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Consociational Theory and Switzerland – Revisited

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Abstract

Religious conflicts between Catholics and Protestants have almost completely vanished from Swiss politics. It is plausible that consociational practices have contributed to this development. The language issue, on the other hand, has gained salience although in this respect the Swiss attempt to practice consociationalism more carefully than ever before. What has made consociationalism between the two major language groups more difficult in recent times is the tendency of French and German speakers to see the identity of Switzerland in a different light. If conflicts between German and French speakers deal with language per se, they can be more easily dealt with in a consociational way than if language is only a marker for different views of the role of Switzerland in Europe and the world at large.

1 Introduction

In the early 1960s, Switzerland enjoyed a high level of political stability, which contrasted with episodes of turmoil in earlier periods of its history. Two cleavages led to turmoil in earlier periods of Swiss history: religion and language. For both of these cleavages, consociational theory argued that a decision pattern of consociationalism helped to reduce the level of turmoil (Lehmbruch 1967; Steiner 1970). In my own writing at the time, I warned that in the long run consociationalism would lead to new problems since it “prevents innovations and makes the articulation of dissent difficult”, and I suggested that a combination of majority rule and consociationalism “may minimize the negative effects of either of the two strategies” (Steiner 1974: 280). In this chapter I revisit Switzerland from the perspective of consociational theory and examine what the development of Switzerland in the last forty years has to say about the validity of consociational theory (see also Linder 1997). I will consider the two cleavages separately, and, for each cleavage, I will discuss, first, the historical development up to the early 1960s, and, second, what has happened in the last 40 years.

2 The religious cleavage up to the 1960s

When Switzerland began to evolve as a loose alliance of cantons in the 13th century, the whole country was Catholic. In the Reformation, most cantons made either Protestantism or Catholicism the sole cantonal religion. There was much turmoil between the two sets of cantons, and the split became so severe that they began to meet in separate diets. Four times, in the period of the 16th to the 18th century, they went to war against each other. In 1847, there was yet another civil war, which was not primarily religiously based but which had, nevertheless, strong religious overtones. The fight was between the progressive forces, which wanted a modern Switzerland with a central government, and the conservative forces, which wished to keep the status quo with autonomous cantons. The progressive forces were mostly Protestant, the conservative Catholic. The war ended with a quick victory for the former, which in 1848 established the constitution of modern Switzerland with central institutions, in particular a federal parliament, a federal cabinet and a federal court. The federal parliament has two chambers, the National Council where the cantons are represented according to their population, and the Council of States where each canton has two representatives. The election system for the National Council was initially first-past-the-post, which allowed the progressives to attain a comfortable majority in this chamber. As a political party, they called themselves Free Democrats. For the Council of States, it was up to each canton to determine the election system; here, too, the Free Democrats reached a comfortable majority. The federal cabinet, the Federal Council, is elected by a joint session of the two chambers of parliament. The constitution sets the number of Federal Councillors at seven. Each of them has the same formal status; there is no prime minister, merely a yearly rotating chair according to seniority. In 1848, the Free Democrats used their parliamentary majority to elect all seven Federal Councillors from their own ranks.

The conservative forces organized themselves politically as the Catholic Conservative Party, and, from their stronghold cantons, they began to resist many key policies of the federal government. A useful instrument for this endeavour was the referendum. According to the constitution of 1848, all amendments to the constitution had to be submitted to a popular referendum. More importantly, a constitutional revision in 1874 allowed the challenge of bills by referendum if the required number of signatures was collected. In 1891, citizens were allowed to submit constitutional amendments of their own if they were able to collect the necessary number of signatures. The Free Democrats had pushed for the referendum as an instrument because they had expected the citizens to support their progressive policies. In fact, the citizens tended to be more conservative than the Free Democrats had expected, and consequently, the referendum turned out to be an unintended useful

instrument for the Catholic Conservative Party in resisting progressive policies at the federal level.

In 1891, the Free Democrats gave up their monopoly on the seats in the Federal Council, yielding one of the seven seats to the Catholic Conservatives. This was a first step from a strictly competitive towards a consociational relationship between the two political parties. Why did the Free Democrats make this gesture even though they still had a controlling majority in parliament? An interpretation based on partisan interest is that the Free Democrats hoped that the Catholic Conservatives would use the referendum less often to obstruct federal policies if they were represented in the Federal Council. There is much to be said for such an interpretation. But more than partisan interest was involved. There was an overarching Swiss loyalty on the part of both political parties to accommodate their differences in the interest of internal peace. Both parties had an interest in the continued political existence of Switzerland. This was obviously the case for the Free Democrats who had created modern Switzerland in 1848. But the Catholic Conservatives, too, had a stake in Switzerland as a political system, since the birthplace of the Swiss Confederation in the 13th century was in three mountain cantons that were now Catholic strongholds.

