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Transformations of Swiss neo-corporatism: From pre-parliamentary negotiations towards privileged pluralism in the parliamentary venue

André Mach (Université de Lausanne), Frédéric Varone (Université de Genève) and Steven Eichenberger (Université de Lausanne)
andre.mach@unil.ch
frederic.varone@unige.ch
steven.eichenberger@unil.ch

Abstract: Major economic peak-level associations, because of their various resources (in terms of membership, finance and institutional reconnaissance by public authorities) have become central political actors of the Swiss neo-corporatist regime. They were considered the dominant actors of the pre-parliamentary phase of the decision-making process (extra-parliamentary committees, consultation procedures), identified as the most important phase, whereas the Parliament only marginally modified the proposals of the Federal Council. However, since the beginning of the 1990s, the strategies of interest groups have profoundly changed, leading to a reconfiguration of the traditional neo-corporatist political regime toward a more pluralist system, in which interest groups more actively target the Parliament. Different factors explain these changes: the declining role of the pre-parliamentary phase, the revalorization of the Parliament, and the increasing role of the media. These changes have weakened the positions of traditional corporatist associations and favored the political rise of new citizen groups. They have also induced interest groups to develop new political strategies, privileging the parliamentary venue, especially the new permanent specialized committees. Despite the growing access of new citizen groups to the political system (pre-parliamentary and parliamentary venues), economic groups remain dominant in the domains of economic and social policies.

Introduction

Stressing the overall stability of the neo-corporatist character of the Swiss political system in a comparative perspective, Klaus Armingeon (2011) underlined the strong presence of economic groups – business interest associations (BIAs) and trade unions – in Parliament: "In 2010 the parliamentary commission on economy and taxes in the Swiss parliament – arguably one of the most important and powerful parliamentary commissions – is composed of members of leading representatives of interest groups representing the workforce, small and medium enterprises, farmers, employers and big business. If we use Lehmbruch's criterion that the direct political representation of interest organizations in parliament is an indicator of corporatism, today *Swiss corporatism is in an extremely healthy state* (Lehmbruch 1974, 1979)" (as cited in Armingeon 2011, 179, emphasis added). In another context, Binderkrantz and Christiansen (2015) also

stressed the resilience of Danish neo-corporatism despite profound socio-economic and political changes.

However, since the heydays of neo-corporatism during the 1970s, traditional European corporatist political systems, among which Switzerland, have been facing profound challenges. Among those are growing difficulties to reach compromises between business associations and trade unions in a context of social policy retrenchment, or the growing importance of post-materialist values underlying the rise of new citizen groups (e.g. environmental and humanitarian groups) increasingly active at the political level. In addition, and concerning the Swiss case more specifically, the formalization of the pre-parliamentary phase of the legislative process and the revalorization of the Parliament (Sciarini 2014; Pilotti 2017) have also contributed to putting the traditional corporatist system under pressure.

The aim of this contribution is to analyze in more detail how the traditional neo-corporatist structures have evolved over the last decades in Switzerland. Have they evolved towards a more pluralist system? Has the predominant position of business associations and trade unions during decision-making processes been challenged by citizen groups? Between the administrative and parliamentary venues, which is the most hospitable to economic groups? Are these actors more present in committees dealing with economic and social policy issues than citizen groups?

After a first part presenting the main challenges facing traditional corporatist systems, we analyze the evolution of interest groups' access to pre-parliamentary committees. Next, we focus on the parliamentary venue and study the evolution of MPs' ties to interest groups, with a particular focus on members of the Committees for Economic Affairs and Taxation (CEAT) as well as the Committees for Social Security and Health (CSSH). We conclude that the Swiss system of interest intermediation has indeed evolved towards a stronger participation of citizen groups, but that major economic groups (BIAs and trade unions) still remain the most dominant players within the domain of economic policy.

1. Declining role of pre-parliamentary negotiations and revalorization of parliament: a challenge for Swiss neo-corporatism?

Interest groups, especially economic peak associations, have traditionally been considered as crucial and very influential political actors in Switzerland. In the context of an underdeveloped central state, weak national political parties and a weakly professionalized Parliament, major Swiss economic interest groups, because of their various resources (in terms of finance, membership, expertise and institutional reconnaissance by public authorities) and their early organization at the national level, became major and central political actors since the end of the 19th century. More precisely, interest groups appeared as the dominant actors of the pre-parliamentary phase of the decision-making process (extra-parliamentary committees, consultation pro-

cedures), identified as the most important phase, whereas the Parliament, with its militia character, only marginally modified the proposals of the Federal Council (Neidhart 1970; Kriesi 1980; Mach 2007).

In this context, major interest groups, which had access to the pre-parliamentary phase, good contacts with the Federal Administration and were involved in the implementation of public policies, were clearly the dominant actors. These were the large peak level economic associations, business associations (USCI/Vorort – economiesuisse since 2000, USAM and UPS), linked to right-wing parties, and, to a lesser extent, trade unions (USS and CSCS) connected to the Social-Democratic Party (PSS) and social wing of the Christian-Democratic Party (PDC).[1] However, there was a clear asymmetry in this corporatist structure, in which the trade unions had been only progressively integrated on a minority basis and in which business associations remained the dominant actors (Kriesi 1980; Katzenstein 1985). This power configuration remained largely stable since the Second World War for three major reasons: First, companies succeeded in setting up cohesive, well-coordinated and representative business associations; second, they maintained close connections to the dominant right-wing parties, especially the Radical-Democratic Party (PRD); and third, business associations developed technical expertise that helped them to decisively influence public policies (see P. Eichenberger and Mach 2011).

