



Cantons and climate change

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Despite their responsibility to fight climate change, politicians in cantons and cities show varying degrees of commitment to measures against the threats of climate change.

For politicians like Marcel Wüthrich (GFL), city councilor in Bern, combating climate change is “the most important political task of the 21st century, which can only be solved globally, but where we have to act locally”.

Divestment of Fossil Fuels

A key approach to helping the environment is to dry up the financial sources of fossil fuels. According to Gabi Stritt (SP), local councilor for the city of Winterthur, “the pension funds [...] have horrendous capital and invest billions in the coal, oil and natural gas industries. They finance companies that are among the biggest causes of global warming.” If banks, pension funds, insurance companies and investors no longer invest money in coal, oil and gas, they reduce the opportunities to expand fossil fuel infrastructures.

Overall, politicians in 14 of 21 (67%) cantons (excluding GE, JU, NE, TI, and VD) made proposals to divest pension funds (PK) and cantonal banks (KB) from fossil fuel companies, some even several times (see **Table 1**).¹The cantons of Zurich and Basel-Stadt lead the cantons with 10, respectively. 8 advances.

At the city level, efforts are more difficult because the authority often lies with the cantons or the federal government. Nevertheless, the city of Zurich dealt with fossil fuels more often than all other cities and cantons.

Pension funds and banks

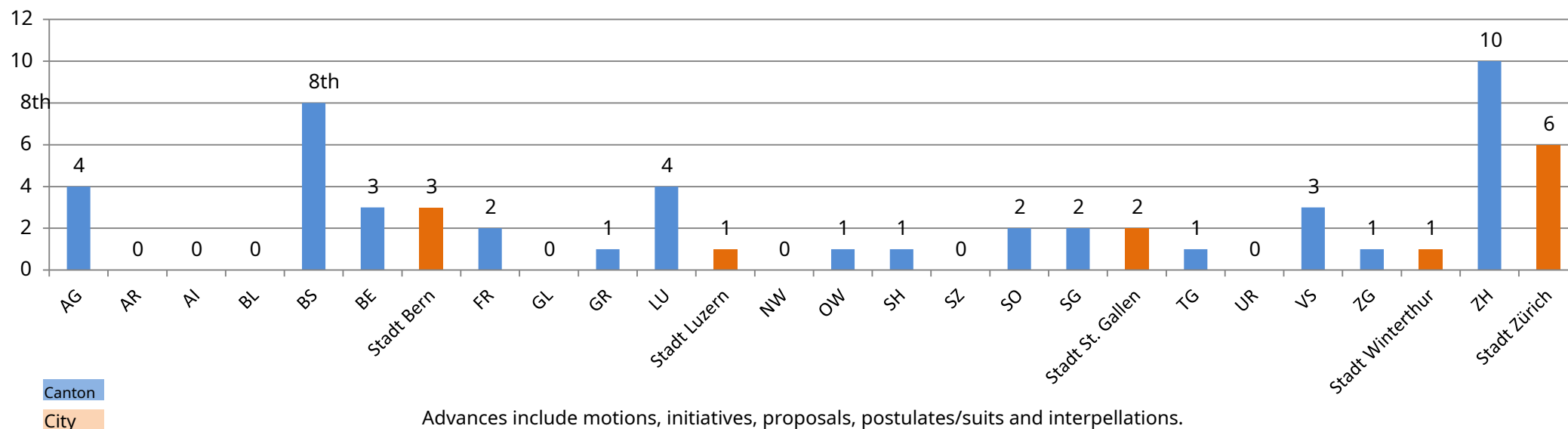
The Swiss Climate Alliance, which deals with sustainable climate policy, developed one [PK Climate Rating Index](#). The index assesses how much the pension funds have already reduced their financed greenhouse gas emissions: green (best practice), orange (first steps taken) or red (damaging to the climate). The Climate Alliance found that 52 percent of pension funds are harmful to the climate and only 7% are climate-friendly.

Politicians mentioned the influence of the Climate Alliance on their initiatives. They complained about the justifications given by banks, pension funds and institutional investors against phasing out fossil fuels, in which they claim that they can only achieve the returns they need from fossil fuels. According to Marcel Wüthrich, “on the contrary, they

¹The entire text of the proposals can also be found in Part 2 of [Fossil Free](#) Manuals can be found in which all cantonal initiatives to divest fossil fuels since 2016 are listed.

