Anti-Semitism Report 2016: Threats, attempted blackmail, assaults

The new Anti-Semitism Report 2016 by the SIG and the GRA focuses on anti-Semitic incidents in German-speaking Switzerland. The main theme by historian Daniel Rickenbacher is examining the interaction between groups on the left, the right, and Islamist organizations. The report can be accessed at www.antisemitismus.ch.

Depending on the study, anti-Semitic attitudes are to be encountered in 10 to 25 percent of the population. The Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities (SIG) and the Foundation against Racism and Anti-Semitism (GRA) show in their Anti-Semitism report for 2016 what happens when attitudes become actions.

In 2016, the year under report, serious incidents were recorded from the spectrum of the extreme Right: In October 2016, in Toggenburg, a concert was held featuring some notorious neo-Nazi bands. According to media reports, around 5000 people attended the event.

A number of the bands appearing included songs with anti-Semitic content in their repertoire; photos of the event show concertgoers giving the Hitler salute. A serious event likewise came to light in October 2016: In one of their songs, members of a neo-Nazi band made death threats against the SIG President and members of the SIG management. They also warned of bomb attacks on Jewish institutions in Zurich.

In July the SIG received an E-mail containing blackmail threats. Jews were held responsible for all the world's misfortunes. The unknown sender demanded a large amount of money from the SIG. If the SIG failed to pay up, the blackmailer threatened that "Jewish people in Switzerland will bear the consequences". Two incidents of physical violence occurred in Zurich: At a football ground two Jewish youngsters asked other footballers if they could join in. The answer was: "You're Jews. There's nothing here for Jews. S**t Jews". The two Jewish youngsters were then spat on. As they left they were followed by jeers of "Heil Hitler". Again in Zurich, in April a Jewish boy was the victim of massive anti-Semitic invective in the street and was spat on as he rode his bicycle past three young people.

As the focus of his contribution the historian Daniel Rickenbacher, under the title "When hatred of Jews creates unity", looks at the cross-front phenomenon in Switzerland. Cross-fronts is the term coined to describe associations which are formed between groups who are at opposite ends of the political spectrum. Rickenbacher shows that in Switzerland informal interaction exists between groupings on the Left, the Right, and Islamists. According to Rickenbacher, the embedding of anti-Semitism in a range of different political spectra provides the basis for groups to find common ground who would otherwise be assumed to be in complete opposition.