

Underlying principles of the Republic and Canton of Neuchâtel

A SUMMARY IN TWELVE QUESTIONS

YOU DECIDE TO SETTLE IN THE CANTON OF NEUCHÂTEL, ARRIVING FROM ABROAD OR FROM ANOTHER CANTON. YOU ALREADY LIVE HERE BUT WELCOME NEWCOMERS. WHAT ARE THE FUNDAMENTALS OF THE STATE WHERE YOU HAVE CHOSEN TO LIVE? WHAT IS A «DEMOCRATIC, SECULAR, SOCIAL AND GUARANTOR OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS REPUBLIC », SUCH AS ONE THAT IS DEFINED BY THE FIRST ARTICLE OF THE CONSTITUTION NEUCHÂTELOISE OF 24 SEPTEMBRE 2000? IN ORDER TO EXPLAIN THIS AND FOR YOU ALSO TO UNDERSTAND BETTER THE CANTON, WE PRESENT THIS PACK OF DOCUMENTS CONTAINING THE «UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES OF THE REPUBLIC AND CANTON OF NEUCHATEL», A BROCHURE ENTITLED «WELCOME», A CULTURAL AGENDA, AS WELL AS A PROGRAMME FOR CIVIC COURSES.

WHY SUCH AN APPROACH?

The underlying principles of a state are generally transcribed as laws, which are concrete rules legally bound, that everyone, Swiss or foreigner, is expected to respect. Even if there is no legal obligation to adhere to the principles themselves, in order for a state like Neuchatel to function, it is necessary that a majority of the population know, respect and undertake to defend these laws.

HOW DOES THE REPUBLIC AND CANTON OF NEUCHÂTEL DEFINE ITSELF?

It is a liberal, democratic, social and secular state. This means that it guarantees its residents liberties and fundamental rights, that it gives the people the right to exercise their rights, that it agrees to social protection for its fellow citizens, that there is no state religion and that it guarantees religious freedom.

WHAT IS A STATE WITH LIBERAL RIGHTS?

It is a state which guarantees fundamental human rights of which the first, human dignity, is the right not be treated in an inhumane and degrading manner; it protects against torture and all other cruelty.

ARE LIBERTIES FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS?

Yes. It refers to personal liberties like the right to life and personal freedom, the right to marriage, the freedom of speech and of religious freedom; freedom of communication which incorporates the freedoms of opinion and of expression, the right to information and the freedom of association, of meetings and demonstrations. Lastly, economic liberties, such as the guarantee of ownership, economic freedom and trade-union freedom.

WHAT OTHER RIGHTS ARE ALSO GUARANTEED?

The law of equality of treatment, the prohibition of discrimination, as well as social rights which guarantee certain state benefits indispensable with regards to respect of human dignity.

CAN THESE LIBERTIES BE RESTRICTED?

The state could do so if there's conflict amidst certain liberties. For example, the freedom of expression of certain individuals could, in particular cases, offend freedom of belief of others. It can also restrict them if there is a contradiction between freedom of the individual and of the common interest. All restrictions should nevertheless be founded on a legal basis and justified in the public's interest.

BIENVENUE
WILLKOMMEN
BENVENUTI
WELCOME
BEM-VINDO
BIENVENIDA
MIRË SE VJEN
DOBRODOŠLI
HOŞGELDİNİZ
KU SOO DHOWOW
BUN VENIT
SZERENCSESEN ERKESZTEK
VÍTEJTE
أهلا وسهلا

WELCOME

WHAT IS A DEMOCRATIC STATE?

It is a state where power belongs to its people. It is important to distinguish between a representative democratic government, where the people elect their representative in a parliament, or government, and that of direct democracy, where the people can, moreover, directly intervene by means of the initiative and a referendum. This is the case in Switzerland and in Neuchâtel.

WHO HAS POLITICAL RIGHTS?

These rights are conferred to all citizens. In the majority of countries, foreigners are excluded from citizenship. In Switzerland at federal level only Swiss people from 18 years of age have this right. However, the canton of Neuchâtel has extended this right to certain categories of foreigners in its Constitution of 2000.

WHICH FOREIGNERS CAN VOTE?

In the canton of Neuchâtel, foreigners from 18 years of age benefiting from an 'autorisation d'établissement' (permit C) can:

- Vote at canton level after at least five years of residency in the canton.
- Vote and be elected at commune level after at least one year of residency in the canton.

WHAT IS A SOCIAL STATE?

A social state ensures a fair distribution of social justice. It takes measures to ensure everyone can have a training, a job, suitable housing, social protection (unemployment, old age, illness, accident). It guarantees social rights indispensable for the respect to human dignity, namely the right to minimum living conditions and the right to sufficient, free basic teaching.

HOW IS A SECULAR STATE DEFINED?

It is a state where public institutions are separated from the church. There is no state religion but a government recognising religious freedom. This freedom includes both freedom of thought and of belief as well as that of the freedom of religious services. By virtue of this liberty, a commune in Neuchâtel cannot forbid Muslim pupils in wearing headscarves in class. Nevertheless, it is not the same for that of a teacher because this contradicts the principles of non-denomination of public schools.

The state has an obligation to be open to all religious and philosophic beliefs. Nonetheless, that does not prevent from recognising the three Christian churches the statute of institutions of public interests.

AND TOLERANCE?

A liberal, social, democratic and secular state supposes that the individuals of whom it comprises, accept and tolerate the diversity of opinions. Only tolerance and open-mindedness can ensure the balance within mixed communities.


RÉPUBLIQUE ET CANTON DE NEUCHÂTEL

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Refer to the text on the Constitution
neuchâteloise at the address, www.ne.ch
or www.ne.ch/constitutionNE