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1 Muslim Populations

Prior to 1960, the presence of Muslims within the Swiss population was rare. That changed with three waves of immigration. The first wave, in the late 1960s, was mainly caused by economic factors 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 1970s, after Switzerland changed its legislation concerning foreigners to allow family reunion. This decision had direct implications: from this point on, Islam was no longer an ephemeral, male social factor in Switzerland but, with the presence of families, had become a lasting reality. The last, political, wave consisted of foreigners seeking asylum from oppressive dictatorships, various civil wars, famines and other situations. More accurately, this is not so much a wave as an ongoing movement, since it started in the 1960s (mainly from the Middle East) and continues today with the exodus of people from the Middle East, the former Yugoslavia, North Africa and other African countries.

Censuses in Switzerland have been carried out every ten years since 1850 and always included the question of affiliation to a religious community. In 2000, 301,807 individuals declaring their affiliation to Islam were living in Switzerland, making up 4.3% of the population. For several reasons the increase observed in preceding decades (1970: 16,353, 1980: 56,625, 1990: 152,217) has slowed down considerably. With the 2010 census the method of data collection changed from a full census to that of random sample. Furthermore, only persons aged over 15 years were considered. This is why the Swiss Federal Statistical Office published a lower figure of Muslims for

1 Dr Stéphane Lathion is founder of GRIS (Research Group on Islam in Switzerland) and a researcher associated with the Observatoire des Religions en Suisse, University of Lausanne. His latest book is Islam et modernité, Identités entre mairie et mosquée (Islam and modernity, Identities between Mosque and Secular State)(Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2010). Dr Andreas Tunger-Zanetti is coordinator of the Centre for Research on Religion at the University of Lucerne and currently engaged in a project on Muslim youth groups.
2010 than for 2000, namely 295,798 (margin of appreciation: 1.8%). Taking into account that in the 2000 census 39.2% of Muslims in Switzerland were under 20 years of age, the number can be calculated to ca. 420,000 persons for 2010 and to 440,000 for 2012 corresponding to 5.5% of the total Swiss population. The percentage is slightly higher in the German-speaking parts than in the French- and Italian-speaking parts of the country. The great majority of the country’s Muslims live in industrialised areas.

Automatic Swiss nationality is by descent and not by birth on Swiss territory. Foreigners, including those born in Switzerland, must generally have lived for a total of twelve years in Switzerland before they can apply for Swiss nationality; the years spent in the country between the ages of ten and twenty are double counted. A federal referendum in 2004 eased access to Swiss citizenship for the descendants of immigrants. Since 2000, the proportion of Muslims with Swiss citizenship has risen from 11.7 to ca. 35%. It was 31.4% in 2010 according to the official figures for those aged over 15, but it is most probably higher for those up to 15 years. Still, the majority of Muslims in Switzerland hold foreign nationalities, some 30% from one of Yugoslavia’s successor states, followed by Turkey (around 16%, Alevi included), North Africa, Sub-Saharan African and the Middle East (all below 5%).

Muslim communities in Switzerland are 75% Sunnis, 7% Shi’is, 10%–15% Turkish Alevi, including some members of Sufi orders. The proportion of those practising Islam on a regular basis is estimated at 10–20%.

2 Islam and the State

Switzerland is a secular state. Its Constitution guarantees the fundamental right to freedom of belief and conscience (§15) and equality before the law. However, since Switzerland is a federation of states (cantons), the Constitution in §72 delegates all matters of religion to the competence of the cantons. This means that a canton is free to grant one or more religious communities a privileged status including the possibility to levy a special tax for them. The only two cantons that have clearly separated state and religion are Geneva and Neuchâtel. Almost all the others have granted special status to the Roman Catholic Church, to the Reformed

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2 For more details, see www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/de/index/themen/01/05.html.
3 Mahning, Hans, “L’intégration institutionnelle des Musulmans de Suisse: L’exemple de Bâle-Ville, Berne, Genève, Neuchâtel et Zurich” (The institutional integration of Muslims in...
Church and to the small Old Catholic Church, six to Jewish congregations. No canton so far has done so with an Islamic corporate body. Most Islamic umbrella organisations, however, declare the privileged status of official recognition as their long-term goal. The two main umbrella organisations FIDS and KIOS (see next section) are pursuing the idea to assemble a national ‘parliament’ of Muslims in order to coordinate efforts for recognition. There is generally cooperation between local or cantonal authorities and the respective Muslim organisations.

