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Jura paving the way

VON PABLO CRIVELLI

Although the last to join the federal family (in 1979), the canton of Jura is playing a pioneering role when it comes to integrating foreigners.

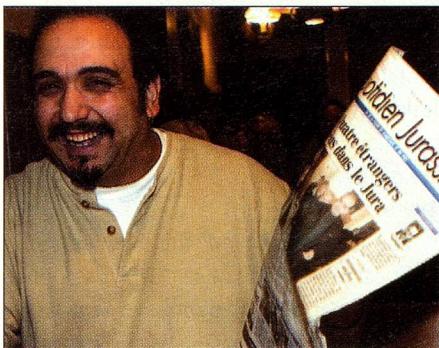
SINCE 26 NOVEMBER 2000 three Italians (Raffaele Scarciglia, Giuseppe Natale and Francesco Prudente) and a Spaniard (José Bernal) have taken their seat on the 51-strong municipal parliament of Delémont. The other non-Swiss candidates in the local elections for the Jura communities of Bassecourt, Pruntrut and Les Bois failed at the hurdle. The anomaly may be attributable to the large population of foreigners in the cantonal capital of Delémont (25 percent of the 11,400 residents - twice as many as the cantonal average).

Promoting the integration of foreigners is a controversial issue which is seldom debated calmly or rationally. Witness last year's crises and staff changes at the Federal Commission for Foreigners: The Federal Council's decision to place this commission under the jurisdiction of the Federal Aliens Office, part of the Federal Justice and Police Department, sparked off a storm of protest and ultimately led to the resignation of the Chairman of the Commission as well as around half its members (see "Swiss Review" 4/00, p. 21).

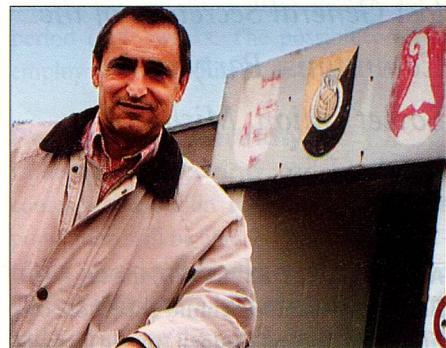
Despite this emotionally charged episode the government is committed to promoting foreigner integration, among other things by facilitating the naturalisation process, the complexity and high cost of which currently deters many foreigners from applying for a Swiss passport. Facilitated naturalisation is also one of the main concerns of the four newly elected members of the Delémont parliament, who believe that extending civil rights to

to the communal parliament. This was a compromise decision following Jura voters' rejection in 1996 (by 51 to 49 percent) of a similar but more radical proposal which called for eligibility to include the Community Executive. This, it is believed, was the point which dictated the negative outcome of the vote.

The concept of extending political rights to foreigners is a political hot potato. Over the past ten years initiatives with



Raffaele Scarciglia (left) and José Bernal have managed to gain a seat in the communal parliament of Delémont.



Photos: Stéphane Gerber and Keystone

the foreign population would promote their integration in society.

Progressive regulation

The pioneering role played by the canton of Jura in this respect comes as no surprise. Foreigners were already granted voting rights at community and cantonal level in the cantonal constitution of 1979, and in December 1998 the cantonal parliament extended this to include eligibility for election

this aim in mind have been rejected by majorities of 60 to 70 percent in the cantons of Vaud, Zurich, Geneva, Basle City, Berne, Uri, Aargau, Solothurn and Fribourg. The canton of Jura therefore deserves recognition for having broken this taboo. Other cantons would do well to follow its example.

Often the process of drawing up a new constitution offers a welcome opportunity to table this topic for discussion. This is happening now in the cantons of Schaffhausen, Grisons, Vaud and Fribourg, where voting and eligibility rights for foreigners could be incorporated in current constitutional reforms. While voters in Geneva and Basle City will soon have the opportunity to cast their ballot on this subject, Neuchâtel has already decided. Last autumn the electorate gave the thumbs up to a new constitution which grants foreigners the right to vote at cantonal level. The right to vote at community level has been enforced since 1849.

Related publications

The Federal Office of Statistics has recently published two reports containing highly informative material on the current situation:

- Ausländerinnen und Ausländer in der Schweiz, Bericht 2000. Neuchâtel 2000, 16 CHF. Order No.: 275-0000.
- Die Einbürgerungen in der Schweiz. Unterschiede zwischen Nationalitäten, Kantonen und Gemeinden 1981-1998. Neuchâtel 2000, 12 CHF. Order No.: 398-9800.

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