Table 1: Number of attacks against fossil fuels

2016 - 2020



Investments in fossil energies pose enormous financial risks [...] (“Carbon Bubble”).” Gabi Stritt further explains that “[...] the risks of those pension funds that continue to invest in fossil energies ‘increase’. The consequences are then borne by the insured persons.” According to a report by the Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN). “Sustainable investing – with an attractive return-risk ratio – [...] is not only possible, but essential for our future.”

Lack of success?

How successful are the initiatives? Not a decisive one, because all 9 motions on fossil investments have either been rejected or dealt with differently. There is a greater response to postulates - around 31% were accepted.

When asked in Graubünden about a "future" pension fund, the government replied that it was "not responsible for the PKGR's investment policy" but rather the federal government: "...there are no binding regulations in federal law (BVG and BVV2)." "sustainable" or "climate-friendly" securities investments." (Session February 14, 2018)

Opponents also say that a decarbonization plan is "superfluous" because "every official in this country thinks about measures day in and day out that can save even more CO2." (Ueli Bamert (SVP), Cantonal Councilor of Zurich, in relation to the motion 228/2018)

But the number of requests, which increased from 12 in 2016 (some of which were made in 2015 and only dealt with in 2016) to a peak of 22 in 2019, may show that more and more people believe that action on climate change is necessary. Politicians with a strong connection to environmental protection also find that their colleagues' interest in climate change is increasing.

There is also progress. According to Zurich Cantonal Councilor Sonja Gehrig (GLP), the Zürcher Kantonalbank (ZKB) and the Pension Fund of the City of Zurich (PKZH), for example, are "doing well in terms of sustainability", unlike the employee pension scheme of the Canton of Zurich (BVK). According to the Climate Alliance Rating, the BVK has an orange rating because of its exclusion of coal producers. The PKZH's orange rating will soon change to green as soon as substantial decarbonization has taken place.

Other environmental protection topics

Unfortunately, other climate change issues are not of great importance in some cantons. Nidwalden, for example, only has two proposals with terms such as "climate", "Paris Agreement" and "CO2": in 2019 a postulate to curb climate change and a query about the effects of drought and global warming on the Nidwalden forest.

In other cantons, however, more proposals were submitted on the subject of climate change and carbon dioxide. In Appenzell Ausserrhoden there were proposals for energy in the heating sector and how the government council plans to introduce climate protection measures and what specific measures each department could take. The Cantonal Council of the Canton of Lucerne debated on various topics, including sustainable food production given the impact of climate change on the soil, the canton's plan for electric vehicles, less CO2 emissions and more solar power. Simple questions were often asked, for example what the government is planning to do about the Paris Agreement and the [Goals 2030](#) for sustainable development.

Christa Mutter (GR), Grand Councilor in the Canton of Fribourg, is proud of her joint successes with Julia Senti (SP) in recent years. Several of their proposals were accepted, the most important of which was a motion for a cantonal environmental and climate law.

The Federal Council

And what has the Federal Council done in the last five years? Seventeen interpellations, two inquiries, nine motions, three postulates, one parliamentary initiative and one urgent interpellation were submitted on the topic of disinvestment of fossil fuels in pension funds and banks alone. Eight motions were either rejected or written off.

Only one motion from 2019 was accepted: The motion "Show sustainable financial flows" instructs the Federal Council to simplify investments in sustainable investments through an improved data basis and to present a report with suggestions in spring 2020

for the financial market on “Sustainability, Environmental, Social and Governance” (ESG) funds and the switch to renewable energies.

In December 2020, the Federal Council took concrete measures “for a sustainable Switzerland as a financial location” with the aim of creating transparency about the effects of financial market products on the environment. But the Federal Council only recommends that financial market players take climate risks into account. In January 2021, Switzerland began supporting the international “Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD)”.

The most important success is the revision of the CO2 regulation from January 1, 2021, which includes 25 percent higher emissions regulations for new vehicles and allows an increase in the CO2 tax of up to 120 francs per ton of CO2 if CO2 emissions do not fall enough.

“We are making progress, but slowly,” says Markus Keller, co-founder of the association [Fossil Free](#), which fights against investments by banks and pension funds in coal, oil and gas power plants. “It is urgent that the federal government promotes the change in financial flows to more sustainable, climate-friendly options - for the sake of our future.”