On 17 October 2012 the Parliament of the Canton of Basel-Stadt granted official recognition of largely symbolic value to two Alevi organisations. This was the first case of recognition for a congregation outside the Christian or Jewish traditions, and Muslim organisations noticed this with interest.

3 Main Muslim Organisations

The situation outlined in section 2 means that there is yet no official representation of all Muslims, neither on the national nor on the cantonal level. In ten cantons, however, there are umbrella organisations uniting the majority of local associations and acting as interlocutors for authorities and civil society for issues such as cemeteries, swimming pools, construction of mosques, etc.; one organisation of this type covers six cantons in Eastern Switzerland and the Principality of Liechtenstein. Another type of umbrella organisations coordinates local associations of the same ethnic and ideological background all over Switzerland. A third type of non-local organisation groups individuals with particular interests such as the Union of Albanian Imams in Switzerland (www.uais.ch), founded in January 2012, or organisations for women or for burial services; important among the older ones are Musulmans et Musulmanes de Suisse (Muslim Men and Women of Switzerland, www.islam.ch) and Ligue des Musulmans de Suisse (League of Swiss Muslims, www.rabita-ms.ch).

There are two umbrella organisations whose presidents have been trying for several years to establish their organisation as the main player on the national level. One is Föderation islamischer Dachorganisationen der Switzerland: The example of Bâle-Ville, Berne, Geneva, Neuchâtel and Zurich)”, *Tangram: Bulletin de la Commission Fédérale contre le Racisme*, vol. 8 (2000), pp. 102–111.

4 A good overview with only few lacunae is found on www.islam.ch/joomla/index.php?option=com_weblinks&view=categories&Itemid=27 (accessed 31 January 2013).

Schweiz (FIDS, Federation of Islamic Organisations of Switzerland, Bahnhstrasse 80, 8105 Regensdorf, www.fids.ch), headed by Dr. Hisham Maizar and bringing together thirteen organisations of the middle-range type described above. The other is Koordination Islamischer Organisationen Schweiz (KIOS, Coordination of Swiss Islamic Organisations) with Dr. Farhad Afshar (Kappelenring 44c, 3032 Hinterkappelen, kios@bluewin.ch) as its spokesperson and with the cantonal umbrella organisations of Basel, Berne and Zurich as its members; KIOS has no website, and nothing is known about its structure, committee etc. FIDS and KIOS, though rivals, cooperate in setting up a representative body of Swiss Muslims and they have formed a common front against a more recent player, the hard-line Islamischer Zentralrat Schweiz (Islamic Central Council of Switzerland or ICCS, www.islamrat.ch). The ICCS was founded on 25 October 2009, one month before and as a reaction to the referendum on minarets. Headed by young Muslim convert Nicolas Blancho, it is constantly seeking media attention, often through provocative initiatives, and has attracted much sympathy among the second and third generation of Muslims for speaking out against discrimination. The ICCS states as one of its objectives “to unite in the future the majority of practising Muslims institutionally and to represent them.”

On the local level, nearly every one of the 200 mosques and prayer houses is under the responsibility of an association or a foundation. Most of them have a youth and a women section. Another type of associations focuses on cultural activities and attracts primarily non-practising Muslims.

