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Election issues (IV): asylum policy

Hawks and doves in the

Swiss citizens disagree on the question of asylum policy – a much-debated issue among the general public. For 25 years opinion has been divided.

We are in a political stalemate," declared SVP National Councillor Ernst Hasler of Aargau. For the political right, the solution to the asylum problem lies in tougher measures, simplified and accelerated procedures, a reduction in support services

Pierre-André Tschanz

for those seeking asylum, and increased border surveillance. By contrast, parties in the centre and left of the political spectrum favour an increase in development aid, better integration of refugees, an extension of grounds for asylum, and a more humanitarian approach to refugees.

Followers of a tough approach

The Swiss People's Party (SVP) is one of the right-wing factions that calls for tougher measures. They claim Switzerland is too attractive, its asylum policy too weak, and conditions for asylum seekers too comfortable. In the short term the SVP solution focuses on rendering assistance for repatriation, a campaign to stamp out the illegal smuggling of refugees, and increased

"Our liberal asylum law has foundered."

RUDOLF KELLER, SD

border patrols (with the involvement of the army). In the longer term the party calls for the relocation of asylum seekers to the nearest safe country, sanctions against airline companies who permit illegal passengers to land in Switzerland, and a reduction in welfare benefits for refugees, and is currently

preparing a popular initiative to this effect

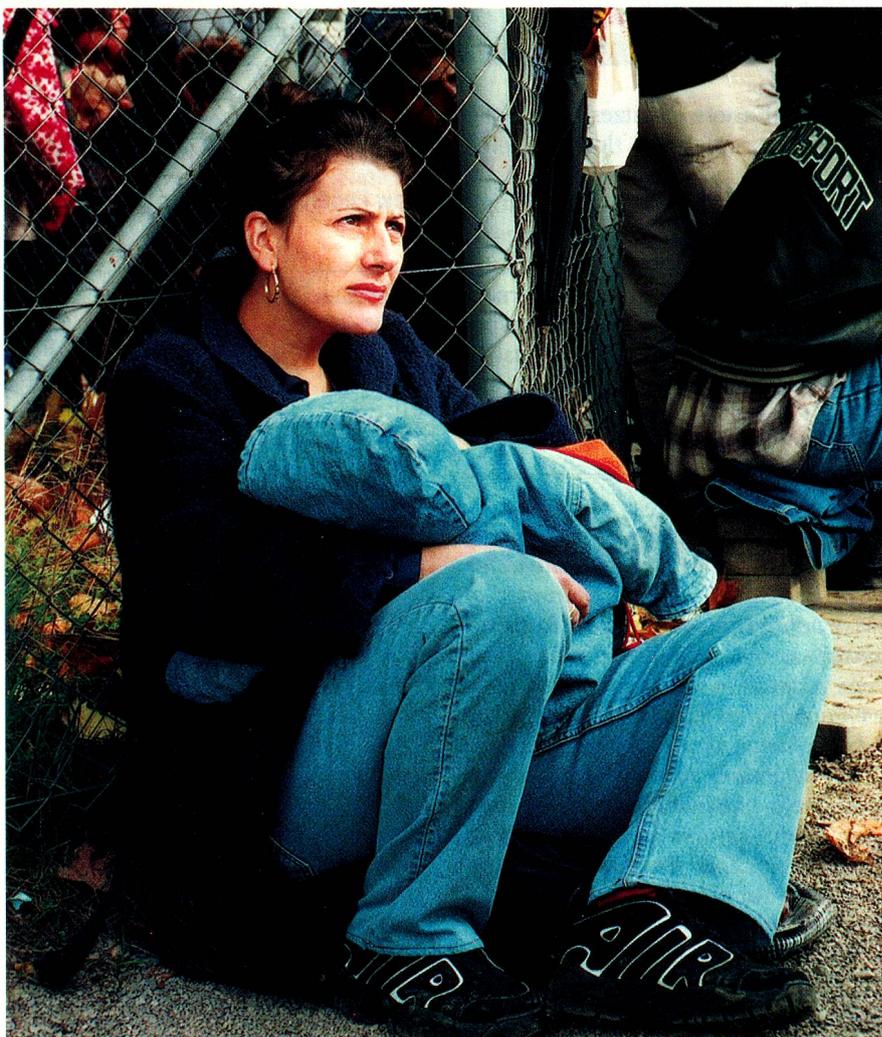
This policy is shared by the Swiss Democrats, who support every measure to toughen up the current legislation. According to National Councillor Rudolf Keller (BL), President of the Swiss Democrats, "Our liberal asylum law has foundered." His party favours the more immediate deportation of persons who have been refused asylum: anyone who has entered Switzerland illegally, says the party, should be deported on the spot.

The Freedom Party demands nothing less than a closure of borders for all asylum seekers until their applications have been accepted, and favours the

rejection of all persons who have not been accorded refugee status. Bernese National Councillor Jürg Scherrer recommends that persons who have entered Switzerland illegally be interned in military camps, adding, "It's time to settle the asylum question once and for all."

