

Antisemitism in Switzerland in 2017

By Simon Erlanger

2017 has been a year, when antisemitism again gained momentum, as is shown by the annual Swiss antisemitism reports. As usual they come in pairs: Incidents in the French-speaking part of the country are collected by the Geneva-based NGO “Coordination Intercommunautaire Contre l’Antisemitisme et la Diffamation” (CICAD).¹ In the German-speaking the annual report is compiled and published in Zurich by the “Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities”, the “Schweizerischer Israelitischer Gemeindebund” (SIG)² together with the NGO “Stiftung gegen Rassismus und Antisemitismus” (GRA)³. Both reports are published independently from each other and made public on different dates.

Sharp Rise

In the German-speaking part of Switzerland the number of registered antisemitic acts has risen by some 52% from 25 in 2016 to 39 in 2017. There were three physical attacks.⁴ This constitutes a change for the worse: Ever since the record year of 2014 with 66 reported antisemitic incidents, numbers have been sinking.⁵ Now they are on the rise again. However, postings on social media and talkbacks on the Internet have not even been included in the 2017 numbers,⁶ but were counted separately by the SIG and the GRA. The latter comments, that a systematic search of the Internet is difficult and would not even be representative from a statistical point of view.⁷

All in all SIG and GRA count 90 antisemitic postings on the Internet,⁸ a number, which seems to be much too low for a yearly count, as a short internet search on Swiss news sites on a given day or week will prove, as the GRA admits. As elsewhere the internet has become the

¹ <http://www.cicad.ch>

² <http://www.swissjews.ch/>

³ <https://gra.ch>

⁴ See: See: <http://www.antisemitismus.ch/content/analyse-antisemitismusbericht-2017> (last viewed on March 25 2018).

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ See: Antisemitismusbericht 2017: Physische Gewalt und Hetze im Netz; Media Release, by SIG and GRA, Zürich, March 21 2018. <http://www.swissjews.ch/de/medien/pressemitteilungen/antisemitismusbericht-2017/> (last seen on March 25 2018)

⁷ GRA: Einschätzung. Rassismus in der Schweiz; https://chronologie.gra.ch/einschaetzungen/?fwp_date=2017 (last viewed on March 25 2018).

⁸ See: See: <http://www.antisemitismus.ch/content/analyse-antisemitismusbericht-2017> (last viewed on March 25 2018).

main arena for antisemitic and racist activity and hate speech.⁹ However this fact does not seem to be adequately presented by the number presented. No wonder, that the methodology employed for measuring antisemitic activity on the internet has come under scrutiny, such as in the Jewish media outlet “tachles”, which calls for more comprehensive data and also refers to antisemitic incidents which allegedly have been reported to Jewish communities without having being registered and counted in the official 2007 report.¹⁰ In the French part of Switzerland – the Romandie – the situation seems stable: CICAD counts 150 antisemitic incidents in 2017 including two physical attacks and dozens of postings on the internet.¹¹ In 2016 the organization counted 150 incidents. However, CICAD sees rise in antisemitic activities by the extreme right. Classic issues seem to dominate antisemitic discourse in the Romandie: 30% of all incidents are said to relate to revisionism of the Shoah, 23% to allegations of a world Jewish conspiracy.

Not the full picture

The numbers mentioned above can merely be an indicator for the prevalent trend, which – seen for the country as a whole – has been negative. But as in years past, the picture is again incomplete for 2017. Most of the available data is not collected for lack of resources, logistics, finances and commonly agreed methodologies. Reports for the German and for the French-speaking parts of Switzerland are still compiled separately, with very few coordination and widely differing mode of operations.

Furthermore, for a variety of reasons victims of antisemitic attacks and abuse in Switzerland are still reluctant to report antisemitic incidents to the authorities and/or to SIG, CICAD and GRA. It must therefore be assumed with a very high probability, that most antisemitic incidents go unreported and that real numbers are much higher.

