



# Sicherheit schaffen



Mein Zuhause – Unsere Schweiz

Volksinitiative



## When Minarets meet Swiss Crosses Anti-Islam in Switzerland

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*"The worst sin toward our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them: that's the essence of inhumanity"*  
George Bernard Shaw

We aim to document and analyse discrimination against Muslims in Switzerland.

### 1. A few general remarks on Switzerland

Switzerland is a country with a population of 7.5 million people. The beauty of its mountains makes it a popular tourism venue. The Swiss can be described as patriotic (the

Swiss flag is used to decorate (everything) and appreciating traditions, yet pursuing a life-style based on modern infrastructure and high-technology. Switzerland is a surrounded by the European Union, with which it collaborates but also struggles in economical matters and matters of security. The political system in Switzerland is a democracy with a lot of ideosyncrasies stemming from its being a confederation of Kantons, with referendums being

frequent and playing a large role in taking important political decisions.

Switzerland has a very high ratio of foreigners: In 2005, they made up 21.4% of the population [For]. It has an elaborate welfare system - in 2001, Switzerland spent 28.4% of its GDP on social benefits (which is roughly EU average and includes retirement pensions and welfare)[Soz]. The costs of the welfare system have steadily increased over the years, which is the same in other European countries,

Switzerland has a very high ratio of foreigners: In 2005, they made up 21.4% of the population [For]. It has an elaborate welfare system - in 2001, Switzerland spent 28.4% of its GDP on social benefits (which is roughly EU average and includes retirement pensions and welfare)[Soz]. The costs of the welfare system have steadily increased over the years, which is the same in other European countries, but gives many people reason to worry. Likewise, there is an ongoing demographic change that transform Switzerland in a society of old people [Alt]. Foreigners enjoy higher fertility rates than Swiss, which suggests that the fraction of foreigners will rise even further [Fer].

An aspect that is relevant to the question at hand is the xenophobic tone that opportunistic Swiss politicians frequently like to use for their purposes. For example, when Switzerland decided in a referendum to join the 1985 Schengen agreement, which allows for the abolition of systematic border controls between the participating countries, security-related aspects formed the essence of the political discussion [Sch]. The Schweizerische Volkspartei (SVP) targeted and instrumentalized the sentiment of fear by using panels with the simple message "lose security? lose job? Schengen - no" along with an image of a citizen screaming in terror [Pan1, Pan2].

## 2. Discrimination against Muslims

### 2.1 News Coverage

Here, as everywhere in the world, the news media is constantly transmitting pictures from Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq that show people of Muslim faith

in situations of war and distress. In fact, Sam Hussein's early description of media in the US is appropriate also here 'The media is so full of reports on the "Islamic threat" from "radical Muslim terrorists" plotting "Islamic fundamentalist violence," one could excuse the average non-Muslim American for concluding that the "fundamentals" of Islam include a course in demolitions training.' [Hus].

Just like others, Muslims are not happy with the state of affairs of the world. However, they often find themselves in a situation where they are associated with radical elements and political struggles, even though they are not connected in any way with the conflicts and ideologies that lead to those conflicts.

### 2.2 Cartoon Crisis

Additionally, the "cartoon crisis" sparked by the Danish newspaper Jyllands Posten. Many Muslims agree with Daniel Vischer's (Member of Swiss National Council) comments:

*When the Danish government avoided distancing themselves from the cartoons, they certainly had an agenda. It is part of their game of marginalizing Islam. [...] Those, that copied [the cartoons] - Welt, Blick and others, and did as if they were the heroic preservers of Western tradition of freedom of expression, acted within the same game, independent of their political positions. [Vis]*

To defend the cartoons using the principle of freedom of expression amounts to Muslims as an open contradiction and the tangible proof of Western hypocrisy: On the one hand, universal values like human rights are claimed to be sought and defended, on the other

hand, defamation of the most important symbol of Islam is not only tolerated, but seemingly endorsed. This is so because the Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him) is integral part of a Muslim's identity and thus attacks on the Prophet's dignity are felt as being attacks on each Muslim's personal dignity.

