

Anti-Semitism-Report of the SIG

Data collected from both the French and German speaking parts of Switzerland showed an increase in antisemitic activity in 2008/9 compared to 2007.

The rise was related to the tense political atmosphere both in the Middle East and in Switzerland in two explicit periods during the year:

- in April 2008 in reaction to severe Jewish criticism of the visit of Swiss Foreign Minister Micheline Calmy-Rey to Tehran. The visit was condemned by the USA and Israel, by national and international Jewish organizations and even by parts of the Swiss population and by some political parties (such as the Swiss People's Party)
- in late 2008/beginning of 2009, coinciding with Israel's war in Gaza.

96 incidents were recorded in the French speaking part in 2008, compared to 38 in 2007 and 67 in 2006. Similar tendencies were registered in the German speaking part. (The SIG did not publish figures for the reasons stated above.)

Most of the manifestations reported were anti-Semitic graffiti on or near Jewish facilities and anti-Jewish texts in printed and electronic materials. However, there were also a few violent incidents. In February, for example, a recognizably Jewish man was threatened on a Zurich street with a knife while the attackers shouted "Jew" before running away without actually harming him. In addition, during a football game of Jewish juniors on November 2 in Zurich, the supporters of the other team, mostly immigrants, beat up and injured the coach, who they believed to be Jewish.

Verbal insults were a frequent complaint in both the German and French speaking parts. In Geneva, during a flea market organized in January 2008 by Jewish associations, a woman who saw menorahs offered for sale said: "Those are Jewish things; the Jews have all the money and rule the world." Jewish pupils suffered verbal anti-Semitic abuse by youngsters of undefined origin at school or on their way to school in several cities and towns. A group of youths in their mid-teens blocked the way of a skull-capped Jew on his way home on Friday eve. Another incident occurred at a Jewish summer camp in the mountains where a group of young people knocked at the door of one of the chalets, saw the Shabbat candles, asked whether they were Jews and shouted that they would "break" the Jews.

Between October and December 2008, several Jewish leaders and organizations in the French speaking part received three issues of a leaflet with virulently anti-Semitic content, such as claims that the Jews were criminal types, that they were mad and sexually deviant, and that they had planned the Bolshevik Revolution, and calling for the destruction of Israel. The authors of the publication were not identified.

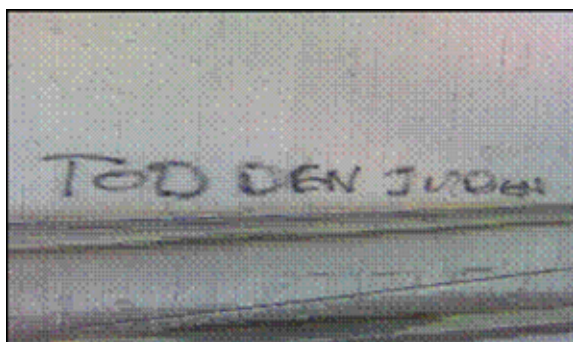


Figure 1: Graffiti with the slogan “Death to the Jews,” sprayed at the entrance of the Jewish community building in Zurich on April 12, 2008.

Antisemitic graffiti and posters were reported in various cities throughout 2008 and early 2009. For example:

A steep increase in anti-Semitic postings on the Internet was observed in 2008, including on electronic forums of mainstream newspapers. Responding to events in the Middle East, many participants made comparisons with the Holocaust or questioned it and denied Israel’s right to exist. This tendency increased in December 2008 and January 2009.



Figure 2: Placard with the slogan “Swiss defend yourself! Don’t buy from Jews,” posted on the door of a Jewish store in Basle on November 10, 2008.

In January 2009, the entrance to a Jewish synagogue in Zurich and the window of a Kollel in Geneva, as well as the El Al offices in Zurich, were damaged. Also during the war in Gaza, graffiti equating the Star of David with the swastika was reported in major cities across Switzerland. Jewish organizations and individuals received dozens of hate letters.

Also in January 2009, there were anti-Semitic reactions in connection with the attitude of the Catholic Church toward the reintegration of, among others, Bishop Richard Williamson. In various internet publications (such as blogs of several newspapers and TV stations), writers made parallels with the Gaza events questioning, for example, why the pope should react against Williamson’s anti-Semitic statements when rabbis had not spoken out against Israel’s behavior in Gaza.

Responses to Racism and Antisemitism

For the first time, Switzerland made a parliamentary submission in 2008 on the occasion of the Universal Periodical Review of the UN Human Rights Council. 20 out of the 31 recommendations contained therein were accepted. A few months later, the submission was subject to a review by the CERD (Convention for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination) Commission. In neither case, however, was anti-Semitism identified as a major concern, nor was Switzerland asked to take any specific measures to combat anti-Semitism in particular.