The city of Zurich is facing important elections – also for the Jewish community

From Sacha Wigdorovits

On March 8, not only the federal electorate will have to decide on important proposals, but also the voters in the city of Zurich. They will decide who will represent them in the city government (city council) and municipal parliament (municipal council) for the next four years.

The majority situation is clear: the Social Democratic Party has four out of nine city councillors in Switzerland's largest city, including the incumbent mayor Corine Mauch. Together with the allied Greens, who have two members on the city council, this gives the red-green party a clear majority in the executive.

The SP is also by far the strongest party in the municipal council with 37 representatives, followed by the Free Democratic Party (FDP) with 23 seats. Together with the Greens (18) and the Alternative List (8), the Social Democrats also dominate the 125-member city parliament. The SP therefore controls the executive and legislature in the city of Zurich.

The consequences of this policy are a steadily growing mountain of debt and an increasingly hostile business environment. Together, these two factors do not bode well for the future of Switzerland's largest economic metropolis. And yet it is questionable whether the upcoming elections will change anything.

On the contrary, the FDP is in danger of losing one of its two seats in the city government because its popular representative Filippo Leutenegger is no longer standing. Hopes are now pinned on Përparim Avdili, who is running for both city councillor and mayor.

The 38-year-old Avdili comes from an Albanian family from North Macedonia, is president of the FDP city party as well as a local councillor and has a career behind him that – in the past – would have fitted in well with the SP. It ranges from truck driver and parcel carrier to customer service employee, a banking job and finally a position as head of finance in a medium-sized vocational training company that supervises over 1,000 apprentices. In addition, his down-to-earth, uncomplicated and approachable manner belies all preconceptions that the Zurich FDP is still the party of high finance.

Whether Përparim Avdili will succeed in wresting the city presidency from the SP is questionable. But he has a good chance of being elected to the city council as

Filippo Leutenegger's successor. The latest polls put him in a neck-and-neck race for the ninth and final place in the city government.

Avdili's election would not only be a positive signal that the city's voters have recognized the signs of the times and want a new, more responsible policy. It would also be good for the Jewish community. After all, his predecessor Filippo Leutenegger has always stood up for Jews in the city of Zurich. For example, when he ensured the continued existence of the Zurich Jewish Girls' School by enabling it to build a temporary school building on municipal land.

If Përparim Avdili is elected to the City Council, this support will continue to be guaranteed. After all, he also has an open ear for the concerns and fears of Jews in the city of Zurich, which has been characterized by a sharp rise in anti-Semitism in recent years. The same applies to his fellow councillor and party member Marita Verbali, who is also running for the city council but has less chance of being elected than Avdili.

It is no coincidence that there are two FDP representatives who have campaigned for Jewish issues and want to continue to do so. The Jewish community in the city of Zurich can also count on support from other parties. In the municipal council faction of the Green Liberal Party (GLP), it has a strong voice in the person of Ronny Siev. Although this displeases some of his party colleagues and the city's party leadership, the GLP has nominated two other candidates, Liya Bruman and Micha Schächter, who are committed to Jews in Zurich. In the SVP, the same applies to local councillors Stefan Urech and Samuel Balsiger. In the Die Mitte party, local councillor Karin Weyermann, who is also a candidate for the city government, has campaigned for Jewish issues in the current legislative period. And Markus Knauss (GP) was the only representative of the left-wing Green Party on the municipal council to vote against the city's financial support for the UN aid organization UNRWA, which has been infiltrated by Hamas.

With the exception of the EDU, which is not currently represented in the city parliament but is also taking part in the elections with its own list, the Jewish community is not as strongly anchored in any party as it is in the FDP. With Jehuda Spielmann and Anthony Goldstein, two Jews sit on the municipal council for the FDP, and with Alex Guggenheim, Jonathan Morgenbesser and Elias Pernet, three others are running for a seat in the city parliament for the first time. However, the FDP's support extends beyond its Jewish party members. During the current legislative period, this was particularly evident in the example of parliamentary group leader

Michael Schmid, who often stood in front of his Jewish parliamentary group colleagues in municipal council debates on anti-Semitism or Israel and took the floor in their place.

Schmid is no longer standing in the current elections. But Ivette Djonova, another FDP representative with a great affinity for Jewish issues and Jewish concerns, is running for the city parliament. Born in 1988, the lawyer is managing director of the Swiss cinema umbrella organization ProCinema and is running for the municipal council in district 2, where many Jews live. This is not the only reason why she is well informed about Jewish issues – especially concerns about security. Djonova also had the best possible role model in this respect: she was the life partner of SVP National Councillor Alfred Heer, who died unexpectedly last year. Heer was one of the most loyal and influential political friends of Swiss Jews. He represented the concerns of the Jewish community and Israel not only at Swiss level, but also vociferously and vehemently in the Council of Europe. Jews in the city of Zurich can expect the same from Ivette Djonova.

For the city’s voters as a whole, the upcoming municipal elections are important in order to send a signal against the disastrous current left-green policies. But for the Jewish community in the city of Zurich, there is another issue: since the massacre by the Palestinian terrorist organization Hamas on 7 October 2023, anti-Semitism in the city of Zurich has increased massively. The left-green city government and the city parliament, which is dominated by the same two parties, are partly responsible for this.

Jews in the city of Zurich can only counter this development if they actively participate in the elections on March 8. And if they vote unanimously for the candidates of the middle-class parties at both city council and municipal council level. In particular the FDP, from which they can traditionally expect the most support.

They stand up for the Jewish community in Zurich:



Përparim Avdili (FDP)

Samuel Balsiger (SVP)

Liya Bruman (GLP)

Ivette Djonova (FDP)

Anthony Goldstein (FDP)

Alex Guggenheim (FDP)

Markus Knauss (GP)

Jonathan Morgenbesser (FDP)

Elias Pernet (FDP)

Micha Schächter (GLP)

Ronny Siev (GLP)

Jehuda Spielman (FDP)

Stefan Urech (SVP)

Marita Verbali (FDP)

Karin Weyermann (The Center)

Sacha Wigdorovits is President of the Fokus Israel und Nahost association, which runs the website fokusisrael.ch. He studied history, German and social psychology at the University of Zurich and has worked as a US correspondent for the SonntagsZeitung, was editor-in-chief of BLICK and co-founder of the commuter newspaper 20minuten.