4 Mosques and Prayer Houses

Switzerland has nearly 200 mosques and/or prayer halls. Only four of them show features of Islamic architecture, in particular a minaret: Zurich (inaugurated in 1963, run by the Ahmadiyya movement), in Geneva (1978, financed by Saudi Arabia), and more recently in two converted industrial buildings in Winterthur (2005, Albanians) and Wangen (2009, Turks).

5 www.izrs.ch/vision.html, accessed 2 April 2013 (authors’ translation).
On 29 November 2009, the Swiss population voted in a referendum to prohibit the building of minarets in Switzerland (see section 16 below). Building permission for the fifth minaret, planned by the Albanian congregation in Langenthal, was issued, but not realised before the vote on the minaret ban. This caused uncertainty about whether it is still valid. On 29 March 2012 the administrative court of the canton of Berne ruled that the planned plexiglass cupola could be built, but not the 6 meter minaret. The court grounded its decision on details of local construction law thus leaving open the question of the effect of the constitutional minaret ban. The Albanian congregation has accepted the verdict. A newly built mosque, from the outset planned without dome or minaret, was inaugurated in Wohlen (Aargau) in 2007. Another one with a lofty appearance and a front with oriental decorative elements opened its doors in Volketswil near Zurich in December 2012. Two more (Grenchen, Wil), both with domes, are in an advanced stage of planning.

The remaining mosques are mainly prayer halls with nothing but a signboard as outward indication of their Islamic function. Most have facilities such as a small library and/or cafeteria. Prayer rooms in public institutions are still few and generally designed to accommodate all faiths with the qibla indicated for Muslims.

5 Children’s Education

The question of religious education is the responsibility of the cantons. Each canton, according to the cantonal constitution and laws, has its own system of teaching in religion or about religion or—rarely—both (usually no more than one hour per week). At the primary school level, religious education often takes the form of optional confessional instruction, given in public schools by staff of churches enjoying the status of official recognition (see section 2). However, this type of education is evolving and is slowly being replaced in many cantons with non-religious and inter-religious classes taught by public school teachers and mandatory for all pupils. In secondary school, only an introduction to the history of religions is offered and is usually taught in a non-dogmatic or non-confessional fashion. Enbiro (Enseignement Biblique Romand, ENBIRO, www.enbiro.ch) has developed a new pedagogy for teaching religion in school. This new programme gives an introduction to the world’s most influential religions and has been generally welcomed in French-speaking Switzerland, although not in the canton of Wallis, where a controversy erupted in November 2003. Some conservative Christian parents removed
their children from the religious education class when they learned that Muhammad was presented as a prophet who received messages from God and that the Qur’an is a holy book. These parents were concerned that presenting Islamic teachings conflicted with the religious education they wanted to provide for their children. All the objections to this new kind of religious education were related to Islam, and not to the other religions taught. In the German-speaking part of Switzerland the variety of types of teaching in/about religion on secondary level is as big as at primary level.8

Muslim children are socialised in religious matters, depending on their parents’ initiative, through the family or at the preferred mosque, which may offer an introduction to Islam, the Qur’an and Arabic by the imam or, often, by poorly trained volunteer teachers. Until now, Muslim pupils (like pupils from other religious communities) are not given any time off school to attend such classes, which often take place on Saturdays or in the early evening.

Islamic instruction in public schools (beside the regular classes) is possible in some cantons even without official recognition of the respective community and only depending on consent of local authorities. So far, qualified Muslim teachers teach classes of Muslim children in four municipalities (since 2002 in Kriens, Ebikon and Turgi/Obersiggenthal, since 2010 in Kreuzlingen).9 These classes are optional and given in German to all nationalities together.

A federal research report on religious education was published in summer 2009.10 There is an agreement that teachers of Islamic religion are needed, but the question is how to organise a training course in practice. The scarcity of Islamic education in public schools is due to a combination of factors: weak Muslim organisations depending on voluntary donations, lack of qualified Muslim teachers, and fear of Islamophobic reactions.

Secular classes are usually unaffected by problems related to Islam. The few cases where the rules and guidelines of public schools are not

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9 The Kreuzlingen classes are extensively documented on www.viuk.ch.

