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A shift to the right, and other hot potatoes



"Swiss parliament shifts to the right" is the simplest way to sum up the federal elections of 22 October 2023. The hardline conservative SVP, the party that won the biggest voting share, was jubilant. But was this actually just a shift to the right? Not necessarily. The Swiss Social Democratic Party also made gains. Both the Right and the Left improved on their performance of four years ago. Here's my take on why. The world has changed incredibly since the 2019 elections, as has the prevailing mood in Switzerland. The pandemic turned life on its head, Russia's invasion of Ukraine upended the geopolitical order, and, most recently, the Israel-Hamas war has shocked everyone. Meanwhile, the cost-of-living crisis and the collapse of big bank Credit Suisse have undermined our belief in a prosperous, stable Switzerland. Things are not as they should be.

According to political scientist Michael Hermann, we turn to political parties promising refuge in times like these: "We will protect you from high costs," says the SP. "We will protect you from the immigrants and other dangers," says the SVP." The losers this time – including the Greens, the Green Liberals and the FDP – instead told people what to do: go without this, go without that, adapt to change, do more. The majority of voters, 53.4 per cent, skipped the elections completely. You could say they also didn't want to be told what to do. They let the politicians do their thing – then shrugged their collective shoulders.

How about a change of subject? I can make a half-decent rösti. It's all in the detail – and the potatoes. Ideally, the spuds need to be slightly floury. Just parboil them until they are al dente. Then leave them in the fridge for two to three days, after which they will have lost moisture and taken on perfect consistency. Grate them, then add pepper, plenty of salt and a copious amount of butter. Transfer to a pan and fry on a medium heat without stirring. Now for the main trick: add peppermint to season. My rösti can release endorphins – when I get it right.

Unfortunately, we cannot escape reality – even with rösti in our stomachs. Switzerland had another bad potato harvest this year. Farming experts are already predicting further misery: in about 100 years, it may no longer be possible to grow potatoes in Switzerland at all (see page 9). Climate change and politics have implications for us all, regardless of whether we vote or not.

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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