

# Switzerland

## *National Affairs*

SWITZERLAND REMAINED torn between its tradition of isolation, on the one hand, and a new impulse toward openness and engagement, on the other. This ambivalence was illustrated by fierce debates over asylum policies and the rights of minorities.

The country approved, by plebiscite, new asylum legislation that would speed up the expulsion of unwanted asylum seekers, track down all forms of "abuse" of asylum status, and end financial aid to refugees with criminal records. The changes were backed by majorities in each of the Swiss cantons, and passed by a solid overall majority of 67.8 percent. Initiated by the rightist Swiss People's Party, the referendum was supported by other conservative parties but opposed by the political left, churches, and the Jewish community. The Swiss People's Party was buoyed by this success and proceeded to suggest even more far-reaching initiatives, such as making naturalization more difficult and forbidding dual citizenship.

Minister of Justice Christoph Blocher, the best-known leader of the party and one of its two representatives in the government, continued his attacks on Swiss institutions, criticized the government of which he was a part, denounced the country's constitution, and attempted to censor Swiss television.

During a visit to Turkey in October, Blocher said publicly that the Swiss law against racism—passed in 1994 and making it a criminal offense to commit public racist or anti-Semitic acts, or to deny any genocide—gave him a "stomachache," and that it should be "either completely suppressed or revised so that citizens of this country do not fear a lawsuit simply because they express an opinion." Coming as a direct attack by a cabinet minister against a national statute, and pronounced in a foreign country without prior consent from his government, Blocher's statement created a furor in Switzerland. Blocher was also highly critical of Jews who spoke out against the new asylum rules and made a point of mentioning their religion. His party was no friend of Muslims either, gathering signatures for a referendum to "forbid all power symbols of Islam" in Switzerland, including minarets.

Nationalist conservative politicians tied their isolationist policies on the

international scene—such as opposition to the European Union and the UN—to xenophobic and racist arguments domestically. Arguing that Switzerland was “a special case,” they rejected the guarantee of equal rights for minorities that all other Western democracies espoused. Having lost battles on some of the international issues—plebiscites had secured Switzerland’s entry into the UN and special agreements with the EU—these nationalists became increasingly fixated on minority groups within the country.

Switzerland came under criticism for steps it took to cooperate with the U.S. in the war on terror. Swiss banks were charged with breaking national laws by providing banking information to American counterterrorism officials. The banks did not inform customers using the Swift money-transfer service that their data could be passed on to third parties. Swiss senator Dick Marty prepared a report for the Council of Europe that criticized 14 countries for authorizing CIA flights carrying “presumed terrorists” to stop over or to fly across their airspace. According to the report, Switzerland allowed six U.S. noncommercial planes to stop in Switzerland between September 2001 and September 2005, while 76 CIA planes flew over Switzerland.

### *Israel and the Middle East*

On July 5, Minister of Foreign Affairs Micheline Calmy-Rey issued a statement expressing Switzerland’s “extreme preoccupation with the current situation in Gaza.” It went on to accuse Israel of violating international law by imposing “collective punishment” on the Palestinians, and denied any justification for Israel’s destruction of an electric-power plant and the arbitrary arrest of democratically elected Hamas members of the Palestinian parliament. The Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities sharply criticized the foreign minister’s position. The International Committee of the Red Cross, based in Geneva, commented on the situation in terms very similar to those of Calmy-Rey.

When Israel launched its invasion of Lebanon in response to the abduction of two Israeli soldiers, Calmy-Rey condemned the move as “disproportionate.” The rest of the government, however, maintained silent neutrality and concentrated on the humanitarian aspect, donating the equivalent of about \$4 million to the Red Cross for the benefit of civilian victims. Swiss public opinion was certainly against Israeli actions, as demonstrated by a surge of anti-Israel and even anti-Semitic letters sent to newspaper editors (some of which were published) and to well-known

Jewish personalities and organizations. There were also numerous street rallies in support of Hezbollah. A pro-Israel rally was organized in Bern, initiated and largely attended by evangelical Christians. About 3,000 gathered at the federal square, where their leader, MP Christian Waber, proclaimed, "Salvation comes from the Jews! This is what says he who gave his life on the cross for us all."

The reconstituted UN Human Rights Council, based in Geneva, convened in emergency session to condemn "gross human-rights violations by Israel in Lebanon." This resolution was approved by the automatic majority created by the African and Asian countries. The new council had now issued three resolutions aimed at a specific country; all of them targeted Israel, to the exclusion of the UN's other 191 member states.

The Swiss government nominated Jean Ziegler, whom it called "one of the best specialists in civil, human, and cultural rights," to serve on the UN Sub-Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights. The choice drew considerable criticism. For the previous six years Ziegler had served as UN special rapporteur on the right to food, and, instead of dealing with the world's food emergencies, had pursued a blatantly leftist and anti-Israel political agenda. The originator and first recipient of the Muammar Qaddafi Prize for Human Rights, Ziegler had even been criticized by UN secretary general Kofi Annan for comparing Israelis to Nazis.

