Switzerland

National Affairs

Switzerland remained outside the European Union, having decided by referendum in 2001 not to proceed with accession negotiations. Nevertheless, Switzerland entered into several bilateral agreements with the EU since then, forging closer ties with the rest of Europe. The latest move, approved by 55 percent of the voters in a referendum in June 2005, extended the free movement of persons to the nationals of the ten most recent EU member states. It was a defeat for the country's leading party, the Swiss People's Party, which opposed the agreement.

Another sign of willingness to cooperate across borders was a noticeable increase in the help Swiss police gave to their foreign counterparts in identifying and arresting members of terrorist groups, tracking down money-laundering networks, and extraditing suspected criminals from other countries who were living in Switzerland. And Switzerland signed the Convention Against Nuclear Terrorism, becoming one of the first countries to do so.

Nevertheless, such indications were counterbalanced by the continuing political exploitation of fears of immigration. This took the form of subtly racist slogans, attempts to ban dual citizenship, and harsh treatment of asylum seekers. The Council of Europe issued a report on human rights in Switzerland that vehemently criticized the country's strict asylum policies, including the absence of financial support and the carrying out of deportations. One exclusionary Swiss practice came to an end when the Supreme Court ruled unconstitutional the granting of naturalization by popular vote of the canton, a system that led to many rejections simply on the basis of the ethnic-sounding names of applicants.

Domestically, the Swiss cultural mosaic showed growing signs of reshuffling. The role of religion generated more and more debate. On the one hand, sociologists pointed to the end of religion-based identity among most Catholic and Protestant citizens, who now tended to relegate religion to the private sphere. On the other hand, growing non-Christian communities sought public recognition so that they might receive state funding. While the size of the Jewish community remained low and stable at 0.25 percent of the total population, Muslims had...
grown to 4.3 percent, and Eastern religions were also a rising presence. Each of the four official languages—German, French, Italian, and Romansh—remained strong in its region, but English was becoming the second language for many people, and thus the preferred language of communication between the Swiss regions.

On June 5, 2005, 58 percent of Swiss people, in a referendum, approved the establishment of "registered partnerships," equivalent to civil unions, for same-sex couples. The cantons of Geneva and Zurich already provided this, but implementation of the new national law was expected to take some time.

Israel and the Middle East

Relations between Switzerland and Israel were mixed, alternating between cooperation and tension.

Foreign Minister Micheline Calmy-Rey traveled to Israel and the Palestinian territories in February in the hope of reviving the so-called "Geneva Initiative," an unofficial proposal drawn up in 2003 by some prominent Israelis and Palestinians under the sponsorship of the Swiss Foreign Ministry. But the plan, calling for a two-state solution based on the negotiations brokered by the U.S. in 2000–01, had already been overwhelmed by events: the Bush administration's formal recognition that Israel could retain parts of the territories, and the Israeli disengagement from Gaza. Also paying a visit to Israel was Swiss interior minister Pascal Couchepin, who came to reinforce scientific cooperation between the two countries.

A number of Swiss political bodies condemned Israel's security fence, ranging from resolutions put forth by city governments like Geneva, to an official report submitted by the Swiss government, the guardian of the Geneva Conventions, in response to a request from the UN General Assembly. At the same time, however, the Swiss government energetically spearheaded the campaign to adopt the "red crystal" as a third official emblem of the International Red Cross, along with the cross and the crescent, in spite of strong opposition from Arab countries. This was deemed a victory for Israel, whose own Magen David Adom, red Star of David symbol, had been blocked by the Arabs. Under the sign of the "red crystal," which had no religious connotation, Israel would be able to participate fully in the organization.

The Ecumenical Council of Churches, headquartered in Geneva, called on its members to divest from companies that "make profit based on Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories." Carlo Sommaruga, a Socialist member of the Federal Assembly, the Swiss parliament, filed a motion
calling for divestment, but his initiative was rejected. There were also calls for boycotting Israeli goods; these were organized by pro-Palestinian organizations that conducted demonstrations in front of supermarkets. In June, a mixed committee of Israeli negotiators and representatives of the European Free Trade Association—to which Switzerland belonged—agreed on a new protocol that would identify the place of production of Israeli goods. Items originating from outside the Green Line, and thus beyond Israeli borders as delimited by international law, would not benefit from the reduced tax rates on imports that came from Israel proper.