Thanks to their representativeness, legitimacy and technical expertise, BIAs, among which the peak level associations, clearly remained the dominant actors in the decision-making process (P. Eichenberger and Mach 2011). Once they had been integrated, on a minority basis, into the corporatist structures in the 1930s, trade unions, as well as the Social-Democratic party, regularly tried to use the instrument of the popular initiative to promote their goals, and thus, to circumvent the power structure in which they remained in a minority position. However, they always lost these popular votes (e.g. co-determination initiative to give rights to employee representatives to sit on the boards of directors of companies in 1976, initiative to suppress banking secrecy in 1982, different initiatives to reduce the weakly working hours).

Despite (or actually because of, as underlined by Neidhart (1970)) the existence of direct democratic instruments (especially the optional referendum), pre-parliamentary negotiations between the major economic associations have become the center of gravity of the decision-making process. In this context, the corporatist insiders with privileged access to the government and its administration were clearly the dominant actors in the "traditional model".

As in other small European neo-corporatist countries (Crepaz 1994; Rommetvedt et al. 2013), corporatist structures seem also to have lost influence in the Swiss context. Economic internationalization exacerbated the cleavage between export-oriented and sheltered industries.

[1] We use the French abbreviations: ASB: Association suisse des banquiers (SwissBanking); USCI: Union suisse du commerce et de l'industrie (economiesuisse); USAM: Union suisse des arts et métiers; UPS: Union patronale suisse; USP: Union suisse des paysans; USS: Union syndicale suisse and CSCS: Confédération des syndicats chrétiens de Suisse (Travail.Suisse).

It also increased tensions between trade unions and BIAs, with the latter pushing for retrenchment policies (Mach 2006). This strain was accentuated through increasingly mediatized politics, which make political actors take more conflictive stances thus rendering classic closed-door corporatist negotiations more difficult (Häusermann, Mach, and Papadopoulos 2004). On the basis of more than 300 interviews with political actors and a network analysis of the most important decision-making processes at the beginning of this century, Sciarini (2014) thus comes to the conclusion of the declining importance of both the pre-parliamentary phase and peak level BIAs and trade unions. At the same time, Parliament has become a less predictable, and thus more important, actor in Swiss politics. This is largely due to the rise of the Swiss People's Party (UDC), which rendered parliamentary majorities less certain. Furthermore, citizen groups have become increasingly present within the Swiss society since the beginning of the 1970s. In fact, their number has more than doubled (Mach 2015). This largely parallels the evolution in other consolidated democracies, such as Denmark (Binderkrantz, Fisker, and Pedersen 2016) or the United States (Berry 1999). Even though the emergence of citizen groups represents a rather recent phenomenon, they have been able to consolidate organizationally (Zwicky 1993).

2. Seats in pre-parliamentary committees

Many authors have defined extra-parliamentary committees (EPC)[2] as a kind of "militia administration" and as an unofficial system of representation existing in parallel to the Parliament (Germann 1981, 1985). Such "corporatist bodies" are very numerous and increased considerably after the Second World War. Their domain of competence is very specialized. Despite their central importance for the preparation of new legislation and the implementation of public policies, EPCs, as the heart of neo-corporatist negotiations, remained completely unregulated until the 1970s. It is only during the 1970s that a first ordinance regulating EPCs was adopted by the Federal Council. Under the impulses of the Parliament, which regularly criticized the composition of EPCs during the renewal of their composition, the ordinance was then reformed in 1996 and included in the new law on the administrative organization in 2008 (for more details, see Rebmann and Mach 2013). During this process of formalization concerning the composition and functioning of EPCs, which aimed to introduce more transparency in the functioning of EPCs, the number of EPCs was considerably reduced from around 300 in 1980 to less than 200 in 2000 (Table 1 below).

[2] According to the official definition, extra-parliamentary committees are organs which assume tasks on behalf of executive authorities, but which are essentially composed of persons who are not civil servants. They have two main functions. First, they serve as a complement to the administration with regard to subjects about which the latter may not have enough knowledge and are thus considered as the best means to keep administrative costs down. Second, they can also be considered as "meeting places" for the Swiss elite, which help to find compromises between the major economic and political actors during the initial phase of the political decision-making process (Kriesi 1980; Germann 1985).

Table 1: Affiliations of members of extra-parliamentary committees to economic IGs and citizen groups (1980, 2000, 2010)[3]

	1980	**2000**	**2010**
Trade unions	178	108	90
	(24%)	(25%)	(24%)
Business interest associations	417	208	183
	(56%)	(49%)	(49%)
Citizen groups	151	109	98
	(20%)	(26%)	(26%)
Seats occupied by IGs	746	425	371
	(100%)	(100%)	(100%)
Total number of committees	301	195	223

Source: S. Eichenberger (2017) on the basis of Swiss Elites in the 20th Century Database, University of Lausanne.

