Noëmi van Gelder wins directional election in the ICZ

Noëmi van Gelder (51) is the new President of the Israelitische Cultusgemeinde Zürich ICZ, the largest Jewish community in Switzerland with 2,500 members. At a general meeting attended by over 700 members, she won the election against Arthur Braunschweig (66) and Edi Rosenstein (69), who were running jointly as co-presidents, by 502 votes to 214. Noëmi van Gelder will therefore take over from outgoing President Jacques Lande on January 1, 2026. Van Gelder is also President of the Association of Swiss Jewish Welfare Organizations VSJF.

The General Assembly's decision had to do with van Gelder's personality and her track record to date. She is regarded as approachable and a go-getter and has proven this many times in her five years on the ICZ Board, the last two of which as Vice President. For example, after the outbreak of war in Ukraine, she was responsible for quickly setting up an aid organization for Ukrainian refugees at the ICZ.

However, Noëmi van Gelder's relationship with Israel was also decisive for the clear choice by the members of the ICZ. Because of the widespread anti-Semitism and the massive criticism of Israel, particularly on the political left, as a result of the war in Gaza, the relationship between Jews in the diaspora and Israel was at the center of the election. The fact that 70 percent of ICZ members voted for Noëmi van Gelder as president shows that they share her "commitment to Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state, which is set in stone". At the same time, they distrusted van Gelder's opponents Braunschweig and Rosenstein, who are close to the left-wing Swiss Jewish Forum Gesher, on this currently key issue.

A few weeks ago, the Gesher board accused the cantonal government of Zurich of having "racist undertones" because it had refused to accept children from Gaza with war insurance for security reasons. This is because these children are accompanied by three to four adults each, who have to be attributed to Hamas or are close to the terrorist organization. Van Gelder and outgoing ICZ President Lande had strongly condemned Gesher's criticism of the government council.

The subsequent election of an additional member of the Board of Directors shows that the Annual General Meeting was a real election of direction. Patrick Balkanyi, who is close to Noëmi van Gelder, prevailed against Arthur Braunschweig by 429 to 194. Switzerland's largest Jewish community will thus remain firmly on the side of Israel in the future.