

Switzerland briefing: January - February 2024

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New legislative measures, including Hamas terrorist designation, enable easier entry bans and deportations of 'sympathisers'

- Following the Swiss Federal Council's designation of Hamas as a terrorist organisation in October, a legislative proposal in February aims to legally establish the prohibition of Hamas in Switzerland as federal law.

The content of the proposed law resembles that of the bans on al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, encompassing affiliated organisations, as well as aspects of financing and support related to Hamas.

- The prohibition of Hamas relies on the federal government's authority in safeguarding internal and external security, but bypasses the criteria for banning organisations as established in the News Act.

According to this act, the Federal Council may only prohibit organisations listed on the UN sanctions list, on which Hamas does not feature.

- Although the Federal Council states that the prohibition is not intended to restrict pro-Palestinian activities in Switzerland, it includes provisions for entry bans and deportations of individuals perceived to sympathise or be associated with Hamas.

Past instances have demonstrated that entry bans, relatively easily imposed, are frequently employed to prevent Muslim activities in Switzerland.

- It remains to be seen whether the prohibition of Hamas signals a paradigm shift that will eventually lead to the prohibition of other organisations, or if it is a singular act influenced by the events of October 7.
- Meanwhile the Legal Affairs Committee of the National Council has called for the inclusion of 'hate speech' in the catalog of offenses leading to mandatory deportation, garnering support from almost all political parties.

In the future, foreigners convicted of publicly promoting discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation would be automatically deported after serving their sentences.

This proposal is attributed to the developments since October 7 and the supposedly "appalling anti-Semitic statements" associated with the war.

Far-right credentials of dominant Swiss People's Party reaffirmed, including growing links with European far-right

- The right-wing populist Swiss People's Party (SVP), currently the strongest political force

in the Swiss Federal Assembly, has once again attracted attention with its alignment with right-nationalist circles.

- In the canton of Schwyz, elected municipal councilor Patrick Aschwanden opposed a planned asylum center by advocating for "remigration," a term used by the far-right to describe the 'voluntary' or forced deportation or expulsion of foreign citizens.

While the party leadership has distanced itself from its member's statements, it maintains its fundamental opposition to establishing an asylum center.

- This incident is part of a series of similar SVP-affiliated cases, often downplayed by the media or attributed to the influence of foreign far-right circles, especially from Germany,

Furthermore, leading figures of the SVP actively seek connections to the European far-right scene, particularly in Germany.

For instance, the AfD's (Alternative for Germany) top politician Alice Weidel spoke at an SVP meeting in Zurich in 2023, and SVP National Council member Andreas Glarner was part of the German far-right movement Pro Cologne, which opposed the "Islamization" of Germany and the construction of a mosque in Cologne.

When an interview with Austrian far-right activist Martin Sellner was broadcast, where he disseminated his theses for 30 minutes, it went uncommented on by the media and politicians.

- Switzerland fails to acknowledge far-right activities in the country, their local roots, and their connection to one of the most significant political forces in the country.

With its liberal gun laws and the absence of a ban on Nazi symbols, Switzerland remains a favored retreat and meeting point for Europe's far-right.