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Move over, Madame!

7.30 a.m., half an hour before the Federal Assembly meets: on Radio Suisse Romande, political observers express serious misgivings about the way forward for Switzerland. According to them, an end to concordance (coalition government) in its present form would threaten the existence of federalism and hence of the country itself.

Fortunately, this was not to be. On the one hand, countless die-hard dissenters protected Switzerland from upheaval and the political excesses of individual despots, and on the other hand, even after 10 December our country continues to adhere to the principles of a restrained and constrainable semi-direct democracy. Nevertheless, the day of the Federal Council election will go down in Swiss history. The 44-year-old "magic formula" was adjusted in line with the political will of the people. As the strongest party in terms of votes, the Swiss People's Party (SVP) demanded and was given its two cabinet seats – and the weakest party, the Christian Democrats (CVP) was not spared the inevitable blood-letting. With 121 votes to 116, Christoph Blocher (SVP) tolled the political death knell for Federal Council Ruth Metzler (CVP), tipping the balance for the People's Party. With its two new Federal Councillors, Christoph Blocher and Samuel Schmid, the party now reflects the will expressed by voters at the general election on 19 October. And the CVP must sacrifice one of its cabinet members to the democratic process.

The Radical Free Democrats put forward the dual candidacy of Hans-Rudolf Merz and Christine Beerli to succeed Kaspar Villiger. One might have assumed that another woman would be appointed following Ruth Metzler's failure to be re-elected. That was certainly the case up to a few years ago. But whereas feminism and female innovativeness could still sway politicians in 1999, now the wind appears to have shifted. Members of the Federal Assembly voted by 127 to 96 in favour of business consultant Merz, who is further to the political right than Beerli.



Gabrielle Keller

Thus our Federal Council has become older, more right-wing and more male-dominated.

Times are hard, blustered Christoph Blocher, and the nation needs representatives who can tackle the problems at hand. It looks as if the entire right-wing male world is of the opinion that the situation is so serious that only their own kind can rectify it. Women on the centre-right and left are furious. On the day of the Federal Council election they took to the streets to voice their disappointment.

But the political implications of this result are at least as serious for men and women alike. With anti-European Blocher on the Federal Council, Switzerland needs an appropriate counterbalance with support from the business world: an eloquent speaker who can project objective authority and stand up to Blocher and his populist platform, both verbally and in terms of political content. The FDP claims it was the profile, not the gender, that determined the outcome of the election.

It is incumbent on the new Federal Council to prove that it finds women's issues and the social aspects of Switzerland important. The two Social Democrats, Micheline Calmy-Rey and Moritz Leuenberger, were re-elected with resounding majorities (206 and 211 votes respectively). The new, more right-wing, government will be obliged to give due consideration to the concerns of their Social Democrat colleagues in the upcoming legislature period.

Gabrielle Keller

Translated from German.



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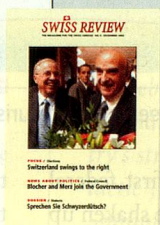
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The strategists have won: with Christoph Blocher (left), the UDC has gained a second member of the national government, in addition to Samuel Schmid. The PRD held on to its second seat with Hans-Rudolf Merz (right). On the losing side was the PDC. Federal Councillor Ruth Metzler was not re-elected.

TITLE PICTURE: Ueli Hiltbold

SWISS REVIEW

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