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Autor: Lehtinen, Marko

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There has been some bad news for the Swiss Abroad. When Tim Guldemann stepped down from the National Council in March, the Swiss Abroad lost their most powerful voice in Parliament. The SP politician was the first Swiss Abroad ever to be elected to the National Council, but he is now standing down after just two and a half years in the middle of the legislative term. The main reason? It has been too difficult to “live in one place and conduct politics in another”. Living in Berlin and being a politician in Berne clearly did not work out.

Guldemann's departure adds fuel to the fire in an emotionally charged debate. Should a Swiss Abroad even be allowed to enter political life in Switzerland? How can somebody living in Berlin have a feel for what is best for Switzerland? And those who would like to take things a step further in this debate may make their voices heard after Guldemann's decision to step down. Should the Swiss Abroad even have the right to vote in Switzerland? Should someone who has spent decades living in Tasmania or Taiwan be able to influence life in their far-away homeland? Especially as they don't generally even have to live with the consequences?

Such arguments are understandable, whether you support them or not. On the other hand, shouldn't Swiss citizens be allowed to vote on Swiss issues regardless of where they live? They too have fundamental rights, including the right to vote. Many of them are only living abroad temporarily. They are working and living in the Swiss community abroad before returning to Switzerland. In that case, they definitely have to live with the outcome of referenda and elections. Some ballots also concern the Swiss Abroad directly.

It is a contentious issue. Fortunately, the debate has been very restrained thus far following Guldemann's premature departure. Instead of questioning the rights of the Swiss Abroad, most Swiss people have acknowledged the departure of the SP National Councillor with regret or at least with a shrug of the shoulders. Let's hope this remains the case and that sleeping dogs continue to lie.

I too would like to take the opportunity to say goodbye to you in this issue of “Swiss Review”. After an intensive period as editor-in-chief of this magazine, I am returning to my native Basel to embark on a new challenge in my career. Thank you all for your faith in me!

MARKO LEHTINEN, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Cover photo:

The violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja. Photo: Julia Wesely