Further steps on the way towards a consociational pattern between the Free Democrats and the Catholic Conservatives were made after World War I. The parliamentary election system for the National Council was changed from first-past-the-post to party list proportionality, which allowed the Catholic Conservatives to gain a greater share of seats. Furthermore, they received a second seat in the Federal Council. Of crucial importance for these further steps towards consociationalism was the increased militancy of the working class with a general strike immediately after the war so that the two bourgeois parties had a common adversary and therefore an interest in working closer together. A last step towards full consociationalism between the two parties was taken in 1953, when the Catholic Conservatives finally reached the number of seats in the Federal Council corresponding to their numerical strength in parliament. In the 1950s, Switzerland was still strongly divided in the two religious subcultures. The Catholics, especially, formed a subculture of their own. Having lost the civil war over the creation of modern Switzerland, they used the federalist structure of the country and retreated in a defensive mood into their stronghold cantons. They created an extensive organizational network consisting of Catholic trade unions, Catholic fraternities, Catholic women's organizations, Catholic sports organizations, Catholic charities, Catholic newspapers, and so on. As the dominant subculture the Protestants had less need to build up their own organizational network, although certain fraternities, for example, were clearly geared towards Protestants.

The cleavage between the two subcultures did not follow the denominational distinction between Catholics and Protestants exactly since anticlerical Catholics tended to support the Free Democrats and not the Catholic Conservatives. Therefore, the line between the two subcultures was somewhat blurred with moderate Catholics taking a middle position in many respects. Thus, modern Switzerland never had sharply distinguished religious subcultures, as they are assumed in the classical consociational literature. Although the two subcultures were not clearly separated, there was little contact and a high level of animosity and conflict between them. Growing up in the 1940s and 1950s in the Emmental valley in the Protestant canton of Bern, I remember vividly how the nearby valley in the Catholic canton of Lucerne appeared to me to be dark and hostile and a place not to be visited. Recently, I met a sociology colleague who grew up at the same time in the Lucerne valley, and he told me that he had experienced exactly the same negative feelings towards my valley. At that time, representative surveys were not carried out, but there is much anecdotal evidence that the negative feelings that my colleague and I had towards each other's religious groups were widespread at the time.

When we reconsider the development of the religious cleavage up to the 1960s, do we arrive in hindsight at the same interpretation as consociational theory did in the 1960s? I believe so. The crucial consideration is that religious segmentation was still very obvious when full consociationalism between Protestants and Catholics was established in the 1950s. Therefore, it seems plausible that the consociational pattern helped to stabilize relations between the two religious groups. If religious segmentation had decreased *before* the 1950s, say, due to secularization, the consociational pattern could not be seen as the *cause* of stability but rather as the *consequence* of decreased segmentation. Thus, consociationalism can quite easily be interpreted as a causal factor contributing to stability between the religious groups, when we consider how the situation presented itself in the 1950s. This conclusion is reinforced if we speculate about the counterfactual situation: that the Free Democrats would have kept their dominant position and would not have let the Catholic Conservatives participate in the Federal Council. One can imagine that the cantons with a Catholic Conservative stronghold would have refused to implement many progressive federal programmes and that the federal authorities would have used the military to enforce implementation, which, in turn, could have led to violent incidents. The situation could have been similar to Northern Ireland, where one group, the Protestants, continued for a long time to play the political game in a competitive way, using their majority status in parliament to keep all power for themselves.

3 The religious cleavage after the 1960s

The main development after the 1960s is the rapid decrease in religious segmentation. The question to be addressed is whether this decrease is the consequence of successful consociationalism between Catholics and Protestants or of some other factors. The most visible sign of the decrease in religious segmentation is that the Catholic Conservative Party made great efforts to expand its basis beyond the clerical Catholic subculture. It changed its name to Christian Democratic Party, and it tries to position itself in the Swiss party spectrum as the party at the centre. The electoral reason for this reorientation was and is that there are fewer and fewer Catholics with a clerical orientation. The party therefore tries to appeal to non-clerical Catholics and even to Protestants. To date this strategy has been unsuccessful and the Christian Democrats constantly lose voter share. A former federal councillor for the party argued publicly in the spring of 2001 that the Christian Democrats have fulfilled their historical mission to integrate the clerical Catholic subculture into the national culture, and that the Christian Democrats and Free Democrats should unite into a single bourgeois party. This is unlikely to happen in the near future, but the fact that the possibility of such a merger is even being considered shows how much religious segmentation has decreased in Switzerland. A further indicator of decreased religious segmentation is that social interactions take place much less exclusively within the two religious subcultures. Gone are the times when in religiously mixed cantons the Catholics went to Catholic bakers and the Protestants to Protestant bakers. To be sure, religiously based organizations such as fraternities and charities still exist, in particular on the Catholic side, but these organizations have greatly de-emphasized their religious orientation and now accept members of other religious groups.

