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Media Release

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When a significant section of the population does not belong – opinion on election and voting rights for foreign nationals

On 22 May 2023, the Zurich Cantonal Parliament rejected the right of foreign nationals to vote in municipal elections, turning down the City of Zurich initiative. From the perspective of the Foreigners' Advisory Board of the City of Zurich (ABR), the Cantonal Parliament is thus preventing the further development of democratic processes and hampering positive coexistence in the municipalities. A missed opportunity.

The Foreigners' Advisory Board of the City of Zurich (ABR) regrets the extremely narrow decision of the Zurich Cantonal Parliament of 22 May 2023 against voting and election rights for foreign nationals at municipal level. The Cantonal Parliament missed the opportunity to strengthen the autonomy of the municipalities and to create local solutions for local challenges.

Many municipalities experience a democratic deficit, as foreign nationals form a large part of the population and make valuable contributions to the economic and social life, but remain excluded from votes and elections. In the city of Zurich, the proportion of foreign nationals is 33 per cent ([current city figures](#)); in Opfikon, Schlieren and Dietikon this figure is around 45 to 48 per cent ([current figures from the canton](#)). This decision at the cantonal level prevents the municipalities from finding their own ways to actively involve these large sections of the population in the community.

From the ABR's perspective, the arguments against the introduction of voting and election rights at municipal level do not stand up. Under the City of Zurich initiative, each municipality would have the opportunity to define precise requirements for integration or language acquisition.



Hope for new initiatives

Through its decision, the Cantonal Parliament classes people who have lived in their municipality for years – who work and pay taxes in the Canton of Zurich and who often engage outside their workplace to ensure the success of the positive coexistence in a diverse society – as non-citizens.

Nevertheless, in view of Switzerland's history, its democratic tradition and the long road to the introduction of the right of women to vote, the ABR is certain: voting rights for foreign nationals will come. Otherwise, the difference between the population and those classed as citizens will remain too great. There is already an increasing demand for state institutions to reflect the diversity of the population. And other cantons already grant voting rights to foreign nationals at municipal or cantonal level. It is only a question of when foreign nationals will attain voting and election rights and the role of the Canton of Zurich in facilitating this. The ABR is hopeful that the capacity for innovation of the canton and the different parties, NGOs and civil society will have an impact. It trusts that new initiatives will emerge that will eventually allow every member of the population to have a say in Zurich's democracy.

The Foreigners' Advisory Council

The Foreigners' Advisory Council of the City of Zurich is an advisory committee to the City Council that pursues three objectives: The Foreigners' Advisory Council communicates the concerns and needs of the foreign resident population of the City of Zurich to the City Council, contributes to the integration of the foreign population of the city of Zurich and to a good coexistence between locals and newcomers and supports the City Council and the municipal administration in integration policy issues.

Note to editors:

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