Switzerland’s imports from Israel—including precious metals, jewelry, pharmaceuticals, machines, and agricultural produce—amounted to $350 million in 2004, an 11-percent increase from the previous year.

After three years of not purchasing military goods from Israel, Switzerland’s 2005 defense budget included 20 new helicopters and radio equipment made in Israel. The decision to resume such purchases was entirely commercial, but the Socialist and Green parties opposed the idea of buying from a country “that doesn’t care about UN resolutions and violates Geneva Conventions.” Opponents gathered over 25,000 signatures on a petition that called for a moratorium on all military collaboration with Israel, but the government went ahead with the purchases.

In July, Jean Ziegler, a former Socialist member of the Federal Assembly and now the UN special rapporteur on the right to food, declared at a pro-Palestinian rally in Geneva that “Gaza is a huge concentration camp.” This was not the first time that Ziegler had uttered statements against Israel or flirted with anti-Semitism. In this case, the UN secretary general Kofi Annan reacted quickly, calling his speech “irresponsible.” But no action was taken against Ziegler, whose mandate was due to expire in 2006.

Throughout the year, Iran courted Switzerland in the hope of strengthening diplomatic and commercial ties, but with little success. Joseph Deiss, the Swiss economy minister, traveled to Libya and signed a cooperation agreement relating to aerial transportation. Libya was Switzerland’s second largest trading partner in Africa, after South Africa: Switzerland imported $790 million in Libyan goods (mostly oil), and exported to Libya $190-million worth of material, mostly machines, pharmaceuticals, and agricultural equipment.

**Anti-Semitism and Extremism**

The federal police published two reports in 2005 relating to extremism in Switzerland. One of them outraged the Jewish community because it
contained a page about Jewish extremism that listed the Geneva Association of Jewish Students as a potential ally of Kahane Chai, and suggested that the security guards who protected Jewish public buildings fostered ties with Jewish extremist groups abroad. The Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities reacted strongly, requesting a meeting with Minister of Justice Christoph Blocher. Afterwards, an erratum notice was appended to the document, stating that no presence of Jewish extremist movements had been noted in Switzerland, and that imputations to the contrary in the report should not have appeared. The report was made available on the Internet in its original version, accompanied by the erratum.

Both reports on extremism indicated that the phenomenon continued to exist on both the political right and the left, and noted a rise of extremist violence at stadiums during sports events. But the number of racist and anti-Semitic incidents in 2005—verbal and physical aggression, discrimination, and property damage—declined to about 100. This drop probably had much to do with tighter law enforcement: the federal police effectively monitored Muslim fundamentalist organizations with branches in Switzerland, and high-profile trials of skinheads, Holocaust deniers, and other extremists sent a message that such activities would not be tolerated. In light of the improved situation, the Swiss government closed down the fund that had been set up in 2001 to support projects against racism. The fund had been established in the wake of the publication of the historical report about Switzerland's equivocal attitude toward refugees during World War II.

The Federal Commission Against Racism marked its tenth anniversary with a report of its activities. The document gave a very positive assessment of the commission's accomplishments and praised the implementation of Article 261b of the Constitution, which condemned public racist and anti-Semitic statements or actions.

Nevertheless, three serious anti-Semitic incidents occurred during 2005. Two of them could not be solved because there were no clues: the defacing of the Holocaust memorial in Geneva with neo-Nazi graffiti, and the desecration of the Jewish cemetery in La Tour-De-Peilz, in which 12 graves were vandalized. The third incident, the firebombing of the Lugano synagogue, came one month after the same thing had been done to a Jewish-owned fabric store nearby. A 58-year-old Italian confessed to starting both fires, and was arrested. But the police quickly excluded anti-Semitism as a motive and concluded that the man was mentally disturbed. His original two-year sentence was commuted to treatment in a
mental institution. The Jewish community expressed dismay, recalling instances in previous years when perpetrators of attacks on Jewish targets were similarly categorized as mentally unstable and therefore not responsible for their acts.