The political party SVP has used the worldwide Muslims protests of the cartoons to evoke the image of the hostile Muslim that cannot live with Swiss values [Spe].

### 2.3 The Minaret Initiative

The SVP mentioned above is a party that over the years has increasingly moved to the extreme right in the political spectrum. In early 2007, they initiated a referendum process to add a phrase to the constitution that would forbid construction of minarets [Min0, Min1, Min2]. The logo of the initiative is a minaret that is piercing a stylized Swiss flag in the geographical shape of Switzerland.

The concerted campaign has a deep, polarizing impact on society. Polls are conducted on the matter, with highly polarized results [Min3]. Muslims find themselves the subject of discussions like "should building minarets be allowed?", which put into question their human rights and freedom to practice their religion [Cvp, Voe, Ber1, Ber2, Wae, Gef].

### 2.4 Open Racist and Anti-Muslim Propaganda

The SVP is using openly racist and discriminatory posters in order to remain visible. Examples include a veiled woman with the caption "Aargau or Ankara?" [Aar], communicating the message that a veiled Muslim woman belongs rather live in the Turkish capital



than in a Swiss city. An investigation has been started by Swiss authorities to check whether it violates racism laws [Anz].

Another poster with legal consequences for the SVP is one that shows Muslims in prayer with the caption "Utilisez vos tetes!" (Use your heads!) [Anz2], communicating the message that a Muslim in prayer is not using his intellect.

Finally, an infamous poster shows three white sheep that kick out a black sheep from a stylized country of Switzerland [Row]. This has provoked a reaction from the UN del



“... many Muslim immigrants are not practicing their faith, let alone being capable of communicating it. They cannot defend themselves against discrimination.”

### 3. Reasons for Discrimination

Not a reason, but a strong background for the negative image is certainly the global impact of terrorist attacks in the USA (Sep 2001), Madrid (March 2004), London (July 2005). Likewise, the retaliation of the USA by attacking Afghanistan and Iraq are an endless source of images and stories that portray Muslims in the context of death and destruction.

Nevertheless, the alleged connections of Islam with terrorism are one-sided, leaving out important facts or dismissing them quickly as Anti-Americanism- for instance that the Palestine dilemma is also caused by years of continuing, unconditional US support for Israel's military actions, and that the terrorist structures visible in Afghanistan and Iraq today had received considerable amounts of weapons and training as part of US foreign policy. What is even more important, statements of Islamic scholars that condemn terrorism the attacks as well as retaliation hate crimes do not receive the same media coverage [Kur,Sta]. *Islam is not being represented correctly.*

Consequently, the majority of the Swiss population *does not know the religion of Islam*, which leads to misunderstanding - either accidental or intended. A reason for this is that integration of people from foreign cultures into Swiss society has not been very effective. Part of this lack of integration is due to the Swiss society itself: it is very hard to become a Swiss citizen, which manifest itself in its strict citizenship that has been labeled 'racist' [Cit]. However, it should not be forgotten that the mentality of most immigrants was those of people that come for a temporary stay, and not forever. Many Muslim immigrants do not have an in-depth knowledge of Islam either: they are not practicing their faith, *let alone being capable of communicating it*. They cannot defend themselves against discrimination.

The numbers make Muslims a "cultural minority", which opportunists use to position themselves as "Islam-critics", writing inaccurate books and engaging in politics based on the negative image associated with Muslims in the media. Who would hold them accountable?

Since Islam is not homogeneous and not represented by a single or few organization entities, the media seems to be a lack a communication partner/ representative for dialogue in situations that would befit a Muslim response or statement on actual topics. However, nothing prevents media from interviewing representatives of the various Muslim organizations, which do not differ on important points of their faith.

