

Federal elections 2007 : expatriate candidates

Autor(en): **[s.n.]**

Objekttyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad**

Band (Jahr): **34 (2007)**

Heft 4

PDF erstellt am: **20.05.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-907565>

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Expatriate candidates

Never before have so many foreign-resident Swiss voters stood as candidates for seats on the National Council. They also include four high-profile members of the Council for the Swiss Abroad.



Peter Simon Kaul, born 1956, is an self-employed businessman living near Dresden. He is standing for the SVP in Zurich canton. Kaul is married and has four children. Why is he standing for election? "My candidature will help to raise awareness of the needs of the Swiss abroad among the political parties and the general public, and to promote and strengthen mutual understanding. We need to build bridges and come closer, exchange experiences and work out how best to use the skills we have acquired abroad for the benefit of our common homeland. As an independent, self-sufficient and sovereign state in an increasingly global world, Switzerland faces great challenges. We could do even more to put the experience and skills we have gained abroad at Switzerland's disposal. A Swiss expatriate seat on the National Council would greatly help in this respect. It would give us a hotline to Switzerland's decision-making bodies as well as an opportunity to talk to members of parliament directly. It is this belief that has prompted me to stand for election to the National Council in my home canton of Zurich."



Edgar Studer, born 1940, is married and a father of three. He has lived in Finchampstead in England since 1997. Amongst other positions he has held in the past, he led a social security office in Schaffhausen. Studer is standing as an SVP candidate in Schaffhausen. The former member of the residents' council in Neuhausen am Rheinfall justifies his candidacy thus: "In my work on the Council for the Swiss Abroad, I hear politicians time and again use well-chosen words to stress how important we are for Switzerland's image abroad. Unfortunately, day-to-day political life is very different. For example, voluntary AHV contributions for Swiss expatriates living within the EU have been scrapped on dubious grounds and not replaced. In addition, consulates

have been and are still being closed without replacement, and Switzerland's foreign presence has been restricted and weakened. Such action hurts Swiss companies wherever they may operate around the globe. At the same time, the expatriate Swiss community cannot afford to just sit back and observe the political goings on back at home. Surely the Swiss abroad are better placed to recognise and understand developments and connections from afar. We, the Swiss abroad, want to help uphold freedom and democracy in Switzerland. And that is what I stand for."



Rolf Schudel, born 1943, is divorced and has a daughter. He lives and works in South Africa, where he is a self-employed businessman and the president of SVP International. One of his main concerns is for Switzerland's image abroad. As a national councillor, Basel-born Schudel would promote self-assured foreign policies and the maintenance of banking secrecy. He is well aware that the present system makes it very difficult for Swiss expatriates to be elected as national councillors. He therefore wants to reform the electoral system to, amongst other things, give the Fifth Switzerland its own constituencies as a way of overcoming the current discrimination against the Swiss abroad.

Shortly before our copy deadline, it came to our attention that another member of the Council for the Swiss Abroad, Ron Favarger from Geneva, would be standing. Favarger, a self-employed businessman living in Canada, will be standing as a SVP candidate in Geneva canton.

As this issue of the Swiss Review went to press, the SVP had announced that it would be putting forward a Swiss abroad list in Schaffhausen, Geneva and Zurich cantons.

The following SVP candidates will be standing Zurich: Peter Simon Kaul (51), businessman, Radebeul, Germany; Inge Schütz (57), the head of the commercial section of the Swiss embassy in Stockholm, Sweden. /

Mario Valli (61), general manager, Edenvale, South Africa. / Hans Peter Bieri (42), head of the visa service of the Swiss embassy in Cairo, Downtown Cairo, Egypt. / Walter Müller (62), businessman, Greenpoint, Cape Town, South Africa. / Ueli Maurer jr. (29), business manager, Bergen, Norway. / Karl Bachmann (54), paramedic, Trnava, Croatia. / Yvonne Ochser (44), restaurant owner, Whitehorse, Y.T., Canada. / Hubert Brumann (55), IT entrepreneur, East London, South Africa. / Markus Stöckli (38), sales agent for Bolivia, Chile and Peru; Quito, Ecuador. / Dr. Nicolas Szita (37), university lecturer, London, Great Britain. / Heinz Moll (56), journalist, Prague, Czech Republic. / Norbert Ehrbar (47), gastronomy expert, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

Schaffhausen: Rolf B. Schudel (63), businessman, President, SVP International, Vico Morcoro, Switzerland (otherwise based in South Africa) / Edgar Studer (67), former welfare secretary, Berkshire, Great Britain.

Geneva: Ron Favarger (71), businessman, Toronto, Canada. / Dominique Miglio (41), hotel owner, Bangkok, Thailand. / Pierre Goldschmid (74), retired businessman, Bruy, France.

FDP International will also be putting up a list in Zurich.