How has consociationalism between Catholics and Protestants evolved since the 1960s? A crucial issue dating back to the writing of the constitution of 1848 could be solved in a consociational way. According to articles 51 and 52 of the original constitution no new monasteries could be created, and Jesuits were not allowed to exercise any responsibilities in the church and in schools. After the 1960s, in a classical consociational manner, key leaders of the two religious groups worked out a deal whereby the two articles were to be eliminated from the constitution. Such a deal was now also acceptable to Protestant leaders who considered the articles as antiquated and as unnecessary obstacles to collaboration between Protestants and Catholics. Even with the common accord at the elite level, there was uncertainty about the outcome in the referendum. In May 1973, the elimination of the two constitutional articles was accepted with a margin of 55 per cent against 45 per cent. 16½ cantons supported the abolishment of the two discriminatory articles, 5½

cantons were against. The latter were all Protestant cantons. These results show that in the early 1970s there was still much animosity between Protestants and Catholics at the mass level. It was only thanks to the leadership on both sides that the referendum was successful. This episode is clearly in accordance with consociational theory: the elites were willing to transcend a cleavage line, and they were able to bring enough of their followers along to win the referendum. After the elimination of articles 51 and 52 from the constitution, conflicts between Catholics and Protestants played less and less of a role in Swiss politics. A last discriminatory article in the constitution against the Catholics was easily eliminated in a referendum in June 2001: after a campaign without much emotion, 64 per cent of the citizens decided to cut the article mandating the agreement of the state for the redrawing of diocesan borders. This time, all cantons had supporting majorities.

Today, even issues like abortion are decreasingly defined in religious terms. Thus, the Christian Democrats are now split on the abortion issue with their women's group taking a pro-choice position. When new federal councillors are elected by parliament, religious affiliation is almost irrelevant. Since the Swiss population has always been about half Catholic and half Protestant, in former times, each of the two religious groups had at least three representatives on the seven-member council. Now most people don't know and don't care about the religious affiliation of the councillors. One of the current councillors is not a member of any church, and another is Jewish, but these are considered private matters without political implications. The low salience of the cleavage between Catholics and Protestants is also revealed in a study about 51 referenda at the federal level from December 1992 until September 1997 (Linder et al. 2000). In this study the percentage of the yes-votes in the 184 districts of the country was compared. The religious composition of the districts only had a statistically significant impact on the outcome for 16 of the 51 referenda. This is clearly less than for language and social class.

We must now evaluate the question of causality. According to consociational theory, in the short run, successful consociationalism will reinforce subcultural segmentation since the subcultures are the main building blocks of politics and are therefore much in the mind of everyone. In the long run, however, successful consociationalism should reduce the tensions along subcultural lines so much that segmentation loses its importance. As a consequence, consociationalism makes itself redundant since there are no longer any severe conflicts to be resolved. The development of the religious cleavage in Switzerland after the 1960s supports this interpretation. But successful consociationalism was probably not the only factor, and perhaps not even the most important one. After all, there is a strong secular trend in Western Europe at large that has to do with many other factors such as changes in the economy, in values, and in the churches themselves. Therefore, religious segmentation

between Protestants and Catholics might have diminished even without the practice of consociationalism.

4 The language cleavage up to the 1960s

Just as the original Swiss Confederation of the 13th century was homogenous with respect to religion, so too was it with respect to language, as the three founding cantons were all German speaking. Up to the end of the 18th century, the Swiss Confederation remained almost exclusively German speaking. Of the 13 cantons at that time, eleven were entirely German speaking, and two, Bern and Freiburg, were mostly German speaking with a French-speaking minority. It was only after the invasion of the armies of Napoléon that French-speaking cantons emerged. It was also at that time that the Italian-speaking Ticino canton and the trilingual canton of Graubünden (German, Italian and Romansh) joined the Swiss Confederation. The figures for the four linguistic groups have remained about the same over the last 200 years, with about 70 per cent German speaking, 20 per cent French, 10 per cent Italian and less than 1 per cent Romansh.

