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Switzerland

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Demographic Data

- Immigration Waves

Prior to 1960, the presence of Muslims within the Swiss population was rare. That changed with three waves of immigration: one economic-based, one family-based, and one politically-based. The first wave, occurring in the late 1960's, was mainly born of economic reasons and consisted chiefly of men coming to work in Switzerland with no particular intention to stay permanently in the country. These immigrants were mostly from Turkey, the former Yugoslavia, and Albania. The second wave came in the late 1970's after Switzerland changed its legislation concerning foreigners to allow family regrouping. This decision had direct implications: from this point on, Islam was no longer only a masculine ephemeral social fact in Switzerland, but had become a reality with the presence of families. The last wave is a political one consisting of foreigners seeking asylum from oppressive dictatorships, various civil wars, famines and other reasons. More accurately, this is not a wave as much as it is an ongoing movement since it started in the 1960's (mainly from the Middle East) and continues on today with the exile of people from the Middle East, the former Yugoslavia, North Africa and other African countries.

- Statistics

Based on the census of the year 20001, the total Swiss population numbers 7,288,010. Of this number, 310,807 are Muslims, meaning Muslims represent 4.3% of the total population of Switzerland. An element that is important and interesting to note is that of the 310,807 Muslims in Switzerland, only 36,481 have Swiss nationality, having been born Swiss nationals and/or converting to Islam (approximately one-half of the 36,481) or having gone through the process of naturalization to become Swiss citizens. These Swiss Muslims represent 0.6% of the total population of Switzerland, a proportion which remains relatively low—low in comparison to other European countries—because access to Swiss nationality is passed along through the bloodline and not merely by birth on Swiss territory. In general, foreigners must have lived a total of 12 years in Switzerland before they may apply for Swiss nationality [1]. There is a facilitated procedure for foreigners married to Swiss citizens (art. 27), and for second generations. Note that the years spent in Switzerland between the ages of 10 and 20 are counted double (art.15, par.2).].

Of the overall number of Muslims in Switzerland, there are a majority of ex-Yugoslavians

Yugoslavia: 108,058 Bosnia Herzegovina: 23,457 Macedonia: 43,365 Croatia: 392 Slovenia: 102

followed by Turks and Albanians:

Turkey: 62,698 Albania: 699

And finally, we find the North African and Middle Eastern immigrants:

Morocco: 4,364 Tunisia: 3,318 Algeria: 2,654 Egypt: 865 Libya: 489 Iraq: 3,171 Lebanon: 1,277 Syria: 459

The fact that statistics reveal the presence of 169,726 Muslim men compared to 141,081 Muslim women demonstrates that the Muslim presence has evolved and is no longer merely due to a working immigration. Statistics also show that the Muslim population in Switzerland is rejuvenating. This is another indication that the Muslim community is settling in the country. With all nationalities

combined, there are

Less than 15 years old: 77'322 Between 15 and 24: 59'867 Between 25 and 34: 59'932 Between 35 and 44: 46'125 Between 45 and 54: 28'675 Between 55 and 64: 7'057 Between 65 and 74: 3'165 More than 75: 1'231

Relations between the State and the religious communities

Switzerland is a laic state. Nonetheless, the Swiss state recognizes both Catholicism and Protestantism as official religions. The relations with the religious communities are based on the fundamental rights to freedom of religion and philosophy and to equality before the law [2]. As a federation of states, all matters of religion fall under the competence of the cantons within the limits of federal (constitutional) law. The only two cantons that have clearly separated the state and religion are Geneva and Neuchâtel. Coincidentally, these are also the only two cantons that have had to deal with legal cases with regards to wearing of the veil. Also of note is a recent case of another type (from May 7, 2003): in Wallis, a Catholic canton, an imam from Macedonia was denied a work permit (to work as an imam in Switzerland) based in large part on the fact that the imam had studied in Medina (Saudi Arabia); the cantonal authorities considered the imam a potential threat to religious peace.

- **Islam and Law in Switzerland**

Muslims in Switzerland must abide by all Swiss laws and regulations. In general, no Swiss laws exist that directly interfere with any Islamic duty. For example, no Swiss laws forbid Muslims from exercising their religious beliefs or practices, such as praying or fasting. However, some conflicts with Islamic rights may be found in the Swiss family law. For example, according to the shari'a, polygamy is a right for the Muslims, but not a duty; however, in Switzerland like in other European countries, polygamy is legally forbidden. Similar conflicts may also arise in estate law or in cases where women are called to testify in Swiss courts.

