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Switzerland

Open Islamophobia in Switzerland

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Swiss citizens will vote in March 2021 on the popular Islamophobic initiative "Yes to the ban on concealing one's face". The main objective is a new stigmatisation campaign against Muslim populations.

This initiative, supported by the UDC and a majority of the centre group (PDC, PBD and PEV) was tabled in 2017 by the Egerkingen committee (which had already initiated the vote "Against the construction of minarets" in 2008). [1] It has its roots in the Ticino initiative "Prohibition of the concealment of the face in public places", initiated by the "Trouble-fête" movement with the support of the Lega and the UDC, and accepted by more than 65% of the votes in September 2013.

Racism in permanent campaign

The proposed text deliberately avoided any reference to the Muslim full veil. But make no mistake, the burqa is the main object of accusation of the Egerkingen Committee and its supporters, as the initiative goes alongside discrimination against Muslims more generally. The campaign visuals of the initiators are clear, with a picture of a woman in a burqa, stamped "stop extremism".

This is part of an ongoing and increasingly stigmatizing campaign against non-white people, but also against Muslim people. The UDC wants to continue to promote and strengthen xenophobic and Islamophobic discourse while maintaining a neo-liberal economic and ecologically destructive orientation.

Equality as an instrument

The UDC and its supporters also continue to instrumentalize the issue of women's emancipation in their campaigns against foreigners and Muslim populations in particular. On the historic day of the Feminist Strike on 14 June 2019, the Swiss People's Party (UDC) in French-speaking Switzerland, which of course did not support it, organized a support meal for an anti-abortion foundation (Swiss Aid for Mother and Child). Not surprisingly, a party that had supported the popular initiative "Financing abortion is a private matter", which proposed to exclude the terminations from the benefits reimbursed by the health insurance (LAMal), which was rejected in a vote in February 2014. On the contrary, the UDC is a historical enemy of the progress of women's rights.

Other voices claiming to be "left-wing and feminist" also support the initiative in the name of equality, stating that "the full veil is nothing more than a mobile prison for women". Their paternalistic argument - "we have never considered the fact that some people accept or even adhere to the discrimination they face as a reason to stop fighting it" - denies the agency of women wearing the burqa and ignores the fact that this initiative will only reinforce the discrimination to which they are already subjected.

Self-determination vs. the patriarchal state

Such political orientations are at odds with any idea of women's self-determination by anathematizing women wearing the burqa, speaking on their behalf and automatically declaring them oppressed without giving them a voice or even listening to them. Moreover, the use of the repressive apparatus of the state is never a vehicle for emancipation. Muslim women, who are already sufficiently discriminated against and subject to stereotypes that have a considerable impact on the realization of their rights, do not need to have decisions made for them.

It should be noted that the organization Terre des Femmes (TdF), which is committed to gender equality and combats gender-based violence, has spoken out unequivocally against a ban on the burqa, as has the Swiss section of Amnesty International. TdF describes it as "hypocritical": demanding a burqa ban in the name of equality is nothing but "racist instrumentalization".

The UN Human Rights Committee also considered in 2018 that the French law on the burqa ban disproportionately infringed on religious freedom and at the same time constituted a "form of criss-crossing discrimination based on gender and religion".

Voting in favour of an initiative that will only reinforce one form of discrimination in the name of fighting discrimination against women is political nonsense. The veil and burqa, imposed or removed by force (by a state and/or an individual), are reactionary acts that run counter to any support for women's self-determination.

Translated from [solidarités](#).

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[1] SVP/UDC: Swiss People's Party (extreme right); CVP/PDC: Christian Democratic People's Party; BDP/PBD: Conservative Democratic Party; EVP/PEV: Evangelical People's Party.