The greatest potential conflict line was between German and French speakers. Tensions between these two language groups were particularly great during World War I, when the French speakers sided with France and the German speakers with Germany. At the time, one spoke of a trench dividing Switzerland. The biggest language problem, however, arose in connection with the Jura, a French-speaking minority within the German-speaking canton of Bern. At the Congress of Vienna in 1815, the Jura was considered a masterless territory and was given to Bern as compensation for other territories that Bern had lost after its defeat by the armies of Napoléon. Bern was not enthusiastic about the arrangement, and in the Jura itself there was strong opposition to the annexation. Relations between the Jura and the rest of the canton were already stormy in the 19th century, and continued to be so up to the 1960s. Occasionally, there were even some violent incidents.

When modern Switzerland was founded in 1848, the consociational principle was immediately applied with regard to language at the federal level. In the very first election, the federal parliament elected five German speakers, one French speaker and one Italian speaker to the Federal Council, which gave the two minority language groups combined a proportional share of the seats. In later elections to the Federal Council, the minority language groups were sometimes even over-represented with two French speakers and one Italian speaker. Strong federalism also corresponded to the consociational model because it allowed the minority language cantons to handle issues sensitive to language concerns, in particular school matters. According to consociational

theory, the consociational pattern among the language groups helped to keep language relations in Switzerland relatively harmonious. If this had not been the case, in other words, if the German-speaking majority had taken all seats in the Federal Council for themselves and if federalism with strong autonomy for the cantons had been absent, then the conflict level among the language groups would most likely have been much higher. The consociational argument is also supported when we look at the Jura problem. In the canton of Bern, the German-speaking majority did not practice consociationalism at all in its relation with the French-speaking minority. Typical in this respect was an incident in 1947 when a management position within the cantonal Department of Public Works was denied to a French speaker on the grounds that the department was too important to be run by a French speaker. It seems plausible that relations between the language groups in the canton of Bern would have been less stormy if the German-speaking majority had been more willing to practice consociationalism with regard to the Jura problem.

5 The language cleavage after the 1960s

Since the 1960s, tensions over the Jura problem have declined greatly although the issue still lingers. To come closer to a solution, much use was made of the referendum. Barry (1975) has argued that since the referendum by definition is based on the majority principle it is contrary to the consociational mode. It is true that there are many cases in Swiss history where the referendum was used by a majority to outvote minorities. The Jura issue shows, however, that the referendum can also be used in a consociational manner. This was done by using not a single referendum but a whole series of referenda. In the first instance, the populace of the whole canton of Bern accepted a cantonal constitutional amendment allowing the question of separation of the Jura to be put to a referendum in the Jura districts. In a second step, the Jura opted by a narrow margin for separation. In a third referendum, those districts of the Jura along the border with the rest of the canton of Bern decided not to join the new canton but to remain within the canton of Bern. Fourth, individual communities along the new frontier between the Bern canton and the Jura canton could decide whether they wished to change their district and consequently also the canton. Finally, it was decided in a nationwide referendum to accept the Jura as a new canton, which then began to function on January 1, 1979.

Religion played an important role in the outcome of the various Jura referenda. The German-speaking majority of the canton of Bern was Protestant. The Jura districts farthest away from the German-speaking majority were Catholic, whereas the Jura districts closest to the rest of the

canton were Protestant. In organizing not merely a single referendum but a whole series of referenda, the French-speaking Catholics were allowed to create a new canton, and the French-speaking Protestants were allowed to stay within the old canton. This outcome corresponded pretty much to a consociational pattern as it is usually arrived at by elite accommodation. Despite the importance of the referendum, the elites were important, too, because it was thanks to their ingenuity that the cascade of referenda could take place at all. The ingenuity lies in the fact that it was decided at the very start to hold a series of referenda before it was known what the outcome would be at each stage.

With the Jura problem largely out of the way, one may expect that in Switzerland at large language has become less of an issue. But this is not true. On the contrary, in recent years, the language cleavage has become more important in Swiss politics. That the language cleavage is currently of high salience was revealed in an investigation of 51 recent federal referenda (Linder et al. 2000). The importance of the cleavage between German and French speakers was established by using a variable that was calculated for each district by dividing the number of German speakers by the number of French speakers. This ratio turned out to be the most important variable, being statistically significant for 35 of the 51 referenda.