- **Religion at school**

At the Swiss primary school level, catechism is often given as religious class. However, this type of education is evolving as catechism is slowly being replaced with non-religious and inter-religious classes. In secondary school, only an introduction to the history of religions is offered and is most often taught as non-dogmatic or non-confessional. "Enbire" (Enseignement Biblique Romand) developed a new pedagogy for teaching religion at school. This new program gives an introduction to the most influential religions of the world. This religious teaching was in general openly accepted in French-speaking Switzerland, but not in the canton of Wallis where a controversy exploded in November 2003. Some conservative Christian parents removed their children from religion class when they learned that Mohammed was presented as a prophet receiving God's messages and that the Koran was treated as a holy book. These parents were concerned that Islam teachings were contrary to the religious education that they wanted to provide to their children. All of the objections made towards this new religious teaching aimed at Islam, to the exclusion of all other religions taught. These parents have requested that the "good old" classes of catechism, which respected the Christian faith, be brought back.

The question of religious studies falls under the competence of the cantons. Each canton's department for public education decides what weight to give to religion in its schools' programs (usually offering no more than one hour per week). Therefore, in order to provide religious education for their children, Muslims must organize it themselves. The religious socialization is done through the families, and Muslim organizations that offer different classes such as introduction to Islam, the Holy Koran and Arabic. So far, Muslim pupils (as well as pupils of other

religious communities) do not benefit from any free hours to attend those classes. They often take place on Saturdays or in the early evening.

To date, there is one exception. In the canton of Lucerne, two communes decided to introduce Islamic religious classes for their Muslim pupils in fall 2002. This class is given in German language to all nationalities together and is optional. After a difficult start largely diffused through the media, this decision has now been accepted.

- **Political Participation**

To date, no Islamic or Muslim political parties exist in Switzerland. Only a few Swiss Muslims are involved politically and the few Muslims elected to office have not made Islam their battle. To the contrary, their religious belonging usually remains silent. Similarly, no Swiss political party has directed its political views against Islam, even with the far right Swiss parties - which tend to take a hard line against foreigners in general - gaining in popularity. Note that the controversy mentioned above about religious classes was largely supported by the UDC (Union Democratique du Centre), a political party often identified as far right. The UDC initiated a similar movement in November 2003. The canton of Zurich was preparing a vote for a modernization of the relations between state and church and the recognition of new confessional communities. This project intended to give some religious communities an official status that would allow them to perceive religious taxes and organize religious teachings. The UDC, opposed to this project, directed its entire campaign against Islam, underlying that violence was a daily fact in Muslim countries, and arguing that the confrontation of Islam with other religious communities had always led to violence. The UDC also publicly claimed that the shari'a (Islamic law) is a threat for the lawful state of Zurich. The UDC's campaign was a success and led to the refusal of the project.

- **Muslim Religious Holidays**

No particular measures exist in Switzerland concerning Muslim religious holidays. However, according to some judicial decisions, Muslims have a right to take days off from work on Muslim religious holidays unless this leave causes a major economical damage to the employer. Also note that no reduction of work hours is legally permitted during the Ramadan fast, but arrangements can be made with the employer on an individual basis. One example of unofficial regulation that exists concerns gymnastics at school during Ramadan. Students following their religious rite of fasting during Ramadan are exempted from gym class due to the danger of fainting or dehydration.

Religious Sociography

- **Number of mosques and prayer halls**

Switzerland has registered 97 mosques and/or prayer halls. Only one in Geneva and one in Zurich have the proper Islamic architecture to be considered mosques whereas the rest are mainly prayer halls. Some have real infrastructures with a library and/or a cafeteria, but these are rare.

- **Islamic Schools**

There are no Islamic schools in Switzerland. Thus, the religious socialization of young Muslims is mostly performed by the families and the local associations. The only exception to the rule is the canton of Lucerne mentioned above. The foundation of the Geneva Mosque intends to create an institute to train imams, a national first. The students will take university-level courses for a minimum of two years. The teachings will be particularly geared towards young Muslims born in

Switzerland of second or third generation. The goal is to have people educated in religious matters as well as being integrated in local life. Alongside classes on the Koran and the Sunnah, the students will also follow courses in judicial decisions and comparative law, thus enabling them to profess an Islam adapted to the Swiss laws and way of life. This project is supposed to begin in fall 2004.