10 Formation en Suisse des imams et des enseignants-es en religion islamique (Training in Switzerland for imams and teachers of Islamic religious education), PNR 58 (Collectivités religieuses, Etat et société) (Berne, 2009), German and French version available on www.nfp58.ch.
accepted by Muslim parents are mostly about participation in school camps or swimming lessons. Normally pragmatic solutions are found. Only rare cases end up before the courts, causing disproportionate media attention. In 2012 some cases in and around Basel have escalated: Several families refused to send their daughters to the mandatory swimming lessons in the public school. They were fined increasing amounts, but remain resolved; a non-Muslim consultant pays the fines for them.

6 Higher and Professional Education

In Switzerland, there is a small number of university chairs in Islamic studies (Geneva, Berne, Zurich, Basel). They are slowly beginning to broaden the spectrum of research topics from the philological, historical, civilizational and sometimes political aspects towards a contemporary view of the Islamic world. Islam in Europe is primarily a research topic of some Departments of Religious Studies (Universities of Lausanne, Fribourg, Lucerne and Zurich).

On 7 May 2003, in Wallis, a Catholic canton, an imam from Macedonia was denied a work permit to work as an imam, largely due to the fact that he had studied in Medina (Saudi Arabia) and the canton authorities considered him to be a potential threat to religious harmony. The case contributed to imam training becoming a political issue and a study group was established which reported its findings in July 2009. The report confirms that the Muslim majority expect training courses for imams as well as for teachers based on the German model (educational studies, Arabic, Islam). The situation in the French part of Switzerland is quite different and seems more orientated towards an historical and ecumenical approach proposed by the NGO Enseignement Biblique et Interreligieux Romand. The study revealed widespread consensus on the necessity for imams and religious teachers to be fluent in one of Switzerland’s national languages and familiar with its society, laws and history. Two models for training of imams and religious teachers are discussed. One is to establish an academic unit for ‘Islamic theology’ at a university, similar to recent initiatives in Germany. An intermediate solution is to provide adult continuing education to supplement the theological training that functioning imams already have, and also to make it available to leaders in Muslim communities.

11 Details see preceding note in section 5.
associations; a one-year course of this type, called “Religious support in an interreligious context” and open to religious staff of all religions has been conducted at Zurich University of Applied Sciences in Winterthur in 2009 and 2010 with resumption planned for 2013.

7 Burial and Cemeteries

As a federation of states, Switzerland has left this issue of cemeteries to the cantons, which usually allow the individual local authorities to find the solution that best suits their population. A number of Muslim cemeteries have been established in recent years. The oldest was started in Petit-Saconnex in Geneva in 1978. It was not until 2000 that other major cities began to define and establish sections suited for Muslim burials. Meanwhile the 11 biggest cities, except Lausanne, now have such sections, the one in Winterthur having been opened in 2012; there are also Muslim sections at cemeteries in some middle-sized or small municipalities. Negotiations and planning are under way in the cities of Neuchâtel, Fribourg, St. Gallen, Schlieren and Lausanne. Usually Muslim residents of neighbouring cities or villages can also be buried in these sections provided the authorities of the two municipalities have signed a general agreement. Demand for existing burial places is low so far, because the majority of first generation Muslim immigrants still prefer to be buried in their country of origin. But Muslim functionaries expect this to change in the future.

With regard to funeral rites, Muslim organisations usually provide personnel to prepare the body for the funeral. When there are no local regulations governing the details of funeral rites, local parishes or civil authorities usually try to do their best to find a solution acceptable to the family.

