

## People's Party accused of "racist" campaign



This poster stirred up the emotions (Ex-press)

**Switzerland's biggest political party, the rightwing Swiss People's Party, has come under renewed fire for its hard-hitting election campaign attacking foreigners.**

On Wednesday Swiss President Micheline Calmy-Rey denounced posters depicting three white sheep booting a black sheep out of the country as "irresponsible" and liable to incite racial hatred.

"I think it is important that there are people in this country who have the courage to stand up and denounce this type of campaign, which to be quite frank disgusts me. It disgusts me because it stirs up hatred. They are racist campaigns," Calmy-Rey, a member of the centre-left Social Democrats, told Swiss-French radio.

The "black sheep" posters underpin a People's Party initiative to expel foreign criminals, which was launched on August 1 – Swiss National Day – three months ahead of October's parliamentary elections.

The People's Party secured 26.2 per cent of the vote four years ago on the back of equally provocative campaigning, and latest polls show a similar level of support for the party this time around.

The posters, which have been plastered across the country and the Swiss press, have attracted the ire of the Federal Commission against Racism, the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities and even the United Nations.

### UN intervention

On Thursday Swiss Interior Minister Pascal Couchepin revealed that the UN special rapporteur on racism, Doudou Diène, had contacted the Swiss government seeking an explanation. Couchepin added that the government was preparing its response.

The letter, which was sent three weeks ago, was co-signed by the UN special rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, Jorge Bustamante. Earlier this year Diène published a report, castigating Switzerland for its "political climate influenced by xenophobic tendencies".

Roman Jäggi, spokesman for the Swiss People's Party, hit back at the latest criticism, describing the poster campaign as "completely fair".

"It is not racist," he said. "We have a big problem with violence and in particular youth violence, and foreign criminals are a big factor," he told swissinfo.

Jäggi said it was reprehensible that the Swiss president had attacked a poster campaign by another party, adding that Calmy-Rey was clearly electioneering on behalf of the Social Democrats.

The People's Party dismissed Diène's intervention as "worthless", describing the UN special rapporteur on racism as a troublemaker who never had a good word to say about Switzerland.

### Tough line

According to Pascal Sciarini, professor of political science at Geneva University, the People's Party's recent electoral success is down to its tough line on foreigners, the European Union and the UN, and it is now a prisoner of this strategy.

"They have to keep the fires burning, and that means they have to come up with new ideas and at the same time harden their stance," he said.

Sciarini cited the initiatives against minarets and foreign criminals as evidence of the People's Party's desire to push an ever-harder line and to keep control of the immigration debate.

"They are getting more intelligent and more subtle, and are the best when it comes to marketing their policies and attracting the media's attention," he said. "They are polarising people more and more: you are either for them or very much against."

Calmy-Rey's comments came on the same day that the People's Party was ordered by a judge to remove a campaign video from its website.

Footage showed staged scenes of youth violence and pictures of foreigners juxtaposed with picture-postcard scenes of Switzerland, along with the message: "Heaven and Hell".

The ruling came after seven of the youths featured complained they had been duped into taking part.

swissinfo, Adam Beaumont

### UN AND THE SWISS PEOPLE'S PARTY

In November 2002 the then UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Ruud Lubbers, condemned a proposal by the rightwing party to clamp down on asylum seekers.

In October the following year the Geneva-based UN refugee agency accused the People's Party of stoking up prejudice against foreigners ahead of the 2003 parliamentary elections. It said some of the party's campaign material was the worst it had seen in Europe.

### KEY FACTS

14,106 youths (11,189 boys and 2,917 girls) were convicted of crimes in 2005, according to the Federal Statistics Office.

The figure was up about 2,000 on 1999.

62.7% of the convicted youths were Swiss.

### LINKS

- Swiss People's Party (German and French) ([http://www.svp.ch/index.html?page\\_id=1&change\\_lid=2](http://www.svp.ch/index.html?page_id=1&change_lid=2) )
- Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities ([http://www.swissjews.org/facts/facts\\_e.html](http://www.swissjews.org/facts/facts_e.html) )
- Federal Commission Against Racism (<http://www.ekr-cfr.ch/ekr/index.html?lang=en&PHPSESSID=0f8384403e65e48a2e798019352af444>)
- Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (<http://www.ohchr.org/english/> )

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