Table 1 displays the distribution of committee seats across trade unions, BIAs and citizen groups in 1980, 2000 and 2010. The total number of seats occupied by these three types of interest groups has declined (from 746 to 371), mirroring the decline in the number of committees (from 301 to 223). It must be noted though that the average number of seats occupied by interest groups per committee has also declined. Whereas each committee hosted, on average, 2.5 interest group representatives in 1980, this figure has declined to roughly 1.6 in 2010. Most importantly, Table 1 shows that the share of interest group seats occupied by citizen groups has indeed increased, from 20% in 1980 to 26% in 2000-10. This disguises, however, a decline in absolute terms: citizen groups occupied 151 seats in 1980 and 98 in 2010. This decline was much stronger in the case of BIAs and trade unions, which "lost" more than half of their seats. Nevertheless, it must be stressed that economic groups still occupy the vast majority of seats (i.e. 73%) attributed to interest groups in 2010. To some extent at least, the evolution of the distribution of EPC seats across group types reflects the increasing number of citizen groups within the interest group population (Mach 2015).

The Swiss system of interest intermediation has thus adapted to changes within the interest group population. Of course, this does not mean that economic and citizen groups enjoy equal access to extra-parliamentary committees. But, from a neo-corporatist perspective the integration of citizen groups, which do not hold a monopoly of representation over certain societal interests, seems somewhat puzzling. Alternatively, and from a pluralist perspective, it might be argued that access to EPCSs does not actually depend on representative monopolies, but more so on expertise, and that the rise and consolidation of citizen groups should accordingly translate into more (but not necessarily equal) access.

[3] It should be noted that "ad hoc" EPCs, which often play a crucial role in drafting a first version of legislative proposals, are not included in this table; only permanent EPCs have been considered. Neither does the table include committee seats occupied by institutional and occupational groups.

We then looked at the numbers of mandates in EPCs occupied by members of the executive committee of the seven major economic associations, including the elected members as well as the major paid officials of these associations (Table 2 below). The post-war period until the 1990s, covering 1957 and 1980, clearly represents the heyday of Swiss neo-corporatism, where the number of EPCs increased considerably and where the representatives of economic groups were the most numerous. During the second half of the century, the concentration of economic groups is strongest within some central EPCs dealing with social and economic policies developed by the Federal Department of Economic Affairs (DFE) and the Federal Department of Home Affairs (DFI). After 1980, the number of seats held by representatives of the peak level economic groups decreased substantially, to a larger extent than the general decrease in the number of EPCs, underlining again the declining role of economic groups within EPCs.[4] There are two exceptions. The number of seats held by representatives of the Swiss Industry and Trade Association (USAM) has only slightly declined (from 19 to 17). And the number of seats occupied by representatives of the Confédération des syndicats chrétiens de Suisse (CSCS/Travail.Suisse) has actually increased during the 2000-10 period. In the former case this might be related to the structurally weak position, in times of economic liberalization, of a BIA representing small and medium-sized enterprises rather focused on the domestic market. In order to avert a too strong and rapid liberalization process, this organization might have faced an additional incentive to remain represented within EPCs. In the latter case, this might simply be due to the fact that the CSCS merged with another peak level trade union (Confederation of Swiss Salaried Employees Organizations) in order to become Travail.Suisse in 2002.

Table 2*:* Number of mandates in EPCs occupied by executive committee members of peak level economic groups (seats occupied by paid officials)

	Business interest associations					*Trade unions*		
	ASB	*UPS*	*USCI*	*USAM*	*USP*	*USS*	*CSCS*	**Total**
1957	12 (6)	24 (16)	39 (24)	28 (12)	56 (23)	54 (22)	18 (9)	**231 (112)**
1980	11 (5)	28 (14)	36 (29)	41 (22)	44 (21)	75 (38)	26 (11)	**261 (140)**
2000	4 (2)	22 (15)	20 (14)	19 (17)	14 (11)	29 (23)	17 (9)	**125 (91)**
2010	1 (1)	17 (15)	13 (9)	17 (17)	8 (6)	18 (10)	24 (14)	**98 (72)**
Total	**28 (14)**	**91 (60)**	**108 (76)**	**105 (68)**	**122 (61)**	**176 (93)**	**85 (43)**	**715 (415)**

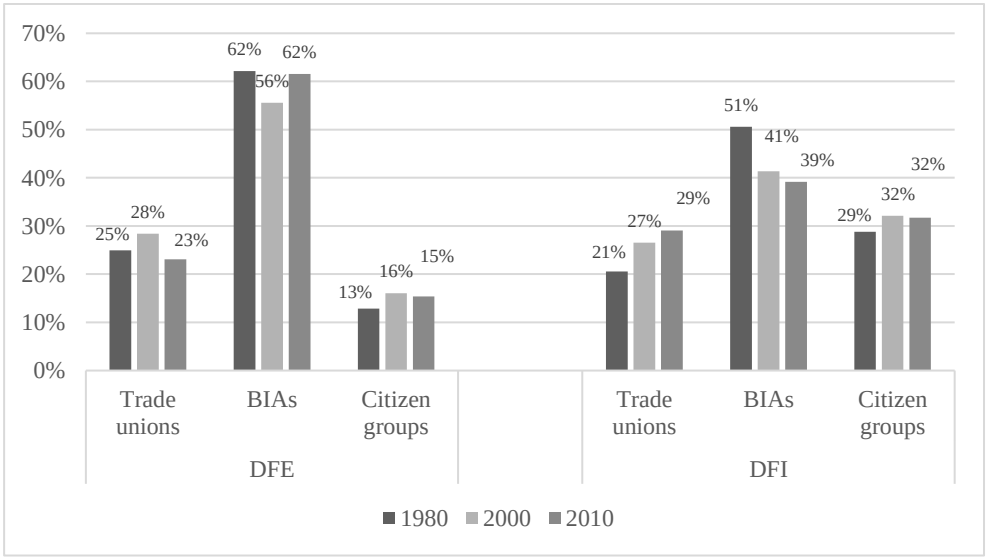
Source: Swiss Elites in the 20th Century Database, University of Lausanne. Acronyms: See Footnote 1.