### *Anti-Semitism and Extremism*

Racism, anti-Semitism, and a general hostility toward minorities remained everyday phenomena in Switzerland. While cases of physical violence were rare, people with dark skin, non-Christians, and those who did not lead a conventional lifestyle risked taunts, threats, and discrimination. They were often refused service in restaurants and hotels, charged more for automobile insurance and deposits for apartment rentals, discriminated against in schools and businesses, and subject to stringent police controls. Since the late 1990s, hostility tended to focus on individuals from the former Yugoslavia and Turkey, as well as on Jews, Muslims, and blacks.

The sociology department of the University of Geneva published *Monitoring Misanthropy and Right-Wing Extremist Attitudes in Switzerland: An Exploratory Study*. Directed by Prof. Sandro Cattacin and based on 3,000 oral interviews lasting 40 minutes each, the survey showed that 20 percent of the Swiss population harbored anti-Semitic feelings and 30

percent anti-Muslim feelings, and that 6 percent felt that violence "can solve problems." The study concluded that "right-wing extremism is not a marginal phenomenon."

Right-wing extremist groups remained active, but small and disorganized. Federal police estimated their number at about 1,000, including skinheads, neo-Nazis, and other white supremacists. Their activities were local or regional and consisted of concerts, rallies, and privately printed publications. Some recently founded groups were Helvetica Youth (Helvetische Jugend) and Les Identitaires. Among the veteran anti-Semites and Holocaust deniers were Gaston-Armand Amaudruz, publisher of *Courrier du Continent*; Claude and Mariette Paschoud, publishers of *Le Pamphlet*; and Ernst Indelkofer, publisher of *Recht+Wahrheit*. Internet hate seemed to be on the upswing. Instead of starting their own Web sites, however, which could be shut down, extremists would post their opinions on blogs and other forums located at conventional Web sites.

Erwin Kessler, leader of the Association against Animal Factories (ACUSA) and previously convicted for anti-Semitic articles and incendiary statements about kosher slaughter, got into trouble once more. In his organization's newsletter, which had a circulation of 350,000, he wrote that hens raised in factories were living in "concentration camps." Sued for anti-Semitism, he refused to appear at the first hearing of his case in Geneva.

The most active extreme-right political group was the five-year-old Partei National Orientierter Schweiz, or PNOS (National-Oriented Party of Switzerland). By running candidates in municipal and cantonal elections, the PNOS became the first such party since the end of World War II to take a serious part in Swiss politics. The PNOS aspired to put "an end to multiculturalism," expel most foreigners from Switzerland, and set up internment camps for asylum seekers. Its leader was 28-year-old Sacha Kunz, who also started a record company, "White Revolution," which released music with far-right themes. He was arrested in Germany in 2006 for "diffusion of anticonstitutional propaganda" after police seized 2,000 copies of a German-language skinhead CD that Kunz produced.

The single public event that drew all the extreme-right factions was the annual celebration of August 1, Switzerland's national holiday, officially commemorated on Rütli Mountain in the presence of elected officials. In 2006, for the first time, the traditional event took place under heavy police security; only guests with tickets and identification were allowed to attend. Since 1996, radical right-wingers had tried to hijack, or at least disturb, the commemoration with their loud presence, neo-Nazi dress and

banners, and nationalist slogans. The new security measures in 2006 kept away all but a handful of extremists. But about 150 of them, mostly skin-heads, tried to disrupt speeches given that day by members of the government in other locations, and marched through small towns carrying torches. Rather than decry the disrupters, the Swiss People's Party criticized the security measures.

Public Holocaust-denial propaganda decreased in Switzerland, two of its most important voices having left the country. Jürgen Graf avoided a 15-month jail sentence by fleeing to Russia. René-Louis Berclaz was forced to disband his organization, Vérité et Justice (Truth and Justice), and, after serving a prison sentence for his Holocaust-denial activities, settled in Romania, where he was arrested in September 2006 after a gun, ammunition, Holocaust-denial publications, and racist CDs were found in his room. He was charged with smuggling weapons and attempting to create a fascist organization.

The only Swiss citizen to attend the Holocaust-denial conference in Tehran in December was Bernhard Schaub. He delivered a speech praising Iranian president Ahmadinejad for endorsing "the fight against the myth of the Holocaust" and called all European Holocaust deniers to join forces with Muslims, since "they have the same enemy . . . which subjugates the whole world to Jewish Capitalism with the help of American fighting elephants, and wants to annihilate independent people, cultures and religions."

Left-wing anti-Semitism was expressed mostly in the guise of anti-Israel or anti-Zionist comments, especially during the war between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Participants at an anti-Israel rally in Bern carried not only Hezbollah flags and portraits of Hassan Nasrallah, but also Israeli flags with swastikas, and shouted anti-Semitic slogans. The rally was cosponsored by two mainstream left-of-center parties represented in the parliament, the Green Party and the Socialist Party of Switzerland.

