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Autor: Schenk, Peter
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7,528 Swiss Abroad from Basel are unable to vote

In canton Basel-Stadt, the Swiss Abroad have no right to vote at cantonal level. The situation is different in the neighbouring cantons of Basel-Landschaft, Solothurn and Jura as well as in seven other cantons. The Cantonal Parliament has thus far consistently rejected an extension of the right to vote in Basel-Stadt.

PETER SCHENK

The Swiss Abroad from canton Basel-Stadt have been able to take part in the Council of States elections since the end of 2013. The Cantonal Parliament's clear decision was preceded by fierce debate; in particular the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) refused to give way. They argued that only those affected should be able to have their say. This was not the case for people living in Timbuktu, said André Auderset (LDP) at the time on behalf of his parliamentary group. However, the main argument for giving the right to vote to Swiss Abroad from Basel was the fact that they have been able to take part in National Council elections since 1992. Excluding them from the Council of States elections was therefore illogical. The legislative amend-

Basel-Landschaft, for example, where the Swiss Abroad can also vote at cantonal level. Exactly the same provisions apply in the cantons of Solothurn and Jura. Extending participation to cantonal elections and referenda has been "discussed several times but rejected by the Cantonal Parliament thus far", according to government spokesperson Marco Greiner. At the Cantonal Council and Cantonal Parliament elections last October, the 7,528 former Basel residents, who were able to take part in the Council of States elections for the first time in 2015, therefore still had no say.

A voice through the referendum

This is not the same everywhere. There are ten cantons in Switzerland where the Swiss Abroad can vote at cantonal level. In the neighbouring canton of Solothurn, this goes back to a referendum in 1980 while in Basel-Landschaft the applicable law entered into force in 1981. The issue was discussed three times in the Cantonal Parliament in 1978, according to Basel-Landschaft's Cantonal Chancellery. In Jura, the provision has existed since the canton was founded in 1979. In contrast, Zurich, like Basel, restricts the right to vote to the Council of States elections.

In northwestern Switzerland, canton Aargau is the most restrictive when it comes to voting rights for the Swiss Abroad. The 7,005 Swiss Abroad registered here can only take part in the National Council elections. Participation in the Council of States elections is only possible if provided for by

cantonal legislation, which it is not. Aargau's Cantonal Council justified its rejectionist stance in November 2012 in its response to an interpellation submitted by Kim Lara Schweri (Greens) which was only signed by one other Council member.

"The connection disappears"

On the subject of Swiss people who have lived abroad for a long period of time or on a permanent basis, the council said: "The connection with Aargau disappears over time and cantonal issues and elections become of much less interest than to citizens living here. Such persons eligible to vote sometimes no longer even have a command of the German language." Guy Morin (Greens), the former President of the Cantonal Council in Basel, uses a similar line of argument in relation to cantonal voting rights for the Swiss Abroad: "There has to be a relationship for cantonal elections, which is lost when people are away for a long period of time." He also argues that Basel is a city canton and he cannot imagine that the Swiss Abroad have a vote in other cities.

The conservative politician Baschi Dürr is more open. He could personally understand the argument that "it would be strange if a citizen of Basel residing abroad in Argentina could vote on the redesign of a square in Basel but not someone from Basel-Landschaft or a foreigner living in Basel who passes through it every day." He could nevertheless envisage an amendment and wrote: "I would not rule out the idea of a general right to vote for the Swiss Abroad in canton Basel-Stadt if this were put forward from the ranks of the Cantonal Parliament."



The Swiss Abroad from canton Basel-Stadt can still only take part in national votes. In the photo: Polling station in the Basel Rathaus

Photo: Keystone

ment was eventually approved with 80 votes in favour and 7 against.

The Swiss Abroad from Basel are nevertheless still prevented from taking part in cantonal elections. In this, the otherwise liberal canton Basel-Stadt is more conservative than

PETER SCHENK IS A JOURNALIST WITH "BZ BASEL"