[4] Besides the political will to formalize EPCs and to make them more transparent, the declining importance of the pre-parliamentary phase and of EPCs are also related to the declining capacity of corporatist actors to find compromises on policy reforms, notably concerning social policies, but also in other fields (Häusermann, Mach, and Papadopoulos 2004; Sciarini 2014).

3. Focus on pre-parliamentary committees in the economic and social policy domains

Finally, we propose a disaggregated view of the evolution of committee seats, in committees affiliated to the DFE and the DFI. These two departments are responsible for economic and social policy. We can thus test whether a pluralization has also taken place within these policy domains. As can be seen on Figure 1, the evolution of EPCs mandates in the economic and social policy domains is different than the one observed at an aggregate level (see previous section). At an aggregate level, the share of seats attributed to citizen groups has increased by 6 percentage points (see Table 1). At the level of economic policy – that is, within the committees affiliated to the DFE – the share of seats attributed to citizen groups has only increased by 2 percentage points, and 3 percentage points in the case of the committees affiliated to the DFI. Thus within committees affiliated to both the DFE and DFI the share of seats occupied by citizen groups has remained relatively stable. This stability must also be seen in light of a rather strong increase in the share of citizen group seats within committees affiliated to the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAE) and the Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications (DETEC) (not depicted in Figure 1). Citizen groups occupied roughly 20% of all DETEC seats in 1980, but 35% in 2010. Also, within committees affiliated to the DFI we mostly observe a shift in access from BIAs to trade unions. Whereas BIAs occupied 51% of all committee seats affiliated to the DFI in 1980, this share had decreased to 39% by 2010. Inversely, trade unions occupied 21% of all seats in 1980, as compared to 29% in 2010.

Figure 1: Share of DFE and DFI committee seats occupied by trade unions, BIAs, and citizen groups, 1980, 2000, and 2010



Source: S. Eichenberger (2017) on the basis of Swiss Elites in the 20th Century Database, University of Lausanne.

The pluralization of extra-parliamentary committee seats must hence be nuanced as the share of seats occupied by citizen groups has remained fairly stable within committees affiliated to both the DFE and the DFI. This might reflect a certain "resilience" of neo-corporatism within the economic and social policy domains. Neo-corporatist negotiations usually took place within committee affiliated to the DFE and DFI. The stability observed within the EPCs affiliated to these departments might reflect a certain neo-corporatist heritage. In these departments, civil servants might still turn to BIAs and trade unions, quasi by default, when developing public policies. And this might lead to the exclusion of citizen groups working within these policy domains. On the other hand, it might be argued that citizen groups remain marginally invested in economic and social policy. That is, the stability observed might simply reflect a certain stability within the interest group population concerned by economic and social policy.

4. Formal ties to elected Members of the Parliament

Traditionally considered as a less important phase in the policy process, in comparison to the pre-parliamentary negotiations, the Parliament underwent some institutional reforms since the beginning of the 1990s that reinforced its role. Despite the negative popular vote against the reform of the Parliament in 1992, except for the part about the creation of specialized parliamentary commissions, different authors have underlined the increasing role of the Parliament in the Swiss decision-making process (Lüthi 1997; Linder 1998; Jegher 1999; Sciarini 2014; Pilotti 2017).

Different reasons explain this change. First, the rising role of Parliament is partly due to the partial institutional reform of 1992, based on the replacement of ad hoc parliamentary committees by permanent and specialized committees. This means that MPs have become increasingly specialized and competent in some policy fields, and might thus be less dependent on the expertise and pressure of interest groups. Second, the increasing difficulty of economic groups to find compromise during the pre-parliamentary phase has led to a more important role of the debates in Parliament. Deadlocks in the pre-parliamentary phase have often been overcome during the parliamentary debates (Kriesi and Jegen 2000 on energy policy; Häusermann, Mach, and Papadopoulos 2004 on social policy; Fischer 2005; Sciarini 2014).

Third, despite the popular refusal of the major parts of the institutional reform of 1992 concerning the improvements of the remunerations of MPs, the Parliament, through different adjustments not subject to an optional referendum, increased the remunerations of MPs. Thus, the militia character of the Swiss Parliament has clearly diminished since the beginning of the 1990s. MPs have become more professional, and less dependent on other revenues stemming from other professional activities, such as member of cantonal or communal executive authorities, or membership in boards of directors, or paid positions in interest groups. It is not rare to find real professional MPs, without any main profession besides their political mandates (Pilotti 2017; Sciarini et al. 2017). The few studies on Swiss MPs (Gruner and Frei 1966; Kerr 1981;

Wiesli 2003) all emphasized historically the strong dependence of MPs with respect to economic interests, especially through leading positions in business associations and trade unions, or through memberships on the boards of directors of companies.