8 ‘Chaplaincy’ in State Institutions

No chaplaincy arrangements are formally organised for Muslims, and what services there are depend exclusively on the good will of institutions and individuals. The Swiss Army has only Roman Catholic and Protestant chaplains. These have to care for any member of the Army asking for assistance. A similar situation is found in Swiss prisons and hospitals. Only some prisons (e.g. Pöschwies prison in Regensdorf near Zurich) have arrangements with individually selected professionally trained imams or
with confidential Muslims persons, sometimes brokered by regional Muslim associations. A sociological study on religious pluralism in Swiss prisons recommends not only a more systematic involvement of imams, but also to raise awareness of prison staff of Islam and related issues through further education in order to counter gross stereotypes. There is a chaplaincy service in the Geneva hospital that works because of the involvement of some Muslim doctors. Some hospitals give their staff further training on aspects of religious and cultural diversity.

9 Religious Festivals

No specific arrangements exist in Switzerland concerning Muslim religious holidays. However, Muslims are sometimes allowed to take days off work for Islamic festivals unless this would cause serious economic difficulties for the employer. There is no legal right to a reduction of working hours during the Ramadan fast, but arrangements can be made with the employer on an individual basis. Students fasting during Ramadan are exempted from gym class because of the risk of fainting or dehydration. Most schools have guidelines on how to treat requests for dispensation related to requirements of any religion. Given the federal system, these guidelines differ among cantons and even among municipalities.

Hajj is organised by the major Islamic umbrella organisations in collaboration with authorised travel agencies. According to the Consular Section of the Saudi Embassy in Switzerland, “the number of hajj visas granted from Switzerland for the year 1433H/2012AD is approximately 1,700 visas.”

10 Halal Products and Islamic Services

Slaughter without prior anaesthetisation is not permitted, although exceptions are made for special events. This is not a serious problem because halal food imported from France, Italy, Germany, Austria and New Zealand (60% of lamb meat) is readily available. There are butchers selling meat as halal which is from anaesthetised animals slaughtered

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13 E-mail reply of the Consular Section to the authors on 18 February 2013.
by a Muslim. Halal meat is rarely offered in prisons or hospitals as it costs more than ordinary meat.

Official statistics for 2012 show an imported quantity of 335 tons of halal beef (permitted: 350) and of 158 tons of halal mutton (permitted: 175). The biggest contingent (142 tons of beef) was bought by Halal Import SA in Basel, one among 11 import companies. Halal certificates for any products usually originate from foreign certifiers. Business and services under explicitly Islamic headings are few. This applies also for Islamic banking. The only bank working entirely according to Shari’a principles was Faisal Private Bank, Geneva, founded in 2006, but they stopped their banking activities in November 2012 because demand for halal banking products was too weak; they operate now only as a family office. Several other banks still have a small Islamic window. Hajj and ‘Umrah are organised by the major Islamic umbrella organisations cooperating with travel agencies authorised by the Saudi embassy.

11 Dress Codes

There has been fierce debate on the subject of religious dress all over Switzerland, but emotions have been higher in the French part because of the impact of events in France and a similar perception of laïcité. The hijab is permitted at school for students and pupils but prohibited in most cantons for teachers.

Two cantons have had to deal with legal cases concerning hijab. As the result of a case in Geneva that went all the way to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, it was established that the principle of laïcité, which applies in Geneva, entitles the canton to rule that public officials may not wear ostentatious religious symbols, such as hijab. In theory this ruling could become a precedent for the whole of Switzerland, but the decision remains with individual cantons. Schools allow Muslim girls to wear the ‘burqini’ for swimming lessons.

Since July 2009, as in France, complete veiling has become a subject of public debate in Switzerland. After a phase of mostly theoretical and hypothetical polemics echoing discussions in France, the controversy is continuing in some cantons and even on the national level. The same

political forces that initiated the minaret ban are now preparing an initiative to ban any type of ‘disguise’ in public, aiming primarily at the niqab (very often mistakenly labelled as burqa which is more or less non-existent in Switzerland; authorities estimate the number of niqab-wearing women at 100–150). The intention to launch a popular initiative in 2013 has been confirmed, after the national parliament rejected a request advanced by the canton of Aargau, on 28 September 2012, with 93 against 87 votes. A similar request was submitted to the National Assembly by a parliamentarian and won a majority in the Lower House in 2011, but was rejected by the Council of States on 5 March 2012.