In the area of language, consociationalism is used today more carefully than ever. For many years, the French-speaking population had two representatives and the Italian-speaking population one representative in the seven member Federal Council, which means an overrepresentation of the linguistic minorities. In 1999, an interesting situation developed when the Italian speaking representative in the Federal Council retired. He was replaced with a French speaker, which shows the flexibility of the Swiss system. Because they are so few, the Italian speakers have no claim to a permanent representation in the council. Thus, occasionally, they may have to yield their seat to one of the two other language groups. In the federal bureaucracy, the linguistic minorities were in former times often somewhat underrepresented in the top positions, but this is no longer the case. Great care is given in other areas as well that the linguistic minorities have at least proportional representation, for example, in the composition of federal expert commissions. So why has language become a more important issue despite continued and even increased consociationalism among the language groups? Has consociationalism lost its causal effect? I don't think so. Rather, the language issue would be even more explosive today if consociationalism had been reduced or even abandoned altogether. There are powerful factors that have made the language issue more salient.

A first factor is the decreased importance of religion in Swiss politics (section 1). Religious and language cleavages used to cross-cut each other so that there were, for example, both French-speaking Protestants and French-

speaking Catholics. Such cross-cutting cleavages helped to stabilize the country because for some issues French-speaking Catholics, for instance, had more in common with German-speaking Catholics than with other French speakers. Classical consociational theory only dealt with countries that had no cross-cutting cleavages; where the individual subcultures (pillars in the Dutch sense) were clearly pitted against each other. Viewed from this perspective, Switzerland was not a classical consociational case, because the cross-cutting of religious and language cleavages made political stability less of a problem. With the vanishing of the religious cleavage, however, Switzerland has begun to approach the classical consociational situation as the language groups are now more clearly pitted against each other.

A second reason for the increased importance of the language cleavage is the decreased salience of neutrality as a foreign policy device. The end of the Cold War and increased globalization have forced Switzerland to have a more active foreign policy, and consequently the different foreign policy approaches of the language groups have become much more manifest. The French-speaking population tends to prefer an open foreign policy and supports, in particular, membership of the United Nations and the European Union. German speakers tend to be more reluctant to join such international organizations, and, thanks to their majority status, are able to outvote the French speakers in referenda. Losing in key foreign policy referenda has increased the perception among French speakers that they have different interests than the German speakers.

A third factor why language has become more important in Swiss politics is that cantonal borders have become less important. This is particularly true for the French-speaking cantons. The two largest, Geneva and Vaud, traditionally had their own very special identities, and there was much rivalry between these two proud cantons. Now there is talk of merging the universities of the two cantons and even of merging the cantons altogether. Although a merger of the two cantons may never happen, the mere talk of it indicates that the cantonal borders in the French-speaking region have become less important, which contributes further to the perception of a common French-speaking identity.

A fourth factor has to do with the increased importance of television for political discourse. The three major language groups all have their own programmes. Efforts to broadcast trilingual programmes have failed since the public did not watch them. The political discourse in Switzerland has always taken place to a large extent within the individual language groups; recently, this has become even more the case.

As a consequence of these four factors, the language groups are more clearly delimited against each other. A common metaphor is that they stand with their backs to each other. They are more oriented towards the outside, and, here again, television plays an important role. German speakers watch German television in great numbers, French speakers French television, and Italian

speakers Italian television. Within Switzerland, interactions across language borders have become less frequent. The traditional year that young German speakers spent in a French-speaking canton at the end of their mandatory schooling has almost become a thing of the past. Also contributing to the lack of interaction across the language borders is the phenomenon that English has become so popular that learning another national language has become less attractive.

6 Different views of Swiss identity

What does all this mean for future relations among the Swiss language groups? There is no risk that Switzerland will suddenly break apart, but that the language groups will increasingly *drift apart*. The two major language groups have developed very different perceptions of Swiss identity. The French-speaking Swiss tend to see Switzerland as part of Europe, whereas many among the German-speaking Swiss see Europe as a danger. The more the French speakers want to be part of Europe, the greater the fears of many German speakers that Switzerland will fall apart. That the German speakers are more worried that Switzerland will fall apart is related to their much longer roots in Swiss history. As we recall, in the 13th century, the Swiss Confederation was founded in German-speaking Switzerland, whereas the other language groups, for the main part, only joined around 1800. Many German speakers fear that the French speakers have never fully understood the *idea* of Switzerland and that they are therefore willing to abandon it recklessly. According to the traditional view, Switzerland was always under threat by external enemies, the Habsburgs, Napoléon, Hitler, and many others. Given these recurring threats, Switzerland constantly had to fight to keep its independence. The best way to stay independent was to fortify the mountains and to remain neutral in international affairs.