Finally, the increasing polarization in the Parliament, related to the electoral success of the Swiss People Party (UDC), rendered the parliamentary debates more uncertain. Among the right-wing parties, the traditional cohesion of the 'bourgeois bloc', linking the main BIAs and right-wing political parties, was called into question because of the increasing divisions between BIAs, but also through the electoral success of the populist-conservative UDC to the detriment of the Radical-Democratic Party (PRD) and the Christian-Democratic Party (PDC). The PRD, which maintained very close links to business circles, lost much of its leadership in the political arena. This change in the power balance undermined the traditional channel of influence of BIAs via the PRD, rendering their lobbying activities more difficult.

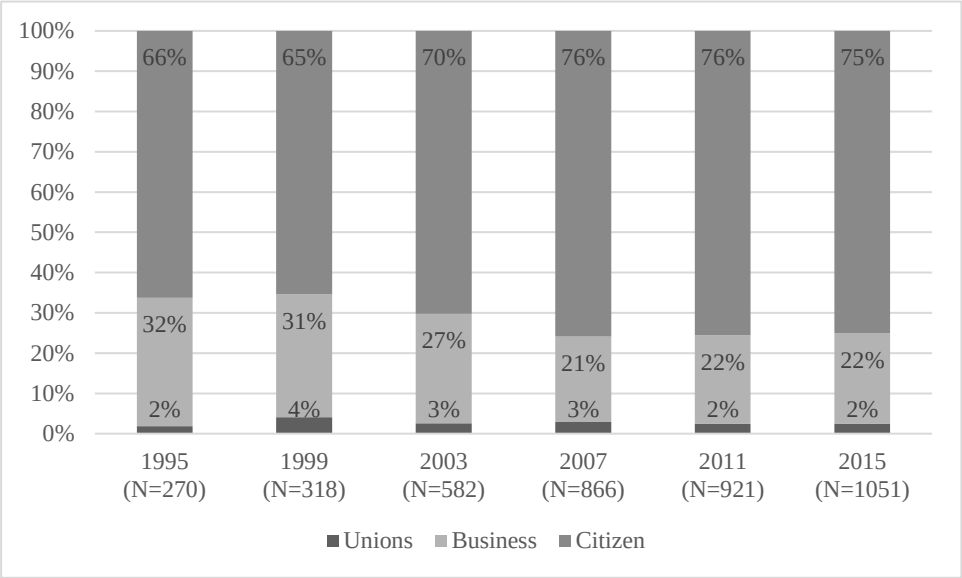
The revalorization of the Parliament should be nuanced for internationalized policy issues. The international literature generally underlines, on the contrary to what is argued in this section, the weakening role of national parliaments in the context of the increasing role of international organizations with a supranational dimension. This also apply to Switzerland: for "internationalized policy process", meaning policy reforms related to international constraining agreements or norms (bilateral agreements with the EU or international pressure), the role of the Parliament is effectively weakened, whereas the government and its administration has been reinforced (Mach, Häusermann, and Papadopoulos 2003; Sciarini 2014; Gava and Varone 2014).

In the context of the declining importance of the pre-parliamentary phase and the growing role of the Parliament combined with the increasing importance of the media, interest groups had to adjust their strategies of influence toward political actors. Similarly, to what happened in some Scandinavian neo-corporatist countries (see Öberg et al. 2011; Rommetvedt et al. 2013), Swiss interest groups have progressively modified their strategies of influence in direction of the Parliament.

In relation to the growing diversity in interest group landscape, it seems that MPs are increasingly asked to occupy leading positions in various interest groups. This could be explained by the revalorization of the Parliament and the intensification of lobbying activities targeting the Parliament. On the basis of the official register of MPs private interests it is possible to document formal connections of MPs with interest groups[5].

[5] MPs' private interests are accessible since the mid-80s in the Registry of Interest Ties (see www.parlament.ch and particularly Gava et al. 2017, for a general overview).

Figure 2: Evolution MPs' ties to business associations, trade unions and citizen groups



Source: S. Eichenberger (2017).

As can be seen in Figure 2, the number of ties to BIAs, trade unions and citizen groups has increased from 270 in 1995 to 1051 in 2015. It must be noted that the increase can be partially explained by stricter rules concerning the declaration of ties, which entered into force in December 2003. Particularly the more than twofold increase of ties between 1999 and 2007 must be, to a large extent, due to these stricter rules.[6] Nevertheless, over the entire period we can observe an increase in the number of ties held by MPs. Between 1995 and 1999, an 18% increase in the total number of ties can be observed, and between 2007 and 2015 the total number of ties has increased by 21%. This clearly reflects the growing importance of the Parliament in Swiss decision-making processes. S. Eichenberger and Mach (2017) have further shown that MPs often develop ties in function of their membership in legislative committees. That is, members of the Environment Committees are more likely to develop ties to interest groups working on environmental policy than the members of other committees. This further illustrates how interest groups have increased their lobbying activities within Parliament.