Head scarves are permitted on photos in ID cards and passports as long as the face remains visible from the chin to the hairline.16

12 Publication and Media

Muslims do not have their own programmes on either television or radio. However, there are a certain number of religious programmes in which Islam is discussed in an inter-religious context. Themes such as creation, death, health and fundamentalism are examples of subjects covered. Similar topics are raised on the Internet, where Muslims are particularly active with websites of their own making. This shift in media use is symbolised by the end of Er-Rahma—Die Barmherzigkeit, a journal produced in 200 copies by private enthusiasts, in 2007, after sixteen years in print. Some of the Muslim websites that show how well organised the associations are becoming are: Islam en Suisse (www.islam.ch/); Gesellschaft Schweiz—Islamische Welt (www.gsiw.ch/, with a rich monthly newsletter), Ligue des Musulmans de Suisse (www.rabita-ms.ch/); Fondation Culturelle Islamique de Genève (www.mosque.ch/); Association Culturelle des Femmes Musulmanes de Suisse (www.femme-musulmane.ch); Centre Islamique de Genève (www.cige.org/cige/index.html); Vereinigung der Islamischen Organisationen in Zürich (www.vioz.ch); Stiftung Islamische Gemeinschaft Zürich (www.sigz.ch); Schweizerische Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft (www.sig-net.ch/); Bulletins du Centre Islamique de Genève (www.cige.org/cige/publications/bulletins_du_cig/index.html) is a newsletter produced three times a year. Many groups consisting of

mainly young people do not maintain websites, but organise themselves through social media, especially Facebook.

13 Family Law

In Switzerland, as in other European countries, polygamy is illegal; nevertheless, sometimes international private law obliges some exceptions. Conflicts may arise in inheritance law or in cases where women are called to testify in Swiss courts. Marriages can only be formalised according to civil law. Research on family law and on the consequences of increasing legal diversity has received more attention since the foundation, in 2008, of the Center for Islamic and Middle Eastern Legal Studies (CIMELS) at the University of Zurich (www.rwi.uzh.ch/oe/cimels.html).

14 Interreligious Relations

Since 1992, the Interreligious Working Group of Switzerland (www.iras-cotis.ch) counsels religious communities on practical questions (e.g. residency permits for staff, rooms), coordinates their activities and publicly promotes interreligious encounter through a “Week of Religions” held every year since 2007 in the beginning of November. One Muslim woman and two men are among the ten members of the committee. The woman, Rifa’at Lenzin, was awarded the title of honorary doctor of the University of Berne in 2010 for years of engagement in interreligious dialogue.

Aiming at a more political level, the Swiss Council of Religions (SCR, www.councilofreligions.ch) was established in 2006 with the goal of contributing to the maintenance and promotion of religious harmony and freedom in Switzerland. It consists of representatives of the three churches officially recognised in most cantons (Roman Catholic, Old Catholic and Protestant), the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities, the two Islamic umbrella organisations FIDS and KIOS (see above section 3), an Orthodox Christian bishop and three independent women (Jewish, Christian, Muslim). The power of the body's statements is purely symbolic.

Partly as a reaction to the SCR which consisted only of men at its start, women of the three Abrahamic religions founded the Interreligious Think

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17 Pahud de Mortanges, René and Erwin Tanner (eds), Muslime und Schweizerische Rechtsordnung (Muslims and Swiss law) (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires, 2002).
Tank (www.interrelthinktank.ch) in 2008. They work on theological questions of social relevance such as integration politics, women’s position in their religions, minaret ban, and sometimes publish comments on publicly debated issues.