Other anti-Semitic incidents included dissemination of flyers, graffiti, slurs, and speeches that promulgated a mixture of historical anti-Semitism, anti-Zionism, and Nazism. Holocaust deniers remained active in Switzerland despite the fact that one of their leaders, Jürgen Graf, had evaded a prison term by settling in Iran, and the other, René-Louis Berclaz, having been extradited from Serbia, was serving an 18-month sentence. Numerous pamphlets, posters, and stickers were distributed in public spaces and in mailboxes calling the Holocaust a lie.

Other far-right groups active in Switzerland included advocates of "white and European identity" (also known as "identitarians"), neo-Nazis, and skinheads. Activists put periodic pressure on the government by disturbing official commemorations, especially Switzerland's National Day, on August 1. In 2005, despite increased police presence, 700 shaven-headed neo-Nazis wearing black outfits with nationalist symbols booed the Swiss president continuously during his National Day address, and shouted slurs ("Swine! Judas!") and slogans ("We are national resistance!"). In his remarks, President Samuel Schmid condemned extremism, racism and anti-Semitism.

Schmid was a member of the Swiss People's Party, and his words contrasted sharply with those of his xenophobic fellow party member, Minister of Justice Christoph Blocher. Schmid and Blocher represented polarized camps within the party, the former advocating centrist policies, the latter inclined towards hard-line conservatism, ultranationalism, and sympathy for the far right. Indeed, some local leaders of this party downplayed the danger posed by neo-Nazis, preferring to focus on left-wing extremism. The Swiss People's Party actively lobbied the parliament to dissolve the Federal Commission Against Racism and to abrogate the law against racism, Article 261b of the Constitution. So far both drives were unsuccessful.

Another extreme political group seeking to nullify the antiracism law, the Swiss National Party (PNOS), had two locally elected representatives. After publishing its 20-point platform, the party was immediately sued for racial discrimination and endangering social order; it had previously been convicted on similar grounds. The PNOS pocket calendar for 2006—sold on its Web site along with Nazi paraphernalia—featured a black eagle on the cover and noted the dates of birth and death of notorious Nazis.
After years of complaints about the activities of racists, Swiss authorities took serious steps to deal with the problem in 2005. Late in the year police arrested a number of neo-Nazis on the charge of racial discrimination, and seven skinheads were sentenced to jail for murder. One neo-Nazi Web site was shut down, as were some blogs with racist content that were hosted in Switzerland. Furthermore, the Swiss army announced that it was making inquiries about far-right extremists in its ranks, and two officers who had made the Nazi salute and uttered racist statements were expelled.

The government sought to combat extremist hooliganism in anticipation of the 2008 European Soccer Championships, scheduled to be played in four Swiss and four Austrian cities. The parliament adopted a law limiting access to certain areas of stadiums, restricting travel abroad, requiring check-ins with the police, and legalizing surveillance for people known to disrupt sports events. Other measures included the creation of a database of hooligans and a pilot project aimed at gathering biometric data. The Federal Assembly went further, submitting a proposal for a penal law banning the public display of all symbols sympathetic to extremist movements or that called for violence or racial discrimination.

Switzerland also focused attention on Islamic fundamentalism. It banned from its territory at least three imams who were considered dangerous, and expelled another for lack of a visa. The government also renewed its ban on Al Qaeda until 2007, as well as on two other organizations and 11 individuals with links to Al Qaeda.

Already controversial for his possible ties to extremist Islam (see AJYB 2005, pp. 408–09) Tariq Ramadan drew attention once again with equivocal statements about the stoning of adulterous women, refusing to condemn the practice but calling for a moratorium on carrying it out. He had been hired to teach at the University of Notre Dame in the U.S., but his American visa was revoked by the State Department in the summer of 2004. Ramadan then accepted a position at St. Anthony College in Great Britain, and shortly after the terror attacks in London in July 2005 he was invited to lecture to the London police about Islam. His brother, Hani Ramadan, who defended outright the stoning of adulterous women, had been fired from his teaching job in a Geneva public school in 2004 and was not reinstated.