If we focus on the distribution of ties across group types, and particularly its evolution, we can observe a certain stability. At first sight, it appears as if the share of citizen groups has considerably increased. However, this increase intervenes between 1999 and 2007, when Parliament enacted the stricter declaration rules. In fact, MPs were required to declare all ties, not just those which they deemed "important". It seems likely that ties to politically inactive citizen groups constituted the lion's share of those ties which had not yet been disclosed.[7] Thus the

[6] In fact, these stricter rules of declaration had already been anticipated by the offices of both Councils in April 2001. Also, the registry of ties is updated at the beginning of each year. In order to isolate any effects related to these stricter declaration rules, both when studying the evolution of the total number of ties as well as the distribution across group types, we must limit ourselves to a comparison of the periods reaching from 1995 to 1999, and from 2007 to 2015.

[7] Between 2000 and 2004, a fivefold increase in the number of ties to leisure groups has taken place.

increase in the share of ties to citizen groups should not be interpreted as an actual increase in the share of citizen groups actually seeking to influence public policy. Nevertheless, it must be underlined that the number of ties to citizen groups has starkly increased since the 1990s. And ties to citizen groups represented the majority of all ties already in 1995.[8] Moreover, citizen groups clearly enjoy more access to Parliament than to extra-parliamentary committees. In 2010, citizen groups accounted for 26% of all EPC seats occupied by interest groups (see Table 1), but for 76% of all ties to MPs (see Figure 3).

The increasing role of the Parliament, combined with the decline of the pre-parliamentary phase, has thus "pluralized" and opened up access to the decision-making process to a wider spectrum of interest groups, and thus weakened the traditional insiders. Decision-making takes more and more place within Parliament, which is relatively more hospitable to citizen groups. Even though economic groups have increased their ties to MPs, thus updating their lobbying activities to the increased importance of Parliament, this has not led to a crowding out of citizen groups. In other words, economic groups' heavier investment in the parliamentary venue has not allowed them to obtain as dominant a position as the one previously enjoyed within the administrative venue. The sheer number of interest groups present within Parliament, as well as the increasing presence of citizen groups, most of which cannot be considered to detain a monopoly of representation, does not square well with a neo-corporatist understanding of policy-making, according to which only a handful of mostly economic groups should play an important role.

The declining role of the pre-parliamentary phase does not mean that peak level economic groups do not play any role. They remain major actors (in terms of finance or membership), but they had to adjust their strategies towards political actors. Table 3 below clearly indicates a growing presence of MPs sitting on the executive committees of peak level economic associations during the recent period. This is particularly true for the USAM and USP, but also for the trade-unions (USS and CSCS, which became Travail.Suisse in 2002); however, this does not apply to USCI-Economiesuisse and UPS. As underlined by Armingeon (2011), we can see a displacement in the involvement of corporatist actors from the pre-parliamentary phase to the Parliament. So, contrary to the decline in the number of mandates on the board of directors of companies, which can be interpreted as a professionalization of the Parliament, the involvement of MPs in the governing bodies of corporatist actors has on the contrary increased. It is also interesting to note that the associations, which were the most affected by liberal economic reforms of the 1990s (farmers – USP, Small and medium enterprises – USAM, and employees organized by the trade unions), are also those with the highest number of MPs in their executive committee. This can again be interpreted as an attempt of these associations to compensate for their perceived loss of influence through closer ties to MPs.

[8] Even though this must be nuanced since many ties to citizen actually do not represent ties to politically active interest groups (S. Eichenberger 2017, 112).

Table 3: Number of MPs sitting in the executive committee of peak level economic associations

	Business interest associations				*Trade unions*		
	UPS	*USCI*	*USAM*	*USP*	*USS*	*CSCS*	**Total**
1957	1	1	2	8	6	2	**20**
1980	3	-	4	5	3	1	**16**
2000	3	1	6	8	3	2	**23**
2010	3	1	7	4	5	2	**22**
Total	**10**	**3**	**19**	**25**	**17**	**7**	**81**

Source: S. Eichenberger (2017) on the basis of Swiss Elites in the 20th Century Database, University of Lausanne. Acronyms: see Footnote 1.

This is further illustrated if we focus on those groups holding most accreditations to the Federal Palace.[9] As can be seen in Table 4, the major peak level economic groups, the usual suspects so to speak, occupy the top four positions of groups holding most accreditations to the Federal Palace in 2015. Just to make this clear, the USCI (economiesuisse), USAM, USS and USP could rely on a total of 37 lobbyists enjoying free access to the Parliament's anti-chambers. This represents roughly 10% of all accreditations handed out by MPs in 2015.[10] At the same time, however, three citizen groups (Pro Natura, ASLOCA, and the WWF) also occupy one of the ten highest ranks. This suggests that access is not so much related to representative monopolies, but more so interest groups' capacity to provide MPs with relevant political and technical information.

Table 4 – Interest groups holding most accreditations to the Federal Palace in 2015 (top ten)[11]

Rank	Interest group	Accreditations
1	**economiesuisse**	10
2	**Union suisse des arts et métiers (USAM)**	9
2	**Union Syndicale Suisse (USS)**	9
2	**Union suisse des paysans (USP)**	9
5	Pro Natura	5
6	**Travail.Suisse**	4
6	Association Suisse des locataires (ASLOCA)	4
8	WWF	3
8	**Union de propriétaires de maison (HEV)**	3
8	**swisscleantech**	3

Note: Economic (citizen) groups are held in bold (normal) characters. Source: S. Eichenberger (2017).

[9] Each MP can hand out two permanent access badges to "any two persons who wish to have access to the parts of the Parliament Building that are not accessible to the public" (Parliament Act, Art. 69.2). The accreditation lists had been made publicly available on the parliamentary website only since the beginning of 2012 (*Schweiz am Sonntag* 2012).