A reason for general xenophobia might be the exaggerated extrapolation of the demographic trends that show that the native Swiss population is diminishing and being increasingly "replaced" by foreigners, and that moreover the remaining, retired Swiss increasingly depend on these foreigners. No wonder then, that nationalist sentiment wants to stop or reverse this trend by diminishing migration, which results in a feeling of xenophobia. For instance, the Swiss seem to fear that many illegal foreigners exist that live on welfare - a fear that seems to be unfounded and contradict reality [Mig].

*Excluding others is a form of defining one's identity* - the erosion of values and traditions that globalization and consumer culture seemingly brings about is animating conservatives and traditionalists to find new strategies in order to assert their cultural identity. Constructing an enemy is a very effective means to avoid asking questions about one's own values. However, it is not a consistent strategy: Most representatives of Christian communities condemned the cartoons in the same words as their Muslim equivalents [Kar].

*Extremist ideology benefits from anti-Muslim sentiment*, because the more Muslims feel excluded by society, the easier they can be recruited by organizations that promise an alternative form of society. This plays into the hand of terrorists, but also of ideologies like the so-called "Salafists" and political organizations like Hizb-ut-Tahrir, who instrumentalize Islam for their own political agenda.

#### 4. Conclusion

There is very visible and tangible Islamophobia in Switzerland, however it seems to be mainly propagated by political parties out of opportunism. The fact that the SVP is not a marginal party, but has roughly 25% of the votes is disturbing in this regard. For the time being, Switzerland is a welcoming country where legal mechanisms ensure that Muslims can live, work and coexist peacefully. Projects exist that foster dialogue and demonstrate that peaceful coexistence is possible: we mention education in Islamic religion at a local school, the symposium of Abrahamic religions bringing together Jews, Christians and Muslims and the Ramadhan dinners.

Hopefully, those parts of the Swiss population that fear

Muslims will benefit from such events and get to know Islam. This requires Islam to be represented properly in education and in media - a requirement which is guaranteed to draw opposition from opportunistic forces who capitalize on Islam's negative image.

[For] [http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/de/index/themen/01/02/blank/dos/la\\_population\\_etrangere/intro.html](http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/de/index/themen/01/02/blank/dos/la_population_etrangere/intro.html)

[Mig] Michael Caballero, director of International Center for Migration and Health Geneva, in an interview with swissinfo

<http://www.swissinfo.org/ger/swissinfo.html?siteSect=881&sid=7192281>

[Soz] [www.vernunft-schweiz.ch/docs/Sozialsystem.pdf](http://www.vernunft-schweiz.ch/docs/Sozialsystem.pdf)

[Alt] Rainer Münz. Alternendes Europa, alternde Schweiz. [http://www.progressfoundation.ch/PDF/referate/94\\_Referat%20Rainer%20M%C3%BCnz\\_30.11.2006\\_D.pdf](http://www.progressfoundation.ch/PDF/referate/94_Referat%20Rainer%20M%C3%BCnz_30.11.2006_D.pdf)

[Fer] [http://www.statistik-bs.ch/kennzahlen/integration/a\\_demographie/a4](http://www.statistik-bs.ch/kennzahlen/integration/a_demographie/a4)

[Pan1] [http://rudi-roelz.de/andere6/lg\\_schweiz-2005.jpg](http://rudi-roelz.de/andere6/lg_schweiz-2005.jpg)

[Pan2] [http://smggermany.typepad.com/photos/uncategorized/schengenmannndk\\_1.gif](http://smggermany.typepad.com/photos/uncategorized/schengenmannndk_1.gif)

[Sch] [http://www.europa-digital.de/laender/ch/eu\\_pol/schengen2.shtml](http://www.europa-digital.de/laender/ch/eu_pol/schengen2.shtml)

[Hus] Extra! August/September 1995, Sam Hussein. Islam - Fundamental misunderstandings about a growing faith. <http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=1310>