The situation is even worse for social media and the Internet where only a fraction of antisemitic postings is collected and reported. The same seems to be true concerning the traditional media: While CICAD does cover the francophone media quite thoroughly there is no professional media watch for the german-speaking part of Switzerland. Antiisrael

⁹ GRA- Medienmitteilung: Rassismus in der Schweiz 2017, March 21 2018; <https://gra.ch/medienmitteilung-rassismus-in-der-schweiz-2017/> (last viewed on March 26 2018)

¹⁰ See: Valérie Wendenburg: Intransparenz auf höchstem Niveau, tachles, March 23 2018; <https://www.tachles.ch/artikel/schweiz/intransparenz-auf-hoehstem-niveau> (last viewed on March 25 2018).

¹¹ CICAD: Antisémitisme en Suisse Romande en 2017. : Banalisation de la Shoah, complotisme et extrême droite; Communiqué; February 22 2018; <http://www.cicad.ch/fr/antisemitism/news.html> (Last viewed on March 25 2018).

stereotyping has remained a problem, although the situation has somewhat improved because in the last couple of years the emphasis of reports and comments has shifted to the Syrian war, the subsequent refugee crisis and the security threat in Europe. Still, antisemitism remains rampant all over the media, especially in social media and talkbacks. Screening mechanism and self-regulation by providers, media outlets and publishing houses¹² have largely proved to be insufficient.

Prohibition of Kosher Meat Import avoided

While the affair surrounding the discriminatory treatment of Jewish guests in a hotel in Arosa made headlines worldwide,¹³ it proved to be a minor incident.¹⁴ Much more serious and threatening to the continued wellbeing and existence of organized Jewish life in Switzerland, but much less noticed, were the two parliamentary initiatives by important politicians of the Swiss Social-Democratic Party (SP)¹⁵ aiming at limiting or even prohibiting the import of Kosher meat to Switzerland.¹⁶ Since Shechita - kosher slaughtering – is prohibited in Switzerland since 1893, a ban on kosher imports would have had serious consequences for Jewish life in the country. Both parliamentary initiatives were refused or rescinded respectively by both chambers in September and in November 2017.

Still no new study on Swiss antisemitism

While the annual antisemitism reports paint only a partial picture, there is also not much knowledge concerning general trends in the country. As in past years there still is no current and updated study on contemporary Swiss antisemitism using adequate samples and methods. In a general study on coexistence, integration and prejudice the Federal Bureau of

¹² GRA: Einschätzung. Rassismus in der Schweiz; https://chronologie.gra.ch/einschaetzungen/?fwp_date=2017 (last viewed on March 25 2018).

¹³ For the affair and its aftermath see: <https://www.nzz.ch/schweiz/antisemitismus-vorwurf-aroser-hotel-schickt-juden-zum-duschen-ld.1310828> (last viewed on March 25 2018)

<https://www.srf.ch/news/schweiz/ich-schrieb-das-plakat-im-stress> (last seen on March 25 2018).

and: <https://www.blick.ch/news/schweiz/booking-com-sperret-aroser-hotel-wegen-antisemitismus-jetzt-setzt-sich-juedische-vereinigung-fuer-ruth-t-ein-id7963093.html> (last viewed on March 25 2018)

¹⁴ <https://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/sonntagszeitung/standard/Im-Paradies-ist-wieder-alles-koscher/story/23917610> (last viewed on March 25 2018).

¹⁵ <https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaefte?AffairId=20153832> and <https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaefte?AffairId=20153832> (both last viewed on March 25).

¹⁶ Markus Häfliger: Koscheres Fleisch soll in der Schweiz verboten werden. Ein Entscheid des Nationalrats stellt den Import von Fleisch infrage, das von geschächteten Tieren stammt.

<https://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/schweiz/standard/Koscheres-Fleisch-soll-in-der-Schweiz-verbotten-werden/story/30224134> (last viewed on March 25 2018).