[10] It must be noted that not all MPs make us of the opportunity to hand out such access badges. In fact, in 2015 there were 94 free slots.

[11] Economic groups are held in bold characters.

5. Focus on parliamentary committees in the economic and social policy domains

Since 1992, both chambers of the Federal Assembly have nine permanent, specialized legislative committees and 2 permanent, supervisory committees.[12] How have interest groups adapted their strategies towards the parliamentary venue in this new institutional context? Since the reform, decisive debates about legislative proposals by the government are considered to take place in these specialized committees, composed according to the strength of the different parliamentary groups. The plenary debates generally do not profoundly modify the solutions adopted by the specialized committees. It is thus crucial for interest groups to intervene in the deliberations of these committees.

How are interest groups' ties distributed across group types within different specialized parliamentary committees? For economic groups, two committees are of particular importance in both houses: The Committee for Economic Affairs and Taxation (CEAT) and the Committee for Social Security and Health (CSSH), often considered as the most important specialized committees (see Figures 3 and 4 below).

First, a general increase in the number of ties held by CEAT and CSSH members can be observed, with the exception of the 2011-15 period for the CEAT. For instance, between 1995 and 1999, the number of ties held by CEAT members increased by 48% (from 40 to 59). This increase might be partially explained by CEAT members simultaneously holding mandates within other legislative committees (e.g. the Environment Committees). However, if the focus is put on CEAT members of the National Council, which usually do not occupy several committee seats simultaneously, we can still observe an increase in the number of ties. In fact, between 1995 and 1999, the number of ties held by CEAT members of the National Council increased by 81% (from 11 to 20). This shows that the increase observed at an aggregate level is not solely due to an increase in the number of ties held by the members of other legislative committees (most notably the Environment Committees).

Secondly, economic groups account for a larger share of ties to CEAT members than to members of the entire Parliament: whereas they account for 34% of all ties to MPs, they account for roughly 50% of all ties to CEAT members (of both the National Council and the Council of States). This shows that the importance of citizen groups clearly varies across policy domains. When it comes to economic policy, economic groups remain, in terms of numbers at least, the most important actors, as it must be borne in mind that ties to citizen groups often involve groups which are not or only weakly politically active.

Thirdly, except for the 1995-99 period, the share of CEAT members' ties held by economic groups has remained stable, if not even slightly increased. Whereas economic groups accounted

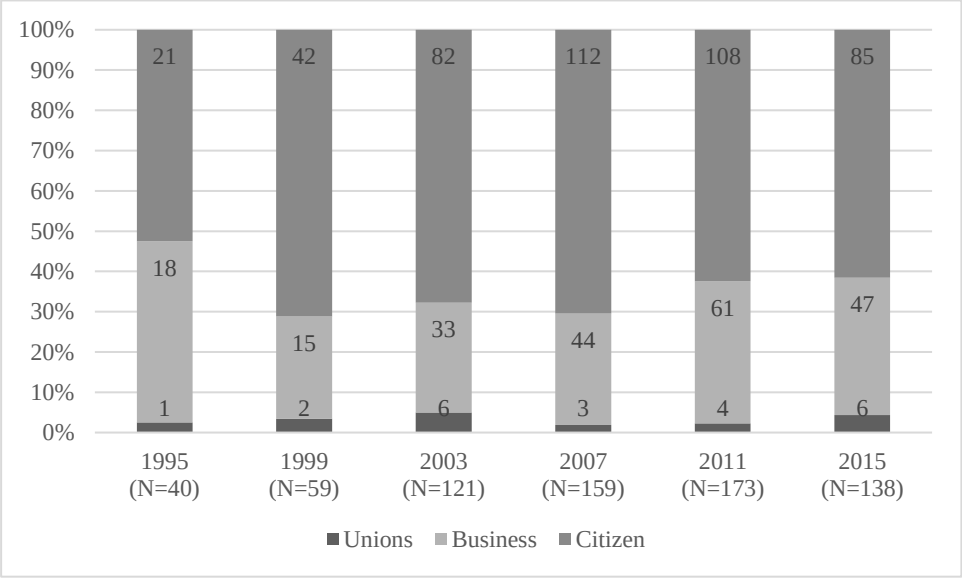
[12] In fact, permanent committees have existed since 1979, but their resources were limited, and ad hoc parliamentary committees remained very important.

for 30% of all ties to CEAT members in 2007, they accounted for 38% in 2015. In absolute terms, the number citizen groups holding ties to CEAT members has actually declined between 2007 and 2015 (from 112 to 85). This runs counter to the evolution observed at the aggregate level, suggesting that economic groups have adapted their lobbying activities to the growing importance of legislative committees and, the proportion of connections of economic groups to the CEAT actually increased more than for citizen groups.

Nevertheless, it must be underlined that economic groups are not amongst themselves within the Economic Affairs Committees, but must face the company of numerous citizen groups. This is notably different from the classic pre-parliamentary corporatist structures with an exclusive participation of economic groups. In fact, our results suggest that both the CEAT and CSSH have never been the exclusive domain of economic groups. Citizen groups accounted for considerable share of ties already in 1995.