The Liberals' special position

"We must break away from old attitudes," says Liberal National Councillor Christoph Eymann of Basle. His party favours measures to prevent migration. Eymann calls for a genuine refugee foreign policy in the form of more intensive engagement in development work



An anxious Kosovo-Albanian waiting at the reception centre for refugees in Kreuzlingen. (Photo: Keystone)

Parties in brief (IV)

Swiss People's Party (SVP)

Seats in the National Council: 31;
in the Council of States: 7
President: Ueli Maurer (ZH)
Address: PO Box, Brückfeldstrasse 18,
CH-3000 Berne 26
Tel +41 31 302 58 58
Fax +41 31 301 75 85
Internet: www.svp.ch
E-mail: gs@svp.ch

The SVP message:

"A solid middle class is the staunch pillar that contributes to the wellbeing and affluence of our country. The SVP represents this middle class, on which burdens are currently being imposed from all directions. This makes the party attractive for Swiss Abroad, too."

Christian Democratic Party of Switzerland (CVP)

Seats in the National Council: 34;
in the Council of States: 15
President: Adalbert Durrer (OW)
Address: PO Box 5835, Klaraweg 6,
CH-3001 Berne
Tel +41 31 352 23 64
Fax +41 31 352 24 30
Internet: www.cvp.ch
E-mail: info@cvp.ch

The CVP message:

"As a government and people's party, the CVP promotes solutions that also take into account minority interests. For this reason the CVP also takes the concerns of the Fifth Switzerland seriously"

balance

and measures to create tariffs that favour countries in the South. In his view a deployment of the Swiss Army outside Swiss borders would be desirable (for example caring for Kosovo refugees in a camp on Malta).

"We must break away from old attitudes."

CHRISTOPH EYMANN, LPS

CVP and FDP between doves and hawks

The Liberal Democrats are split between preserving Switzerland's humanitarian tradition and the need to cut down on costs. Switzerland is too attractive, according to National Councillor Bernard Comby (VS). In his opinion welfare costs for asylum seekers need to be cut. In addition the FDP calls for more restrictive controls at the Swiss border and an acceleration and simplification of procedures. Other Liberal Democrat priorities are assistance in repatriation, a campaign to stamp out related criminal activity, a harmonisation of policies in the fields of migration, foreign affairs, international trade and development, as well as more efficient co-operation with the European Union.

"Generosity, but at the same time clarity and caution." This statement by National Councillor Rose-Marie Ducrot (FR) sums up the policy of the Christian Democrats. Like the Liberal Democrats, the CVP also wishes to uphold the humanitarian tradition of Switzerland and is in favour of unconditional acceptance of victims of persecution, violence, war or civil unrest. However, the party is against a convergence of asylum and migration policies that would permit acceptance quotas to be laid down for foreign nationals. The party is committed to the increased provision of aid in affected countries, measures to prevent abuse of the asylum system, the integration of recognised refugees, and an internationally coordinated refugee policy.

Call for leniency

On the left of the political spectrum deterrent measures such as the rejection of asylum seekers without official papers are forcibly rejected. "A continual turning of the screw in the field of asylum policy is not the way to solve the problem," stresses SP National Councillor Vreni Hubmann (ZH). Her main concerns are to uphold the humanitarian tradition and respect human dignity. She believes victims of political persecution or violence, as well as those threatened by war or civil unrest, must be entitled to asylum, and that Switzerland should also recognise threats specifically aimed at women (e.g. female circumcision) as valid grounds for asylum. The Social Democrats want to see an international harmonisation of the asylum policy, with a view to a more balanced distribution of refugees and related burdens. They also favour an intensification of international efforts to fight the causes of migration, and an ac-

"We cannot worsen the situation of refugees."

CÉCILE BÜHLMANN, GREENS

tive policy for the promotion of human rights.

The Green Party likewise rejects tighter legislation on the grounds that the problems cannot be solved by stricter laws. "We cannot worsen the situation of refugees," declares National Councillor Cécile Bühlmann of Lucerne. She calls for a new migration policy that would place the emphasis on integrating employable persons. The integration criteria would be incorporated in the permit approval procedure. Cécile Bühlmann names three prior-

"The inactivity of refugees instils a hatred for foreigners."

CHRISTIANE JAQUET-BERGER, PDA

ities: a maximum three-month ban on employment, accelerated processing, and the integration of refugees and their families as rapidly as possible.

Finally, National Councillor Christiane Jaquet-Berger of the left-wing Labour Party emphatically underlines the role played by development aid in migration phenomena and calls for increased efforts on the part of Switzerland in this area. "Two billion francs less than promised was spent on aid," she says. She also feels Switzerland should do more in terms of alleviating conflict and in good offices, and calls for a sounder humanitarian approach and more sympathetic handling in the assessment of applications for asylum. "The inactivity of refugees instils a hatred for foreigners," says Jaquet-Berger, explaining the rationale behind the call for work permits for asylum seekers. ■