

## Switzerland Briefing: July and August 2024

*Reporting period: 1<sup>st</sup> July – 31<sup>st</sup> August 2024*

### Switzerland National Developments

#### **Swiss companies supply armaments to Israel**

Despite the war in the Gaza Strip, Switzerland has issued export licences for so-called dual-use goods, i.e. goods that can be used for both military and civilian purposes, since 7 October. These include bulletproof shields from the company Knight Shield and armour plates from Constellium Valais SA. These goods were supplied to Israeli authorities and companies working with the Israeli Ministry of Defence.

Despite the lack of public attention, the exports have been criticised in certain circles, particularly in view of the human rights violations committed by Israeli forces. Philippe Cordonier from Swissmem argues that it is up to the companies themselves to decide whether they want to sell to conflict regions. These exports are legal in Switzerland, but raise ethical questions in view of Israel's actions in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, especially as Switzerland likes to invoke its neutral status with regard to its position in international conflicts.

#### **Forged signatures for popular initiatives**

The popular initiative is a powerful political tool in Switzerland that enables individuals and interest groups to put a request to amend the Federal Constitution before the electorate without the direct involvement of parliament. The popular initiatives became known outside of Switzerland primarily for their Islamophobic content, such as the ban on the niqab and minarets. The first popular initiative to be put to the vote in 1893 was the ban on slaughter, which is still in force today and whose campaign was accompanied by anti-Semitic slogans. Polemics and even manipulation through falsified data and facts in the referendum campaign are still part of popular initiatives today.

In order to put a referendum to the electorate, 100,000 valid signatures of Swiss voters are required, which must be collected within 18 months. To do this, the initiators often use paid signature collectors from the private company Incop. It has now become known that many of these paid signature collectors were massively manipulated. Thousands of signatures were probably systematically forged or duplicated, and the data of genuine voters was misused in order to collect the required number of signatures.



The Office of the Attorney General is currently investigating, but it is questionable whether the scandal will affect the basic concept of the popular initiative.

## **Switzerland wants to expand free trade with China**

To mark the 10th anniversary of the bilateral free trade agreement between Switzerland and China, both countries have signed a solemn declaration of intent to negotiate a further development.

For Uyghurs who have sought refuge in Switzerland and whose families continue to be subjected to repression by the Chinese state, this step is difficult to understand. As early as 2018, a petition by the Society for Threatened Peoples and other organisations warned of the impact of the increasingly close economic relationship with China on the rights of Uyghurs and Tibetans in Switzerland. The report on this topic requested by the Foreign Affairs Committee in 2020 has still not been published by the Federal Council. It appears that Switzerland continues to cling to the long-flawed idea of "change through trade" and prioritises economic interests over respect for fundamental human rights.