Statistics (Bundesamt für Statistik) found 12% of Swiss to be antisemitic.¹⁷ This is below the European average. However the “ADL Global 100” study into worldwide antisemitism by the American Anti Defamation League ADL found in 2014 the very high number of 1,7 Million Swiss or 26% of the Swiss harboring antisemitic attitudes.¹⁸ This would be much above average for Western Europe and would make Switzerland one of the most antijewish countries on the continent. However, due to methodological questions both the Federal and the ADL study have not received much coverage and attention in Switzerland, not even within the Jewish community. In order to prove or to disprove the high number of Swiss anti-Semites the ADL survey has found and in order to get a realistic picture of the present situation, a more localized study with a larger sample of people involved should be conducted. This has not yet happened.

In 2014 a poll undertaken by the institute “Demoscope” on Swiss attitudes to Jews and Judaism was stopped after the endeavor was made public.

The only reliable sources on Swiss attitudes toward the Jews are older studies: In 2000 the “gfs” Research Institute in Berne found that 16 percent of the Swiss harbored intense anti-Semitic feelings.¹⁹ Although this also was about European average at the time, the number constituted double the percentage older polls had found. The 2000 findings were topped by a 2006 study by the University of Geneva's Department of Sociology, which found 20 percent of the Swiss being «affected by anti-Semitism.»²⁰ The gfs Research Institute responded with a new study in 2007.²¹ While it found only 10% of respondents to be openly antisemitic, some 53% of respondents were highly critical of Israel. 50% were thinking at the time that Israel was leading a “war of annihilation” against the Palestinians. 13% of respondents stated that Israel has no right to exist.

The older studies do not take into account recent developments, such as the Swiss variety of the Europe-wide rise of the nationalistic, conservative and populist right and at the same time the rapid rise of fundamentalist Islam and the spread of islamist jihadist groups amongst Switzerland’s fast growing muslim population. Authorities in 2017 counted 88

¹⁷ BfS: Zusammenleben in der Schweiz. Einstellungen gegenüber bestimmten Personengruppen, <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/bevoelkerung/migration-integration/zusammenleben-schweiz/einstellungen-zielgruppen.html> (last viewed on March 25 2018).

¹⁸ See: <http://global100.adl.org/#country/switzerland/2014> (last viewed on March 25).

¹⁹ www.gfs.ch/antsemkurz.html (Last viewed on March 20 2014).

²⁰ Sandro Cattacin, Brigitta Gerber, Massimo Sardi, and Robert Wegener, Monitoring Misanthropy and Rightwing Extremist Attitudes in Switzerland: An Explorative Study, Department of Sociology, University of Geneva, 2006, 70.

²¹ <http://www.gfsbern.ch/de-ch/Detail/kritik-an-israel-nicht-deckungsgleich-mit-antisemitischen-haltungen> (Last viewed on March 29 2016).

Swiss Jihadist fighting in Syria.²² Experts think that around a 1000 persons are radicalized enough to leave Switzerland for Syria.²³

The country also has undergone rapid demographic change since the last profound survey in 2000. The Swiss population has grown by 1,3 million to 8.4 million. An updated study on Swiss antisemitism, taking into account today's changed social environment and being based on sound methodological deliberations is long overdue. For the time being we are left with old studies based on outdated assumptions, methodologies and demographics and therefore have little actual scientific data.

Even without a new survey it can be stated with certainty: Antijewish currents still run deep within Swiss society. Antisemitism of the Right and of the Left is alive and has been growing, as has the newly introduced Islamist variant. As elsewhere in Europe Islamist groups and jihadist fighters returning from Syria present a growing danger to the country and the Swiss Jewish communities. The terror threat level has remained high throughout 2017.

Few support for Jewish Security

Due to the threat level in Europe, Jewish communities Switzerland have been increasing their security massively. The annual security cost for Swiss Jewry nationwide is now estimated at several million francs. Exact numbers are not made public. As already became clear by late 2015 growing security costs do threaten the financial viability and therefore the very institutional survival of many if not most Swiss Jewish Communities. While the federal Swiss government has acknowledged this fact and by the end of 2015 and again in late summer 2017 has declared Jewish security a national priority, not much is happening on the ground.

