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"People who don't like foreigners are actually afraid of them". Our picture: A Tamil peeps round the Swiss flag. (Photo: RDZ)

IMPRESSUM

Swiss Review, the magazine for the Swiss Abroad, is in its 20th year of issue and is published in German, French, Italian, English and Spanish in more than 20 regional editions. It has a total circulation of over 298,000. Regional news appear four times a year.

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As a subject "Foreigners in Switzerland" – and for that matter in all the rich west European countries – is multi-faceted. But we intend to treat several aspects of it in this issue of Swiss Review. These include the job market, asylum policy, migration, integration and racism.

The controversy on asylum policy has recently become milder, at least during the first half of this year. This is mainly because of the drop in requests for asylum. Nevertheless the change at the head of the Federal Office for Refugees has given food for thought. The tightening of refugee legislation in Germany has also hit the headlines; and in France the status of foreigners has been brought further into question since the recent change of government.

In addition, the resurgence of racism in recent times gives rise to much anxiety. The fire attacks against houses occupied by Turks in Germany are only the tip of the iceberg.

The increase in racism may be taken as a reaction to growing migratory pressure on the "promised lands", such as the United States and the countries of western Europe. For its part migratory pressure is caused mainly by the lethal mixture of population explosion, war and ethnic cleansing, flight from the countryside and economic hopelessness in general.

Immigration pressure has also resulted in sealing off national frontiers and protecting recession-plagued labour markets from distortion from abroad. The only real solution to the problem lies in eliminating the causes of migration. But the question of whether this urgent problem can be tackled effectively remains unanswered.

Integration is another key word. It is a subject which was recently touched upon in a decision by the

Swiss Federal Supreme Court. The problem at issue was whether a Turkish girl from a Muslim family should be obliged to take part in co-educational swimming lessons. The Supreme Court decided it had to strike a balance between freedom of religion and compulsory education. In so doing it gave the first factor precedence over the second and excused the girl from participation in the swimming lessons. But looking at the matter from the point of view of integration, would not the opposite verdict have made more sense, even against the wishes of the father and the tenets of religion? Or is full integration not really desired?

The dilemma between adaptation and tradition is particularly difficult for young foreigners born here. Depending on the culture and customs of their countries of origin, they are often pushed hither and thither between the demands of their family and of their Swiss environment.

Integration might well be helped by giving voting rights to foreigners. Such rights exist today to some small degree only in the cantons of Jura and Neuchâtel. There are even a few sour voices who say that it would be more important to give foreigners in Switzerland the right to vote than it was for the Swiss Abroad. But to play these two elements one against the other is in fact to ignore the basic differences between the two issues.

The problem of foreigners in Switzerland is very complex indeed. Even as the focal subject of the present issue of Swiss Review, it cannot be looked at in its entirety.



P. Andermatt

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