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J-7
7 jours before
the poll

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.

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 promoted their image as responsible parties, the Socialist Party (PSS/SPS) has requested social gua-

rantees 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%).

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