- Organizations and Associations

There are various Muslim associations in Switzerland. At present, there are 35 generically named Muslim associations, 4 Muslims youth associations, 3 Muslim women associations and 4 Muslim help associations. It should be noted that most of the regular Muslim associations have substructures for their youth and, often, the women are also organized within the framework of the main association. [The main associations are presented below with their websites.] Muslim associations are generally locally organized, but they are also starting to organize themselves within the frame of the cantons. In most cantons, the associations are organizing themselves into unions (for example, the Union of Muslim associations of the canton of Fribourg) giving them more weight to discuss important issues (eg. cemeteries, swimming pools, construction of mosques, etc.). At the Swiss level, two main structures exist: "Musulmans et Musulmanes de Suisse" (MMS) and "La Ligue des Musulmans de Suisse"; however, there is no official representative like in France.

- Cemeteries

The issue of cemeteries for Muslims in Switzerland varies. As a federation of states, Switzerland has left this issue to the competence of the cantons. Most often the cantons then let the communes individually decide a solution which best suits their population. However, we can briefly note that Bern was the first canton to set aside and reserve in their cemeteries a section for Muslims. Likewise, Basel, Saint-Gall and Zurich have opted for this solution of "Muslims sections." Moreover, Geneva has a Muslim cemetery and, it appears, Basel has a private Muslim cemetery. The Muslim cemetery in Geneva is now fully occupied and the Geneva authorities are looking for new solutions. In January 2004, a law project was submitted to make confessional cemeteries legal. In Neuchatel and Fribourg, requests for "Muslim sections" of existing cemeteries or for a Muslim cemetery have recently been made but no official response has been given thus far. As for the funeral rites, Muslim organizations usually provide personnel to prepare the body for the funeral. The question of internment also falls under the competence of the communes. When no legislation exists, the parishes do their best to find a solution that is acceptable to the family.

Muslims and the Media

- Muslim Media

- Muslim publications, bulletins

- Er-Rahma - Die Barmherzigkeit: unhangige Teitschrift von Muslimen in der Schweiz. This bulletin goes out 4 to 5 times a year. It is possible to read the different articles online.

- <http://www.barmherzigkeit.ch/home.htm> Bulletins du Centre Islamique de Geneve. This report goes out 3 times a year. Like the previous one, it is possible to consult the different articles online. http://www.cige.org/bulletins/Bulletin_24.htm

- Muslim TV and radio programs

- Muslims do not have their own programs either on TV or on the radio. However there are a

certain number of religious programs where Islam is discussed in an inter-religious manner. Themes such as creation, death, health, fundamentalism, etc are examples of subjects that are debated.

- Websites

It is definitely on the Web that Muslims are really present in Switzerland. Here are some Muslim sites that show how well the associations are becoming organized.

- Islam en Suisse: <http://islam.ch>
- Ligue des Musulmans de Suisse: <http://rabita.ch>
- Fondation culturelle islamique de Geneve: <http://www.mosque.ch>
- Association Culturelle des Femmes Musulmanes de Suisse: <http://www.femme-musulmane.ch>
- Centre islamique de Geneve: <http://www.cige.org>
- Islamisches Zentrum Bern: <http://www.muslimonline.com/%7Ebern/german.html>
- Islamisch-Kultureller Verein AHLE BEYT Schweiz: <http://www.ahlebeyt.ch>
- Die Zurcher Moschee: <http://www.moschee-zurich.ch>
- Islamic Scout Switzerland: <http://www.islamic-scouts.ch>
- Schweizerische Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft: <http://www.islamtoplumu.ch>
- Verein der Konvertierten Muslime in der Schweiz und islamischer Frauenverein: <http://www.izzuerich.ch>

- Muslims in the Media

Unfortunately, in the media, Islam is often presented in terms of problems, discrimination, violence and terrorism. As a direct consequence, Islam generally has a negative image in the public opinion. Rare is it that information speaks positively of Islam or Muslims in general or to find the daily life of ordinary Muslim figures in the newspapers or on TV. The media seem concerned mainly with Islam only for big debates such as religious extremism, the veil, cemeteries or ritual slaughter.

However, in the regional press, articles can be found about Muslims: for example, during the Ramadan 2002, one could read articles on Muslim athletes who were fasting.

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[1] Federal Act on the acquisition and loss of Swiss nationality, art. 15

[2] Cf. Federal Constitution of Switzerland art. 15 and 8 respectively.