BDP) may finally retain her seat.

"*Parliament has never elected the government according to this party. The time is right to come up with a new magic formula,*" writes La Tribune de Genève.

Results of the Federal Elections on 23rd October 2011 in Switzerland

Turnout: 49,76%

National Council

Political Parties	% of the votes won	No of seats won
Swiss People's Party (UDC/SVP)	25,9	55
Socialist Party (PSS/SPS)	18,1	44
The Liberal Party (PRD/FDP)	15,3	31
Christian Democratic (PDC/CVP)	13,1	28
Ecologist Party-Greens (PES/GPS)	7,9	13
The Green Liberal Party (GLP/VL)	5,9	12
The Democratic Conservative Party (PDB/BDP)	5,2	9
Evangical Party (PEV/EVP)	3,2	2
The Federal Democratic Union (UDF/EDU)	1,3	0
Ticno League (LEGA)	0,6	2
Others	3,5	4

Source : Internet Site of the TV channel SFR (http://www.entscheidung11.sf.tv/Resultate)

Council of States (first round results)

Political Parties	Nombre de sièges obtenus
Christian Democratic Party (PDC/CVP)	7
The Liberal Party (PRD/FDP)	7
Socialist Party (PSS/SPS)	8
Ecologist-Greens (PES/GPS)	4

Source : Internet Site of the TV channel SFR (http://www.entscheidung11.sf.tv/Resultate/Staenderat)

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