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I vote! More than a tenth of the Swiss population lives abroad. According to the latest statistics, there are precisely 695,101 Swiss abroad and 135,877 of them were entered in electoral registers in Switzerland at the end of last year. A quarter of all Swiss adults abroad participate directly in political life and decision-making in Switzerland – that is 2.4% of the electorate.



*First name: Ursula
Surname: Deplazes
Age: 41
Place of residence: Rome, Italy
Since: Autumn 2008*



*First name: Rudolf
Surname: Arn
Age: 66
Place of residence:
North Brookfield, MA
Since: 1990
Moved to the USA in 1978*

Will you take part in the elections on 23 October. Do you vote regularly?

URSULA DEPLAZES: Provided I receive the voting material on time, I take part in elections and referenda.

RUDOLF ARN: Yes.

What are your memories of the first election or referendum you took part in?

I can't remember when I first voted, but I take part in elections and referenda. I have lived in various countries and have always enjoyed playing a part in determining the fate of my homeland. I see this as a privilege.

I was elated and proud to have the opportunity to participate and have a say in matters I felt were important to me as a Swiss citizen living abroad.

And why do you take part in elections and referenda?

Elections and referenda in Switzerland also concern me as a Swiss citizen abroad. I am therefore pleased to assume my political responsibility.

I feel that it is important to be part of the process to express my view. Even though I have been living abroad for many years, I still feel closely connected to Switzerland and a proud Swiss citizen.

How do you decide who to vote for?

I mainly follow political developments in Switzerland online, but I also read the press. Discussion with my friends in Switzerland is also very important. Of course, I also read the electoral material.

I read the information and material included with the voting pack. If I am not sure or can't decide I discuss it with my sisters or brother living in Switzerland.

The Swiss abroad are entitled to vote although they don't pay taxes and therefore don't assume any responsibility. This is currently being met v

Assuming responsibility for a country means much more than paying taxes. The Swiss abroad are important ambassadors for Switzerland in the world and provide it with a sustainable network. I have noticed that the Swiss abroad are increasingly well-organised and want to assume greater responsibility.

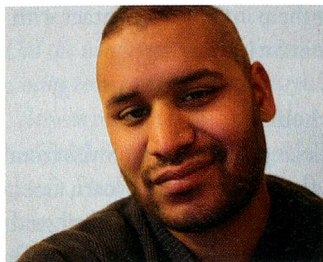
Swiss living abroad can contribute a lot to Swiss culture and life in Switzerland with educated decisions and opinions while living away from their old country.

What are the key issues that Swiss politicians have to resolve?

As a Swiss abroad, Switzerland's position on the international stage concerns me. In this respect, we are going through a key phase where Switzerland must find a balance between integration and preservation of our Swiss identity.

One of the main issues is the immigration situation. The immigration of undesirable people and illegal immigrants calls for strict immigration laws. And the problem of high unemployment is another issue for Switzerland that has to be seriously addressed.

“Swiss Review” is featuring some of these “Swiss voters from abroad” in this election year and asks what their reasons are for taking part in politics from afar. Voter profiles can also be found at www.SwissCommunity.org.



*First name: Nasha
Surname: Gagnebin
Age: 29
Place of residence: Paris, France
Since: 2006*

NASHA GAGNEBIN: Yes. I believe it is very important. I have not missed a single opportunity to vote since I obtained my right to vote in 1999. I even took part in a Great Council of Berne election in 2002 and the National Council election in 2003.

I had just turned 18 and I was on an exchange year (Intercultural Programs Switzerland) in New Zealand. My mother sent me the voting material on maternity insurance. She wrote: “Vote how you want to, but remember we have wanted this for a long time.”

As I’m given the right to voice my opinion, I make use of it! If you don’t vote, then you’re not entitled to moan that nothing is happening. Voting isn’t difficult, you simply have to take an interest.

I don’t vote for a list. I give my vote to a party and then I choose primarily based on language. I favour French-speaking candidates and then young candidates. I try to vote more for women than men because I think they have a different and better approach to politics.

criticism. What’s your view?

The Swiss abroad cannot swing the result one way or the other. However, we have great responsibility as ambassadors for the nation and constantly have to explain and sometimes apologise for the image Switzerland has in our countries of residence.

They should amend the Constitution to enable minimal representation of the Swiss abroad in Parliament as they constitute almost a tenth of the total population.



*First name: Bernhard
Surname: Beutler
Age: 48
Place of residence:
São Paulo, Brazil
Since: 2009
Moved to Brazil in 2005*

BERNHARD BEUTLER: Yes, I vote regularly because I believe it is important that we as Swiss citizens abroad help select our political representatives. The Swiss abroad should also be able to make their contribution, particularly in view of their internationality.

It was 1984 and the issue was a future “without nuclear power stations”. What interested me most in the electoral debate were the opinions of young people. I always thought “it’s our future, the future of us young people”.

We have this democratic tool and should use it. It is important that all Swiss citizens exercise their vote, otherwise the result is falsified. We Swiss abroad also bear responsibility for the future of Switzerland.

I have various criteria, but the most important are the credibility shown by politicians in the past and their attitude towards domestic and foreign policy.

As a Swiss citizen abroad, you don’t just represent yourself but also your country. If the Swiss abroad perform well, Switzerland benefits in various ways. In any case, lots of us will return at some point and have the right to decide the future.

The politicians must primarily resolve the issue of the aging population and sort out the old-age pension system, but also deal with the integration of foreign nationals, Swiss isolationism, healthcare and social welfare costs, education and the environment.