A charismatic politician from Zurich, Christoph Blocher, founded an organization based on this view. The name of the organization is 'Action for a Neutral and Independent Switzerland'. Its supporters are mainly German-speaking Swiss. The rallying cry of the organization is that this time the danger for Swiss neutrality and independence comes from Brussels. There are even parallels drawn to the times of the Nazis. As Switzerland had to defend itself against the Nazis, today it has to defend itself against the bureaucrats and the judges of the European Union. Fears of being ruled by foreign judges echoes back to the foundation of the Swiss Confederation in the 13th century when the Habsburg judges were expelled from Swiss territory. Therefore, it hits at the core of the Swiss historical myth when Christoph Blocher exclaims that Switzerland will never be ruled by foreign judges.

What we see then is a clash between two perceptions of the place of Switzerland in Europe. One perception is that Switzerland is a typical small European country that should take its place in the European Union like other small countries. The other perception builds on the historical myth of Switzerland as a special case in the sense that its very existence was constantly endangered and that it must continue to be vigilant against potential threats to its neutrality and independence, and vigilant in the defense of its special way of practicing direct democracy. Accommodating these two identities is a big challenge for Swiss politics. Traditional patterns of consociationalism do not seem to work. The major difficulty is that it is not easy to identify the groups that have different identities of Switzerland. To some extent it is a cleavage between French and German speakers. On the other hand, there are many German speakers, especially the young, highly educated and urban, who support the identity of an open Switzerland. On the other hand, the traditional view of Switzerland also has some support in French-speaking Switzerland. If the conflicting groups cannot be easily identified, consociationalism is difficult to achieve.

At the core of the conflict between the two identities is the issue of Swiss membership in the European Union. Polls indicate that support for entry into the European Union is close to a majority. But the real issue is not the support in the country at large but in the individual cantons. Membership of the European Union involves an important international treaty, which means that the constitution requires a majority vote from both the national electorate and the cantons. Including the six half-cantons, there are 23 cantons. Therefore, entry to the European Union would only be possible if the voters in at least twelve cantons are supportive, and this is far from being the case. Most of the small rural cantons in German-speaking Switzerland are adamantly opposed to membership of the European Union. As support for EU membership grows among the Swiss electorate at large, the opposition in these cantons becomes even stronger. Thus, for the time being, there is no chance that Switzerland will become a member of the European Union. The requirement that such important issues need also a majority of the cantons was intended by the constitution builders to serve as protection of minorities in the sense of consociationalism. In the case of membership in the European Union this works exactly as planned. The beneficiaries are the small, rural cantons in German-speaking Switzerland. The irony in this case is that it works against another minority, the French speakers.

It is important to emphasize that in the clash between the two Swiss identities, language *per se* is not involved; there are no conflicts, for example, over which language should be spoken in particular post offices, as is often the case in Belgium. In the current situation, language is more a *marker* for two different identities. The Swiss have learned quite well how to handle conflicts

in a consociational way if language *per se* is involved. But they now have great difficulties practicing consociationalism when language is intertwined in a complex way with the question of Swiss identity. One hears from some extremist supporters of 'Action for a Neutral and Independent Switzerland' that the French speakers should leave if they are no longer willing to defend the neutrality and independence of the country. This is, of course, not the appropriate spirit for solving the conflict between the two identities in a consociational way. One also hears less than flattering language from supporters of an open Switzerland about Blocher and his supporters. In the attitude towards Blocher the conflict between the two identities is most clearly crystallized. Most people in Switzerland either admire Blocher or they hate him. He does not seem to mind holding this position. In a lengthy interview, he made it clear that he and his supporters see themselves as the saviours of Switzerland, saving the country from higher and higher taxes and from being swallowed up by the European Union. "We have a clear concept for Switzerland. We want to implement it ... It is not my main task to applaud the Federal Council ... One has to take up the fight even if one may lose." (Neue Zürcher Zeitung October 21, 1998). These are not words in the consociational spirit.

With this non-consociational approach, Blocher scored a big victory in the October 1999 parliamentary elections. His Swiss People's Party increased its share of the national vote from 14.9 per cent in the previous election to 22.5 per cent. In the 200-member National Council it increased its presence from 29 to 44 seats, and in the 46-member Council of States from 5 to 7 seats. It achieved these gains mainly at the expense of two tiny right-wing parties and the right wings of the Free Democrats and the Christian Democrats. The Swiss electorate at large did not move at all to the right but in fact slightly away from the right towards the centre. Thus, the Swiss People's Party was not successful in moving the electorate to the right; its success was rather due to its capacity to integrate an increasing number of rightist voters into its own ranks.