The capital Bern is home to a unique experiment named Haus der Religionen (House of Religions, www.haus-der-religionen.ch). After stages in provisional premises, currently at Laubeggstrasse 21, and difficult fund-raising, construction work at Europaplatz started on 27 June 2012. Once finished, the complex will comprise separate but neighbouring prayer rooms for Alevi, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus and Muslims as well as a common meeting space, offices, apartments and a hotel.

At the cantonal level there are a number of interreligious fora that conduct meetings, public debates, and joint prayers in connection with the main religious festivals. During recent years, Muslim representatives such as imams or choirs have in some cases participated actively in public events of a civic nature, foremost the Federal Day of Thanksgiving, Repentance and Prayer (mid-September).

15 Public Opinion and Debate

Public debate continues to be marked by the features noted during the months before and after the minaret ban decided by the Swiss electorate in a referendum on 29 November 2009. The debate is highly emotional. Since 2007, all main political parties developed a strategic paper on the place of Islam in Switzerland focusing on how to integrate Muslims in society. A discussion about prohibiting the ‘burqa’ (actually meaning the niqab, cf. section 11) has taken the place of the imaginary wave of requests for building minarets. The same right wing and evangelical Christian activists who promoted the minaret ban are trying to bring about a referendum to this end. Another phenomenon is the hysteria fuelled by the same circles and amplified by mainstream media every time the ICCS (cf. section 3) announces a public event. In 2012, it was especially the

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18 The ban and its broader context are analysed in detail in: Adrian Vatter (ed.): Vom Schächt- zum Minarettverbot. Religiöse Minderheiten in der direkten Demokratie (From banning kosher slaughtering to banning minarets. Religious minorities in direct democracy) (Zürich: Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 2011).

19 The Swiss Confederation, through the Federal Commission against Racism (CFR), has published a special issue of its Tangram review on hostility against Muslims in no. 25, June 2010.
annual assembly, held on 15 December in Fribourg, which caused media attention; the Federal authorities banned scheduled speaker Muhammad al-Arifiji from Saudi Arabia from entering the country. Although the mechanisms of the game are obvious, authorities and civil society actors are reluctant to increase efforts to combat the widespread ignorance about Islam among the population and politicians.

Two public debates were imported from Germany in 2012. In spring, local committees of activists followed a German campaign to distribute copies of the Qur’an in pedestrian zones of some Swiss cities. Media watched out for local activities, and some local right-wing politicians urged the authorities to take measures. In the canton of Thurgau, a popular initiative supported by 4,466 citizens demanded to prohibit the use of “misogynous, racist or murderous” textbooks in public schools, explicitly aiming at the Qur’an; the initiative was declared invalid by the cantonal parliament on 19 December. The other imported debate concerned circumcision and arose in summer after a German district court had prohibited circumcision of male children. The main hospital of Zurich suspended circumcisions in July, but after internal discussions and legal and ethical consultation resumed them one month later. The authorities played a moderating but defensive role in these debates. The authorities also showed little activity in the Grenchen case: In that town, on 11 November 2011, police found a dead pig and four pigs’ heads buried on the building lot after various media had received an anonymous letter to this effect. The police have been unable to find the perpetrators so far.

16 Major Cultural Events

The main regular event with Muslim participation is the interreligious “Week of Religions”, held each year at the beginning of November (cf. section 14). Many prayer halls will then have a “Day of open doors”, some will also delegate a spokesperson to a podium or a children’s choir to an interreligious gathering. The participation depends very much on a few local activists. In 2012 fewer mosques arranged a “Day of open doors” as a result of poor demand in preceding years.

Some umbrella organisations use iftar dinners or ‘Id al-adha for inviting representatives of authorities and churches, or in some cases, as e.g. in Zurich, their heads and imams are hosted on this occasion by city authorities.
Young activists are increasingly beginning to organise events for their peers. The biggest one is the Ummah Day (www.u-day.ch) in Dietikon. After causing a big fuss in the media when starting in 2010 with Tariq Ramadan, the second one on 17 December 2011 went unnoticed by the public and attracted many less young Muslims. The event was not organised in 2012.