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The Dual Nationality Saga



12 February 2017 - 13th December 2017: Dual nationals should give up one passport, says Swiss politician

07/02/2017 BY LE NEWS /20 Minutes.

On 12 February 2017, Swiss voted on whether to make it easier for third generation residents to become Swiss. The Swiss People's Party (UDC/SVP) is firmly against the plan.

Now UDC national councillor Erich Hess is voicing his annoyance at allowing naturalized foreigners to keep their other nationality. "We will never know whether those who keep their original nationality are fully committed to Switzerland or not" he said. In addition, he complained that those with dual nationality were better off than Swiss natives because they could freely go and live in other countries. "Naturalized citizens have more rights than the Swiss", he said.

National Councillor Cédric Wermuth (PLR/FDP) disagrees. "Swiss are able to emigrate, naturalize, and, in certain countries, become dual nationals." On this basis he doesn't think Swiss citizens are worse off. Regarding the need to choose, Wermuth said the idea was "absurd". "There are people who feel ties to several countries. That doesn't make them bad Swiss...it makes them good ambassadors for Switzerland", he said.

Gianni D'Amato, a migration expert at the University of Neuchâtel, thinks forcing people to choose would put the brakes on integration. "Those applying for citizenship would have to sweep part of their identity and past under the carpet. This would be difficult for many", he said. In addition, he pointed to studies that proved that becoming a citizen aids integration. It would be a shame to compel people to give it up.

Official figures put the number of Swiss with two passports at 870,000. In addition to these, there are 560,000 Swiss abroad with another nationality

Fast-forward Sept 2017: swissinfo.ch

Candidates for the Swiss cabinet and elected officials with dual nationality are in the cross-hairs of the Swiss People's Party, who question their loyalty to Switzerland. It's a debate that also affects the Swiss abroad, nearly three in four of whom hold a second passport.

Can a member of the cabinet have two passports? Ignazio Cassis and Pierre Maudet have both responded, in their way, to this question. Cassis, who is from the southern Swiss canton of Ticino and is favoured to succeed Didier Burkhalter as a cabinet minister, has declared that he "spontaneously" turned in his Italian passport the moment he became a candidate. And Maudet, who is from Geneva, he has said that he's ready to renounce his French nationality if he is elected to the position. Many see in these announcements a concession to the conservative right, which has always judged dual citizens with a suspicious eye.

'Enrichment' for Switzerland

The debate has also annoyed the more than 775,000 Swiss living abroad, the vast majority of whom (73.5%) have dual nationality. In certain countries, like France, Italy, Australia and Argentina, the figure exceeds 80%.

"We regret this decision, for it implies that dual nationals are not fully Swiss," says Ariane Rustichelli, director of the OSA. "We think, on the contrary, that dual nationality is an enrichment, since it offers a vision and way of thinking differently on certain realities. Having two passports can be interesting, including for a cabinet member. In some cases, it could even facilitate negotiations with other countries," Rustichelli says. In Rustichelli's view, the controversy over dual nationality that has become entrenched in the campaign for the election of a new cabinet member reveals a backward vision of what it means to be Swiss or Swiss Abroad. "International mobility is totally ignored, whereas it is a reality and a necessity in 2017," she says.

Fast forward to Dec 2017 in news@thelocal.ch

The National Council on Tuesday rejected a motion that proposed banning

Swiss citizens with a second nationality from serving in the Swiss government.

The lower house of parliament voted by 127 to 47 against the motion proposed by Lorenzo Quadri of Ticino's Lega party during the furore over the election of Ignazio Cassis to the Federal Council.

Cassis, who had dual Swiss-Italian nationality, gave up his Italian citizenship before the election in order to confirm his loyalty to Switzerland, according to news agency ATS.

At the time some condemned the move, saying it signalled that dual nationals were considered second class citizens. But others agreed with his decision.

For Quadri, who proposed the idea of banning dual nationals from government office, possessing a foreign passport is "incompatible" with the role of federal councillor or MP.

He wants to follow the lead of **Australia**, where it is forbidden to have dual nationality and be a member of parliament. That 116-year-old rule had serious ramifications for the Australian government over the summer when several senators, unaware they had automatic citizenship of another country, were forced to step down.

The proposal in Switzerland would also have banned those working in the diplomatic corps from having a citizenship other than Swiss, as well as secretaries, government assistants and anyone else with access to confidential information.

But such a move would have been a violation of the constitution, argued Swiss chancellor Walter Thurnheer. Currently, anyone in Switzerland who has the right to vote, including dual nationals, also has the right to stand for parliament. To prevent dual nationals from standing for office could violate their rights, said Thurnheer.

According to the Swiss statistics office there are nearly 900,000 adult (aged 15 and over) Swiss citizens with a second nationality.

Citizens of other countries do not have to renounce their passport of origin when they become Swiss, though that is sometimes required by their home country, for example Austria and Norway do not allow dual nationality, though that may be changing in the latter.