

CAGE briefing - Switzerland

September / October 2023

National Council elections see Islamophobic rightwing party lead, with far-right group becoming normalised

- The final results of the National Council elections on 22 October show, as predicted, a clear political slide to the right.

With a gain of three percentage points to 28.6% of the vote, the right-wing populist SVP (Swiss People's Party) secured eight additional seats in parliament and thus emerged from the elections as the strongest party.

- The SVP is known for Islamophobic rhetoric, and time and again individual party members have been convicted of violating the anti-racism penal code. The popular initiatives that ultimately led to the ban on minarets and the niqab also came from the ranks of the SVP.
- In the weeks leading up to the National Council elections, it became known that the two leaders, Tobias L. and Manuel C., of the *Junge Tat*, which is classified as extreme right-wing and is monitored by the Swiss intelligence service NDB), were behind the election campaign and media work of SVP candidate Maria Weglin.

Manuel C. is also an SVP member and has designed another SVP election poster.

- Connections between the SVP and the *Junge Tat* have only become known recently and - especially in connection with the strong election results of the SVP - indicate a normalisation of right-wing extremist positions in Swiss society.

Thus, prominent individuals of the SVP youth organisation (JSVP), like the *Junge Tat*, advocate - among others - the conspiracy theory of the 'Great Replacement' whereby the white population of Europe is supposedly being replaced by Muslim and African migrants.

Although the *Junge Tat* usually presents itself as modern and close to its homeland and publicly distances itself from National Socialism, it maintains close contacts with old Nazis in German-speaking countries and the violent neo-Nazi scene.

Court case on undercover informant reveals details on how intelligence agency has been profiling and possibly entrapping Muslims

- In October, the NDB announced that the terror threat in Switzerland had increased due to the "reignited Middle East conflict", namely Israel's assault on Gaza.
- According to the agency, 41 persons in Switzerland are currently classified as high risk persons by the so-called jihad monitoring programme.

Although the NDB states that these persons are identified "according to a combination of very precise criteria", further details are not communicated and therefore cannot be independently validated.

- However, a court case on private matters against a former undercover informant of the NDB has revealed some details about the NDB's approach to alleged Islamist threats: The target of the informant's mission was, among others, mosques in his region that were viewed as 'Islamist'.

For example, the informant filmed car signs in the local vicinity of the mosques with the help of a hidden camera and wore a microphone during supposedly confidential conversations.

He was apparently advised that the characteristic features of suspicious persons were long beards and loose trousers on men, as well as the face veil on women and the rejection of brand-name clothing.

- In addition, the informant is said to have provoked his target persons on instructions to commit illegal acts in order to provide the NDB with a sufficient basis for an arrest which is an unlawful procedure.
- Against the background of the recently enacted federal law 'Police Measures to Combat Terrorism' (see report of September 2023), this information reinforces the impression of an arbitrary focus on practicing Muslims by the NDB.

Veiling ban takes effect, directed primarily against Muslim women

- After the federal popular initiative (a popular vote on a constitutional change) on the banning of veiling ban was adopted by the voters in March 2021, a proper federal law was passed by the National Council in September 2023.

The law provides for a fine of up to CHF 1000 (approximately £900) for covering the face in public spaces.

- Numerous examples indicate that the law, which is ostensibly neutral in its wording, is

primarily directed against veiled Muslim women.

- In the past, the initiators of the law banning minarets that was passed in 2009, campaigned accordingly. The federal law will come into force next year.