As part of Swiss government efforts to monitor Islamic extremism, the brothers Hani and Tariq Ramadan, grandsons of Muslim Brotherhood founder Hassan al-Bannah, continued to be scrutinized even while they enjoyed many public-speaking opportunities. Tariq Ramadan, denied a U.S. visa by the State Department in 2004 (see AJYB 2006, p. 416), was denied a second time in 2006 because of donations totaling \$940 he made to two organizations, the Comité de Bienfaisance et de Secours aux Palestiniens (CBSP) and the Association de Secours Palestinien (ASP), which were considered fund-raising conduits for Hamas. The U.S. consular officer concluded that Ramadan's request was "inadmissible based solely on his actions, which constituted providing material support to a terror-

ist organization." Ramadan was awarded a two-year research fellowship at Oxford University. While in Great Britain he also served on a task force appointed by Prime Minister Tony Blair to foster British-Muslim understanding.

### *Holocaust-Related Matters*

Eight years after the \$1.25-billion global settlement between Swiss banks and plaintiffs on behalf of Holocaust survivors, there were still obstacles that prevented the matter from being closed. A group of U.S. Holocaust survivors complained to Judge Edward Korman, who had crafted the settlement, that it unfairly apportioned more money for survivors living in the former Soviet Union than for those living in the West. In addition, Burt Neuborne, a lawyer representing many of the plaintiffs, asked for a \$4.1-million fee, which some survivors charged was a violation of his pledge to work pro bono on this case.

2006 marked ten years since the creation of the Independent Committee of Historians, which was assigned to research Switzerland's policies during World War II, and five years since the publication of its final report. To mark the occasion, Prof. Jean-François Bergier, president of the commission, published a memoir based on interviews he gave to journalists Bertrand Müller and Pietro Boschetti. Assessing his years of work in uncovering the truth about Switzerland's wartime record, he expressed disappointment that the 25-volume historical report had been greeted with silence by the government.

One positive result of the report was the release, in 2006, of a new history text for Zurich high schools, *Hinschauen und Nachfragen* (To Observe and To Question), covering the history of Switzerland "at the time of National Socialism and in relation to present times." Commissioned by the education committee of the Zurich canton, this 150-page book was recommended, not mandatory, reading for students. It differed from previous texts in several respects. The book presented Switzerland not simply as a neutral country, but also as ready to compromise with the Nazis; it emphasized that individual citizens did not live under a totalitarian system and so had the freedom, if they chose to use it, to try to save potential victims; and it stressed that the country had shown insensitivity to human rights and to the postwar need for reparations.

This year brought closure to a nine-year legal wrangle. In 1997, the documentary film *L'Honneur Perdu de la Suisse* (Switzerland's Lost Honor), by journalist Daniel Monnat, was aired, and subsequently shown two more times. The Geneva branch of the Swiss People's Party filed a law-

suit accusing the film of bias. When the case reached the Supreme Court in 2000, the judges ruled for the plaintiff on the grounds that the documentary ridiculed Switzerland's wartime generation and manipulated public opinion. The court banned any further broadcast in any format. The filmmaker appealed to the European Commission for Human Rights in Strasbourg, which finally reached a decision in 2006 that overturned the Swiss Supreme Court and made the documentary available again for public screening.

A law passed in 2004 created a special committee to annul the convictions of Swiss people who had broken the law in order to aid fugitives entering the country illegally during World War II. Eleven individuals had their records cleared during 2006, bringing the total number to over 100.

### JEWISH COMMUNITY

The Jews of Switzerland numbered about 17,500 amid a population of some seven million. Like the Swiss people as a whole, Jews were, on the whole, an aging community with a low birthrate.

Michel Halpérin, an active member of the Geneva Jewish community and a leader of the Liberal Party, was named president of Geneva's Grand Conseil, the canton's legislative body, for the year. The position is colloquially referred to as "first citizen of Geneva."

The Department of Judaism at the University of Lausanne—the second to be created in Switzerland after the one at the University of Basel—successfully completed its first academic year. About 100 students attended courses on biblical Judaism, Jewish history and philosophy, and cultural issues in the Jewish experience. An important historical work published in 2006 was Sabine Schreiber's *Hirschfeld, Strauss, Malinsky*, which recounted the story of Jewish life in St. Gallen between 1803, when the first Swiss Jews were emancipated, through 1933, when Jewish refugees began to arrive from other European countries.

The Jewish community of Geneva mourned the death of its chief rabbi, Dr. Alexandre Safran, in July, at the age of 96. Prior to assuming the position in Geneva, Safran had been chief rabbi of Romania from 1940 through 1947. After helping guide that community through the difficult World War II years, he was ousted from office and expelled by the new communist regime in Romania (see below, p. 502).