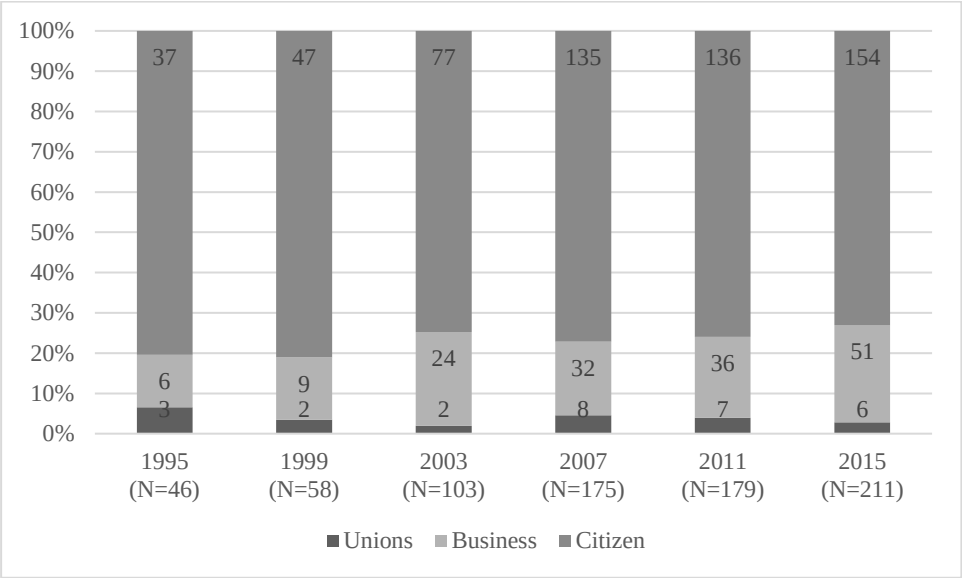
Finally, the evolution within the Committees for Social Security and Health roughly parallels the evolution observed at the aggregate level. Citizen groups account for the vast majority of ties, and there has also been a general increase in the number of ties. But, the distribution across group types has remained fairly stable over the entire period analyzed here.

Figure 3: Ties held by members of the Committees for Economic Affairs and Taxation (CEAT)



Source: S. Eichenberger 2017.

Figure 4: Ties held by members of the Committees for Social Security and Health (CSSH)



Source: S. Eichenberger 2017.

In spite of economic groups having supplemented their pre-parliamentary lobbying activities with a stronger investment into the Parliament, citizen groups appear to represent a force to be reckoned with. The number of groups present within both committees, as well as citizen groups' capacity to increase their ties (in absolute terms) in spite of economic groups' increased investment into the legislative venue, suggest that access does not solely depend on interest groups' representational monopolies, but more so on expertise and legitimacy. Citizen groups, which to a certain extent are also illustrative of economic groups' increasing difficulties to encompass various societal interests, have undergone a process of organizational consolidation since the 1980s. In addition, they have also reinforced their financial resources, particularly in the case of environmental groups. This consolidation allows them to acquire a broader access to decision-making processes. Moreover, citizen groups often represent concerns shared by large segments of the population. In more public venues, such as the parliament, citizen groups are thus more likely to be granted access.

To be clear, this is not to say that citizen groups and economic groups nowadays enjoy equal access to the various decision-making venues. Financial and expertise resources are still unequally distributed across different group types, giving BIAs and trade unions a certain advantage over citizen groups. For instance, the USCI, USAM, USP and USS are represented among the interest groups holding most ties to CEAT members in 2015. The Swiss Farmers Union (USP) alone held five ties to CEAT members of both Councils.

6. Conclusion

As often in Switzerland, there is no brutal departure from traditional political structures. Changes follow a much more incremental dynamic, through progressive adjustments of existing

structures and institutions. But, nevertheless, some changes have occurred concerning the system of interest intermediation and interest groups' access to the decision-making process, amending the traditional neo-corporatist model.

We come to nuanced conclusions. On the one hand, we can observe the growing presence of citizen groups in the various venues of the decision-making process, partly challenging traditional economic groups. On the other hand, business associations and trade unions still occupy dominant positions in some key specialized committees dealing with economic and social policy issues. While at the aggregate level, we can observe a growing access of citizen groups, when we look at more specialized committees dealing with economic and social policies (in the pre- and the parliamentary venue), the overrepresentation of traditional economic groups remains stable.

With the revalorization and growing professionalization of the parliament, the parliamentary venue has gained in importance. This venue is by definition more hospitable to citizen groups defending general causes and objectives. But, economic interest groups have also adjusted their political strategies, and have reinforced their efforts to be present and represented within the parliamentary venue, nuancing thus the strengthening of citizen groups.

The corporatist heritage of Switzerland, marked by the dominant/entrenched positions of traditional economic groups, has certainly limited the capacity of citizen groups to access the decision-making process. However, the existence of direct democratic instruments, facilitating the political agenda-setting and the access of citizen groups to the decision-making process, has probably favored the recognition of citizen groups in Swiss politics (see Christiansen, Mach, and Varone 2017, who compare the Swiss and Danish cases).

Such changes lead us to speak of a progressive transition from a neo-corporatist system toward a "privileged" or "biased pluralism" where citizen groups have gained more access to the decision-making process, more in the parliamentary than the administrative venue, but where traditional economic groups, concentrating important resources (in terms of membership, finance and expertise) remain largely privileged actors in some key committees.

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