

## **Zurich immigrants launch parliamentary bid**

**With immigration set to be one of the key issues in this year's Swiss elections, a group of Zurich immigrants have launched their own political campaign.**

Representing second-generation Swiss in particular, the "Second@s Plus" organisation is putting forward a list of parliamentary candidates, entirely composed of immigrants. In order to stand for election to parliament, all 33 people on the Second@s Plus list have to be Swiss nationals. However, none of them were born Swiss.

With roots in China, Turkey, Somalia and 17 other countries, the candidates have all come through Switzerland's lengthy naturalisation process and say they now want to represent all foreigners in Switzerland - including those with no Swiss passport and no right to vote.

"The Swiss government has already promised to ease naturalisation laws for third-generation immigrants," campaign organiser Roberto Rodriguez points out. "But we think it's too little, too late.

### **Automatic naturalisation**

"We want them to grant automatic naturalisation for second generation Swiss as well as lowering the waiting time for other immigrants to five years. In addition, we want the rules on naturalisation procedures to be decided at a national rather than local level."

Although partially backed by the Social Democratic Party, one of four parties represented in the Swiss government, Second@s Plus officials say they are running an independent campaign.

Indeed they claim that their organisation grew out of frustration with the country's mainstream political parties.

"It's important that we get to represent ourselves, rather than have Swiss politicians trying to speak for us," insists Rodriguez.

"The 33 candidates on our list haven't had to learn about immigration by reading sociology reports - they've learned from their personal experiences."

### **Poster campaign**

The son of a Ugandan father and Ukrainian mother, 32-year-old Andrew Katumba is one of the Second@s Plus candidates. His face is becoming well-known around Zurich, and Switzerland as a whole, following the group's eye-catching first poster campaign.

Winking at the camera, the dark-skinned Katumba is shown above a caption that reads, "If more and more Swiss are feeling like negroes, then the Swiss parliament needs to get itself a real one."

The caption plays on a planned poster campaign by the St Gallen branch of the rightwing Swiss People's Party, in which the party claimed that the Swiss were "always the negroes". The People's Party denied that the campaign was racist, insisting it merely referred to a popular Swiss saying. But the Second@s wasted little time in forming their own response.

“When they came up with the idea for our poster, I did have to sleep on the idea,” Katumba admits, “because of the wording and because it’s taking on a rival, possibly racist, poster.

“But I think it was important to respond directly to the People’s Party campaign, and the reaction that we’ve had from all over Switzerland has been very positive.”

### **First black in parliament?**

If elected, Katumba could become Switzerland’s first black parliamentarian, although he says he’d be happy to share the honour with others.

“I’m not the only black standing for election. I know of at least two others who are standing in Neuchâtel and Biel. But Switzerland is a small country and it takes time to fight for ideas – after all, it took until 1971 for all women to get the vote here.

“But there does seem to be a movement starting now, and when you have 1.5 million people living in Switzerland without a vote, then it’s clearly time for a change.”

Although small parties traditionally have little chance of winning a seat in the national parliament, the Second@s Plus team believes it can buck the trend with support from young voters and fellow immigrants.

“There are no precise numbers as to the number of immigrants living in Zurich with Swiss passports,” Rodriguez points out, “because once they get their passports they stop being classified as foreigners.

“However, I know that we have up to 18,000 naturalised Italians living in Zurich, and if just half of those come out and vote for us, it would be enough for us to get one or two seats in parliament.”

### **Rival lists**

The Second@s are not the only group in Zurich concentrating on the issue of immigration. The Alternative List, a more radical leftwing party, has also issued its own list of 33 naturalised Swiss, with roots in 17 different countries.

Despite the common approach, Alternative List spokeswoman Manuela Schiller told swissinfo that her party would not be limiting itself purely to questions of naturalisation but tackling all forms of inequality, both for Swiss nationals and foreigners. The Zurich branch of the People’s Party has meanwhile come up with its own variation on the immigrant theme, composing a list made up entirely of Swiss citizens based abroad.

The party, which has issued a similar list in Basel, is hoping to woo voters from Switzerland’s large ex-pat community, which is estimated at around 600,000 people.

Although the People’s Party are firmly opposed to the Second@s’ calls for a softer naturalisation process, the similar tactical approaches taken by both parties in their Zurich campaigns appear to send out a joint message – that immigration will be one of the hottest topics in this year’s election.

swissinfo, Mark Ledsom in Zurich

Copyright © Swissinfo / Neue Zürcher Zeitung AG