[Vis] Daniel Vischer. Marginalien zum Karikaturenstreit. [http://www.palaestina.ch/d/doc/16\\_02\\_06\\_marginalien\\_vischer.php](http://www.palaestina.ch/d/doc/16_02_06_marginalien_vischer.php)

[Spe] Sebastian Speich. Religionshetze als Programm? <http://www.servetus.ch/serveislamophob.html>

[Kar] <http://www.ref.ch/thema/mohammed-karikaturen.html>

[Ref] <http://www.vernunft-schweiz.ch/document.php?cid=55>

[Kur] Islamic Statements against terrorism (compiled by Charles Kurzman). <http://www.unc.edu/%7Ekurzman/terror.htm>

[Sta] list of statements compiled by Study of Islam section at the American Academy of Religion <http://groups.colgate.edu/aarislam/response.htm>

[Min0] website of the initiative "Gegen den Bau von Minaretten" <http://www.minarette.ch/>

[Min1] <http://www.radiovaticana.org/ted/Articolo.asp?c=131227>

[Min2] <http://www.swissinfo.org/ger/swissinfo.html?siteSect=601&sid=7780157&cKey=1178221569000>

[Min3] 21.09.2007 [http://tagesschau.sf.tv/nachrichten/archiv/2007/09/21/schweiz/minarett\\_initiative\\_schafft\\_klare\\_fronen](http://tagesschau.sf.tv/nachrichten/archiv/2007/09/21/schweiz/minarett_initiative_schafft_klare_fronen)

[Cvp] CVP gegen Minarettverbot, Calmy-Rey in Cordoba [http://www.islam.ch/typo3/index.php?id=111&L=2&tx\\_ttnews%5BpS%5D=1190056107&tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=153&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=102&cHash=215fe54e72](http://www.islam.ch/typo3/index.php?id=111&L=2&tx_ttnews%5BpS%5D=1190056107&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=153&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=102&cHash=215fe54e72)

[Voe] 3.5.2007 "wohl voelkerrechtswidrig" <http://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/dyn/news/schweiz/747454.html>

[Ber1] 5.9.2007 Aenderung des kantonalen Baugesetzes/Bern <http://www.nachrichten.ch/detail/286279.htm>

[Ber2] Kein Minarettverbot in Bern <http://www.radiovaticana.org/ted/Articolo.asp?c=153369>

[Wae] 4.5.2007 "will Waehler fangen" <http://tages-anzeiger.ch/dyn/news/schweiz/770993.html>

[Gef] Calmy-Rey "...gefährdet Schweizer Interessen" <http://www.tages-anzeiger.ch/dyn/news/schweiz/751666.html>

[Row] 6 Sept 2007. BBC News. Swiss row over black sheep poster. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6980766.stm>

[Aar] Plakat "Aargau oder Ankara" <http://daniel-goldberg.de/V1/?m=200708>

[Anz] Anzeige wegen SVP Plakat eingereicht. <http://www.nachrichten.ch/detail/285867.htm>

[Anz2] 18.09.2007 zisch. Schon wieder Knatsch wegen SVP Plakat.

[http://www.zisch.ch/navigation/top\\_main\\_nav/NEWS/National/detail.htm?client\\_request\\_contentOID=248198](http://www.zisch.ch/navigation/top_main_nav/NEWS/National/detail.htm?client_request_contentOID=248198)

[Cit] 13 Sept 2007. BBC News. Swiss citizenship system 'racist'. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6992670.stm>

[Stu] Studie Islamischer Religionsunterricht im Schulhaus. <http://www.sad.ch/Projekte/detail/Islamischer-Religionsunterricht-im-Schulhaus/onecat/0>

[Dia] Dialog Institut Zuerich, INTERNATIONALES ABRAHAMITISCHE SYMPOSIUM. Ankuendigung <http://dialog-institut.ch/v2/veranstaltungen.asp?mid=3&go=details&smid=4&vid=11>