The following FDP International candidates will be standing: Helen Freiermuth (49), instructor, Gainesville, USA (in Canada from the summer). / Gil Schneider (49), businessman, Singapore. / Hansudi Meli (45), business consultant, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. / Urs Wäfler (28), software engineer, India (in Switzerland from the summer).

The following CVP candidate will be standing in Berne: Felix W. Niederhauser (57), export manager, Rotterdam, Holland.

The following candidate will be standing for the Green Party in Fribourg: Raphaël Thiémond (38), responsible for communication at ECOLO, instructor ETOPIA, Neuchâteau, Belgium.

The up-to-date list of Swiss abroad candidates for the federal Election can be found at www.aso.ch

Parliamentary elections are also Federal Council elections.

A bicameral system based on the American model and a government in which the most important parties are represented proportionally. These are the main characteristics of the Swiss political system. Although the Swiss people do not elect the members of the government directly, they determine the party-political breakdown of the Federal Council. By René Lenzin

The political system in Switzerland is one that guarantees stability. Ever since the introduction of proportional representation in 1919, the four political parties that make up the current government – the Christian Democrats (CVP), Free Democrats (FDP), Social Democrats (SP) and the Swiss People's Party (SVP) – have almost always accounted for at least 80 percent of the votes cast. Nevertheless, there have been significant shifts among the parties in the Federal Council over the past 16 years. Between 1991 and 2003, the SVP more than doubled its share of the votes, advancing from a junior partner to the strongest party overall. During the same period, the CVP and FDP consistently lost ground, while the SP made small gains and recovered the position it had held in the 1970s.

The electoral successes of the Swiss People's Party eventually lead to the "magic formula" that had applied since the 1950s, even though the SVP subsequently "pinched" a seat from the CVP on the Federal Council. Instead of two CVP seats, two FDP seats, two SP seats and one for the SVP, since 2003 the CVP has had one, the FDP two, the SP two and the SVP the remaining two. According

to the thinking behind the magic formula, the Federal Council is to reflect the relative strength of the different parties taking into account not only their share of the vote but also the number of seats each holds in the Federal Assembly. Because the CVP and FDP traditionally have more seats on the Council of States than their share of votes in National Council elections suggest, they

maintain a disproportionate weighting in Parliament despite steadily losing ground.

Few electoral rules

In contrast to the cantons, the members of the national government are chosen not by the people, but by Parliament. Because the elections for the Federal Council take place in the first session after the National Council elections, the latter are also an indirect straw poll for the composition of the government. Indeed, the growing polarisation and personalisation of politics has increased this role of the legislative elections. You could therefore argue that parliamentary elections are also Federal Council elections.

The formula for the composition of government is not set out in any decree. In theory, the MPs are free to choose members of other parties or even independents, although there are a few hard-and-fast rules. For instance, the Constitution states that care must be taken to ensure that all regions and linguistic groups are represented appropriately. At present, there are five German-speaking and two French-speaking members of government, but not a single Italian Swiss. Following the lifting of the relevant ban and the introduction of a constitutional amendment, there are now for the very first time two federal councillors from the same canton (Zurich): Christoph Blocher and Moritz Leuenberger.

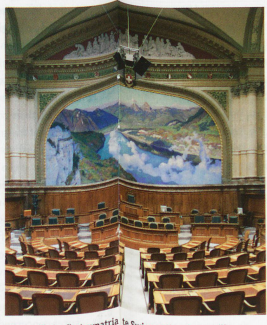
The procedure for Federal Council elections is laid down in law: seats are allocated individually and in succession according to the length of time the previous incumbent has spent in office. Seats contested by existing members of the Federal Council are allocated

first. This system of uninominal voting is often criticised because it enables individual parliamentary groups to do deals with or conversely exact revenge on each other. Party lists are suggested as an alternative, which would enable the Federal Assembly to choose all seven Federal Councillors at the same time. However, such a change to the voting system has not been approved by a majority of MPs.

Another regular feature is the call for popular election of the Federal Council. The SVP in particular considered calling a referendum on the issue after it failed to get a second seat despite increasing its share of the vote. Since Christoph Blocher's election, the SVP has dropped the issue again. The greatest problem with a popular vote would be to ensure the balanced representation of the various regions and language groups.

Council of States: counterbalance or privilege?

National Council elections take place on the same day throughout Switzerland, with the 26 cantons acting as the constituencies. Seats are allocated according to the number of inhabitants in each canton. Zurich gets the most seats (34), followed by Berne (26) and the Vaud (18), while at the other end of the scale, Appenzell, Glarus, Nidwalden, Obwalden and Uri each get only one. By contrast, elections for the Council of States are organised by canton, and take place on the same day as the National Council elections in most cantons. Exceptions include Zug and Appenzell-Aargau, whose regional representatives are selected not at the ballot box but by their regional authority. The two chambers of the Federal Assembly have equal power. This means that legislation can only come into force if approved by both.



When will the first expatriate Swiss national councillor be elected?

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