

## **Switzerland Briefing: November & December 2024**

*Reporting period: 1st November - 31st December 2024*

### **Political Developments**

#### **Switzerland as a Platform for Anti-Palestinian and Islamophobic Propaganda**

Contrary to the federal policy of suspending payments to UNRWA for the time being, the Zurich City Council approved a donation of 380,000 CHF to UNRWA in November. This decision was criticised by the Swiss People's Party (SVP) and the Free Democratic Party (FDP) as interference in federal foreign policy. Israeli Ambassador to Switzerland, Ifat Reshef, also condemned the donation, arguing that it fosters hatred against Jews and Israel, and contributes to raising the next generation of terrorists. She described the decision of the JUSO (Young Socialists) to join the BDS movement as indicative of an anti-Semitic tendency in Switzerland. Ambassador Reshef has previously referred to Israel's actions in Gaza as measured and considerate in various Swiss media, claiming that Israel does not target civilians and provides humanitarian aid and safe zones - assertions that are demonstrably false but continue to be presented to the public largely unchallenged.

German Member of Parliament Alice Weidel, who is set to run as the chancellor candidate for the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party in the upcoming elections, has been contributing a column to the Swiss right-wing populist weekly newspaper *Weltwoche* since December. In this column, she is expected to share her "thoughts, experiences and reflections on current events." Weidel claims her party to be in regular contact with Elon Musk - who recently voiced support for voting for the AfD in Germany - and has been living in Switzerland with her partner for several years, despite her parliamentary responsibilities in the German Bundestag. She frequently draws attention with Islamophobic and anti-immigrant statements.

#### **Repression Against Pro-Palestinian Activists**

Swiss media and politics continue to be dominated by an almost entirely uncritical pro-Israel narrative. Public figures expressing criticism of Israel increasingly face repercussions in different forms:

Following expressions of support for the BDS movement, the 2024 Basel Culture Promotion Award was rescinded from Swiss DJ Leila Moon. The DJ, of Tunisian and Algerian descent, had called on Instagram for boycotts of events and venues collaborating with Israeli cultural figures holding anti-Palestinian positions. This led the jury that initially approved the award to reverse its decision. Several politicians and the Christian-Jewish Working Group also demanded the withdrawal of the award.

In early November, it was reported that pro-Palestinian activist Samuel Crettenand was detained by unidentified individuals at Bern train station in December 2023. Video footage, reviewed by journalists, shows Crettenand being handcuffed by three men in black who suddenly appeared after an altercation with railway security personnel. Questions regarding the identity and role of the men remain unanswered by the police. It is speculated that they are agents of unknown affiliation, but the reasons for their presence at the station and the detention of Crettenand - known for his peaceful protests - remain entirely unclear.

### **Niqab Ban Comes Into Effect**

On January 1, 2025, Switzerland's niqab ban will come into force. Enacted through a national referendum, the ban applies in public spaces as well as in private venues accessible to the public. Violations will be punishable by a fine of up to 1,000 CHF and apply to both residents and tourists. The Swiss Tourism Federation is therefore concerned about a decline in the number of Arab tourists in Switzerland, who are by far the most affluent group of tourists, spending an average of 380 CHF per person per day.