



Zurich-Forch, 26 May 2021

A note from DIGNITAS – To live with dignity – To die with dignity

Ten years ago: The people of Zürich vote in favour of self-determination over one's own end of life

On 15 May 2011, voters in the Canton of Zürich overwhelmingly rejected two initiatives and thus strengthened freedom of choice and self-determination over one's own end of life. To safeguard it was and still is an important task – not only in Switzerland.

Switzerland as a role model

An impressive 84% of the voters of the Canton of Zürich rejected the initiative by the political party Federal Democratic Union (EDU) called “Stop Assisted Suicide” which aimed at a prohibition on Swiss federal level. With this clear rebuff the people of Zürich confirmed their support for freedom of choice regarding one's own end in life and the pioneering role of Switzerland in assisted dying.

The voters also clearly rejected a second initiative launched at the same time by the EDU and supported by the Evangelical Peoples' Party (EVP): over 78% said “No” to the discriminating proposal to allow access to assisted suicide only for individuals who had resided in the Canton of Zürich for at least one year. “Rejection of the moralists – on Sunday, EDU and EVP went down in a big defeat” noted the Swiss newspaper NZZ the day after the vote.

Progress in Europe

In the same year, an important signal was set on a European level: on 20 January 2011, the European Court of Human Rights rendered the judgment that it is “an individual's right to decide by what means and at what point his or her life will end”¹. This judgment of a case initiated by DIGNITAS became an essential basis for numerous further court cases in Europe to enforce freedom of choice regarding one's own end in life.

Successes have also been achieved in our neighbouring German-speaking countries: on 26 February 2020, the Federal Constitutional Court of Germany declared that the criminalisation of professional suicide assistance, article 217 of the Criminal Code introduced in 2015, was a violation of the Basic Law of Germany and so was fundamentally null and void.² In the same year, on 11 December 2020, the Austrian Constitutional Court declared the prohibition of assistance in suicide (second fact of article 78 of the Austrian Criminal Code) to be

¹ ECHR judgment of 20 January 2011 in the case Haas <http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-102940>

² <https://www.bundesverfassungsgericht.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/EN/2020/bvg20-012.html> ; see also: <http://www.dignitas.ch/images/stories/pdf/medienmitteilung-26022020-e.pdf>

unconstitutional.³ In the German court case, DIGNITAS was one of the plaintiffs; in Austria, DIGNITAS initiated, financed and attended the proceedings.

Success thanks to a solid network

Since being founded on 17 May 1998, the non-profit membership association “DIGNITAS – To live with dignity – To die with dignity” has worked to promote, implement, and secure freedom of choice, self-determination and self-responsibility until life's end by suicide attempt prevention, palliative care, advance health care planning and assisted dying. DIGNITAS is at the service of interested individuals and groups in Europe and worldwide and works for legal safety, further development of laws and the enforcement of human rights through judicial and political procedures in this regard.

DIGNITAS can also count on a broad network of supporting experts and organisations in Switzerland. They, together with the now over 10,000 signed-up members worldwide, have contributed significantly to the successes of DIGNITAS. They contributed just as much to the rejection of the two conservative-religious initiatives by the EDU / EVP. DIGNITAS thanks you all them for your engagement in safeguarding the enlightened self-determination and freedom of humans.

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BACKGROUND:

DIGNITAS – To live with dignity – To die with dignity was founded in May 1998 with the aim, through international legal and political work, to make the proven Swiss model of freedom of choice, self-determination and personal responsibility in life and at life's end also accessible to individuals abroad.

DIGNITAS' advisory concept – combining palliative care, suicide attempt prevention, advance directives/decisions and assisted dying – offers a basis for good decision-making to shape life until the end.

Through litigation, DIGNITAS obtained a judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in 2011 acknowledging the right/freedom of a competent individual to decide on the manner and time of his or her own end in life and confirming this to be protected by Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

DIGNITAS has been engaged in many lawsuits in Europe and Canada, and has provided in-depth submissions and received visits by expert and parliamentary committees from Great Britain, Australia, Canada, etc. when laws were discussed and planned for the protection of a patient's autonomy and human dignity.

The founder of the charitable DIGNITAS organisation is Ludwig A. Minelli, an attorney-at-law specialising in human rights. The team of DIGNITAS consists of 32 part-time employees and it is supported by several external experts in the fields of medicine, law, IT and auditing.

³ https://www.vfgh.gv.at/rechtsprechung/Ausgewahlte_Entscheidungen.de.html; see also: <http://www.dignitas.ch/images/stories/pdf/medienmitteilung-11122020-e.pdf>