In Zurich the two Jewish communities recognized by the state, the ICZ and Or Chadasch, will in 2018/19 be getting more money by the city and the canton "in recognition of their contribution to society". While being a sign of goodwill, it does not seem clear, if the money can be used for security and what will happen to the other major Jewish communities in Zurich, which comprise more than half of organized Jewry in Zurich. Nevertheless this

²² See: <https://www.nzz.ch/schweiz/erfassung-von-risikopersonen-rund-90-potenzielle-jihadisten-im-visier-ld.1289943> (last viewed on March 25 2018).

²³ Experte warnt vor Schweizer Jihadisten; in „20 Minuten“ June 28 2017; <http://www.20min.ch/schweiz/news/story/Experte-warnt-vor-Schweizer-Jihadisten-25727879> (last viewed on March 26 2018)

contribution alleviates the situation. In Basel the government and the state parliament have in autumn 2017 finally refused to contribute to the ongoing security of the main and state-recognized Jewish community, the Israelitische Gemeinde Basel (IGB) founded in 1805. The Basel government and parliament are even opposed to increase police patrols and guards as this seemingly would create a precedent for other groups. However the Basel government declared to at least pay a onetime and limited sum to construction made necessary by security measures. Nevertheless, the 960 member strong and rapidly shrinking Basel community still finds itself with 800'000 Francs security cost for 2017 and an estimated 300'000 Francs annual security cost thereafter, this in additions to its running annual deficit of up to half a million. It is not sure for how long the ageing community will be able to shoulder this burden. The community now faces the impossible choice of either relinquishing or downgrading security on one hand or on the other hand of downcutting services massively. 212 years after its founding, one of the oldest continually existing Jewish communities of Europe might therefore be coming to an end.

The Security of Jewish communities

While the overall security Switzerland threat remains high, public gatherings, train stations, Christmas markets, concerts and soccer games are constantly secured. Security is provided by and paid for by the state. Jewish security need have so far been the exception to the rule. Jewish communities are left alone and have to provide their own security. Contrary to Germany of France there are no policemen, soldiers or other security personnel sent by the state to protect community centers, kindergartens, schools and synagogues. The outright refusal to accommodate Jewish security needs by the central government and by most of the cantons, despite the fact that most Jewish communities enjoy an officially recognized legal status has been a major issue in 2017, being considered by the Jewish communities as a violation of the duty of the state to defend its citizens and its inhabitants as stated in Switzerland's constitution, as confirmed in several legal opinions.²⁴ This policy also seems to be in violation of the "Convention of the Council of Europe on the Protection of National Minorities", which Switzerland has signed and ratified. By doing so Switzerland has officially recognized its Jewish community as a national minority. The Swiss authorities are therefore legally obliged to create safe conditions, which enable Swiss Jews to thrive, to exercise their

²⁴ See several legal opinions on: <http://www.swissjews.ch/de/politik/themen/sicherheit/> (last viewed on March 25 2018).

religion and preserve their traditions. Yet the Swiss federal government has tried to shift responsibility to the cantons and vice versa. While this evading of responsibilities and the ensuing arguing between the central state and the cantons is typical for Swiss politics affecting many subjects from education, to taxes, the penal law and even foreign policy, usually solutions are found more or less satisfying all parties involved. Only in the case of Jewish security both the Federal state and the cantons now have been dragging their feet for close to three years now. Finally at the beginning of March 2018 the Swiss government acknowledged the threat and the dire situation of the Jewish communities.²⁵ The federal government sees the need of the cantons and the federal government to coordinate their efforts. The government can support measures, which fall into the definition of crime prevention. However no support for security measures, guards and the like will be forthcoming anytime soon from the Federal government. This still is the sole task of the cantons. In the case of Basel, the canton already has – as mentioned – refused several times to support the Jewish community. Despite the positive signs from Berne not much has changed. Jewish communities still have to deal with the present security threat mostly on their own.

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²⁵ <https://www.parlament.ch/de/ratsbetrieb/amtliches-bulletin/amtliches-bulletin-die-verhandlungen?SubjectId=42669> (last viewed on March 25 2018).