As always after parliamentary elections, the Federal Council had to be appointed in a joint session of parliament for another term of four years. This event took place on December 15, 1999. There was much speculation about the outcome, and many different scenarios were discussed in the media. The crucial question was whether Blocher would be elected to the Federal Council. He and his party made the demand that their representation in the seven-member Council should be increased from one to two seats. Was there a consociational justification for this demand? The consociational principle states that political parties should be represented in the Federal Council according to their parliamentary strength. If we look at voter strength, the Swiss People's Party had a clear claim for a second seat. It tied for first place with the Social Democrats who also received 22.5 per cent of the votes. The

Free Democrats had 19.9 per cent, the Christian Democrats 15.9 per cent. With regard to the seats in the joint session of parliament, however, the situation was less clear. Of the total of 246 seats (200 National Councillors, 46 Councillors of State) the Free Democrats had 60, the Social Democrats 57, the Swiss People's Party 51 and the Christian Democrats 50. Why the difference between voter shares and the number of seats in the joint session of parliament? What needs explanation is why the Christian Democrats got nearly the same number of seats as the Swiss People's Party although the voter share of the latter was much higher. The answer lies in the fact that the Christian Democrats did much better than the Swiss People's Party in the elections to the Council of States, because the former traditionally do well in the small Catholic cantons. It is a crucial feature of Swiss consociationalism that in the Council of States small cantons have the same weight as large cantons. This was forcefully pointed out by the Christian Democrats, who argued that the determining factor for the allocation of seats in the Federal Council was not national voter share but the number of seats in the joint session of parliament. In this respect there was a virtual tie between Christian Democrats and the Swiss People's Party.

The Christian Democrats argued further that there were two factors to be considered in allocating the seats in the Federal Council. First, a political party has to demonstrate its increased share over at least two elections before it can claim an additional seat in the Federal Council. According to this logic, the gains of the Swiss People's Party could possibly be only temporary so that it would not be appropriate to change hastily the composition of the Federal Council. If in four years the Swiss People's Party were able to consolidate its gains, its claim to a second seat would be much more justified. The second argument was that the two Christian Democratic Federal Councillors had been only recently elected, that they were doing a good job, and that it is against Swiss tradition to throw out councillors who have not made serious mistakes. Indeed, in the 20th century a Federal Councillor who stood for re-election has never been removed from the Council. The Christian Democrats' arguments convinced the leadership of the Free Democrats and the Social Democrats, who promised to support the re-election of the two Christian Democratic councillors.

When Blocher realized that he had no chance of ousting one of the Christian Democratic councillors, he changed tactics and declared consociationalism dead. If his Swiss People's Party, with the biggest voter share, did not get proportional representation in the Federal Council, then the other parties had in fact abandoned the consociational principle. Therefore, all bets were off, and the allocation of the seats in the Federal Council could now be allocated according to the competitive principle. According to Blocher, the battle line should be between the bourgeois parties and the Social Democrats,

and he called on the two other bourgeois parties to oust at least one of the Social Democrats and to elect him instead. The Social Democrats reacted immediately with the threat that they would not stay with a single member in the Federal Council and that they would go into opposition. Events had now taken a dramatic turn. The issue was no longer the fine-tuning of consociationalism but the continued existence of the consociational principle. The leadership of the two parties in the middle, the Christian Democrats and the Free Democrats, clearly opted for the continuation of consociationalism. They argued that with the Social Democrats in opposition, Switzerland would lose its political stability. There would be more strikes, and with the weapon of the referendum the Social Democrats would be able to block many initiatives of a bourgeois Federal Council. A further negative consequence would be that the Social Democrats, being in opposition, would have a good chance to make gains in the next parliamentary elections.