Switzerland investigated companies suspected of laundering money, financing terrorism, or bypassing the international embargo on Iraq under Saddam Hussein's rule, although it was too early to know if any prosecutions or arrests would follow.
Holocaust-Related Matters

After the 1998 global settlement between Swiss banks and class-action lawyers over Holocaust-era accounts, payments to the heirs of account holders proceeded slowly, and only a little over half of the $1.25-billion total sum was distributed. Just before the final deadline for filing a claim in July 2005, about 1,000 new requests were filed as the result of a recently published list of 3,200 new names of account holders. Unclaimed assets were to be distributed to needy Holocaust survivors, with 75 percent going to those in the former Soviet Union. Some U.S. Holocaust survivors sought a larger percentage for themselves, but Judge Edward Korman of the U.S. District Court in Brooklyn upheld the original distribution plan.

One family successfully brought a lawsuit in the U.S. against a Swiss bank. In April, 89-year-old Maria V. Altmann and 13 other family members were awarded $21.8 million by Judge Korman. In 1938, days before Hitler annexed Austria, their forebears, Jewish owners of one of the largest sugar refineries in the country, set up a trust account with a Swiss bank (unnamed by the court) to protect their ownership. But the bank allowed the factory to be “aryanized” and sold at a fraction of its worth, a dereliction of duty that the judge called typical of Swiss banks’ “widespread betrayal” of their Jewish clients. (See below, p. 459, regarding Altmann’s suit for the recovery of paintings that her family had owned in Austria.)

Three years after publication of the 24-volume Bergier Report—named after the historian who directed it—on Swiss policies during the Holocaust era, and a year after a one-volume paperback edition went on sale to the general public, a permanent exhibition on the topic was set up at the Zurich National Museum. In addition, a traveling exhibit toured various Swiss cities. Historical research continued. A study of the canton of Valais found that 7,500 civilians (Jews, French, Italians, resistance fighters, deserters) found refuge there. Incomplete archives of the local police showed that of 1,031 Jews who tried to get into Switzerland through the Valais border, 336 were turned down.

Another direct consequence of the historical findings was passage of a law in 2004 reinstating the rights of people who had previously been condemned for helping refugees find asylum in Switzerland. At the time, Swiss citizens who broke the law to smuggle, save, or otherwise help refugees were tried and sentenced if they were caught. In 2005, 21 more such people had their names cleared, bringing the total number to 53, and several new cases were submitted to the parliament.

A number of books were published on Switzerland and the Holocaust.
Two of the most important were Thomas Maissen's *Verweigerte Erinnerung* (Denied Memory), a critical look at public opinion in Switzerland during the controversy of the 1990s over its World War II role, and Stefan Mächler's *Hilfe und Ohnmacht* (Rescue and Powerlessness), which treated the Swiss Jewish Federation's role in rescuing Jewish refugees.

Since the Swiss believed that their country had made great progress over the past decade in coming to grips with its record during the Nazi era, they reacted with shock in January 2005 when Israel Singer, president of the World Jewish Congress (WJC), wrote that Switzerland's neutrality during World War II had been "criminal." These words, published a few days before the 60th commemoration of the liberation of Auschwitz, provoked universal outrage in the country, including from the Jewish community, which now had to contend with a spate of anti-Semitic letters to the editor in the newspapers. Singer refused to apologize, and added fuel to the fire by repeating his assertion.

Historians considered Singer's comments inappropriate and unfair. Some commentators found an explanation in what had happened a few weeks earlier, in late 2004, when tension arose between the WJC and the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities. After the WJC closed its Geneva office, a number of banking transactions were brought to light for which the federation requested clarification and an audit. The WJC responded by excluding the Swiss representative from the European Jewish Congress, its regional affiliate (see AJYB 2005, p. 411). Perhaps, it was suggested, Singer wanted to deflect attention from the WJC's difficulties by shining a spotlight on Switzerland's alleged failings.

**Jewish Communal Affairs**

Switzerland's Jewish population remained stable at around 17,800, some 0.25 percent of the total population of seven million. Two important communal issues left unresolved in 2005 were expected to get a lot of attention in 2006: the prospect of a national referendum banning the import of kosher meat (kosher slaughter in the country was already outlawed), and a proposal to set aside plots within the city cemeteries for Jews, as the cemeteries owned by the Jewish community were almost full.

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