Since the balloting is secret for the election of the Federal Council, there was still some uncertainty about the outcome when the joint session of parliament assembled. In order to understand the outcome, one must know that the Federal Councillors individually come up for re-election according to seniority. The first councillor was Adolf Ogi of the Swiss People's Party, whose tenure had already been twelve years. During his time on the council, Ogi had distanced himself increasingly from his party, in particular in supporting Swiss membership in the EU. According to the consociational principle, political parties should be represented in the Federal Council by their key leaders, who can then authentically speak in the name of their parties. According to this principle, the Swiss People's Party should have replaced Ogi with their charismatic leader Blocher. Such a move would not have precluded the claim of the party for a second seat in a later ballot. But Blocher declared unequivocally that Ogi was the official candidate of the party for the first seat to be filled. Parliament could nevertheless have given the preference to Blocher, and there were indeed some voices in the other parties that Blocher should be elected instead of Ogi. The rationale for such a scenario was that in this way Blocher could be tied into the consociational system. As a member of the Federal Council, Blocher would have to represent the collective decisions reached in the Council. Blocher declared, however, that if elected instead of Ogi, he would refuse the election. For many observers, it was clear that Blocher was not really interested in becoming a member of the Federal Council. His goal seemed rather to be rejected by parliament, which gave him more credibility as leader of the right-wing opposition. Ogi obtained a very good result with 191 votes. Although still a member of the Swiss People's Party, he was now factually an independent in the council, not representing the mainstream views of his party, certainly not in foreign policy.

The second councillor to come up for re-election was Free Democrat Kaspar Villiger. Since he enjoyed a high reputation in parliament and since nobody challenged the claim of the Free Democrats to two seats, Villiger, too, obtained an excellent result with 187 votes. Tensions rose when Social Democrat Ruth Dreifuss as the third most senior councillor was on the ballot. Now Blocher jumped in, putting his name on the ballot. He challenged the consociational principle not only with regard to party affiliation but also with regard to language since Dreifuss was one of the two French-speaking councillors. If Blocher had been victorious, the German speakers would have had six members on the Council, a highly non-consociational pattern. Dreifuss won clearly with 148 votes. Blocher received only 58 votes, barely above the share of his party.

How well was the consociational principle upheld on December 15, 1999? Well, with regard to language it was since the two French speakers were re-elected. With regard to political parties, however, the consociational principle was upheld merely at the surface. Because Ogi had become an outsider in his own party, the Swiss People's Party was no longer really represented in the Federal Council. Blocher could now play the opposition card more than ever before since he could argue that he had been denied access to the Federal Council and thus had to pursue his policies from the opposition bench. From this position of opposition he makes use of not only his Swiss People's Party but also the powerful 'Action for a Neutral and Independent Switzerland'. At the end of 2000, Ogi retired as Federal Councillor and was replaced with Samuel Schmid, also of the Swiss People's Party. Schmid was not his party's official candidate and only won the election with the support of the other parties. Although he is somewhat closer to the party line than Ogi, he has already deviated several times from the official party line, in particular in foreign policy issues. All this shows how difficult it is to apply the consociational principle to the cleavage between the two identities of Switzerland. The Blocher wing in Swiss politics is less and less integrated into the power sharing arrangement of consociationalism.

Notes

1. For historical reasons, Switzerland has six half-cantons. For example, Basel City and Basel Country.
2. www.polittrends.ch

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Consociationalism and Economic Performance in Switzerland 1968-1998: The Conditions of Muddling Through Successfully

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Abstract

Swiss economic policy is neither left nor liberal: it intervenes strongly in the economy but through regulations rather than expenditures. It does not constitute a coherent strategy but rather a pragmatic mixture of a variety of policies. It is reactive, not anticipatory. And it works well in international comparison. The institutional design of policy-making in Switzerland favours these types of policies. This institutional configuration is made up of an independent national bank, a fragmented party system in a quasi-presidential system, a weak central government and strong cantons, strong and stable corporatism, and direct democracy. The interaction of these elements fosters compromise and makes coherent and conflictual economic policy hardly feasible.

1 Introduction

The political system of Switzerland is a paradigmatic case of consociational democracy. In such a political system the main political actors – political parties, the bureaucracy, the central government – do not use majority rule as the predominant decision-making technique. Rather, agreement is sought by respecting minority rights, by bargaining and by making cross-concessions (Lehmbruch 1993). What type of economic policy did this particular political system attempt to create and what effects did the system have from the late 1960s to the late 1990s? This is the guiding question of this chapter.

I put forward two propositions. According to the first proposition, consociationalism is not the only decisive political institution for making economic policy in Switzerland. Rather, consociationalism operates in tandem with political institutions that are historically and functionally closely interwoven with Swiss consociational democracy: federalism and corporatism. Together, they form a system of negotiated economic policy-making. With regard to inflation-prone policies, the system is constrained by another major institution: the independent central bank. As a non-conflictual mode of policy formation, the system is reinforced by direct democracy, which creates a rational bias towards broadly based compromise on the elite level.