

The Bergier Commission

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The Independent Commission of Experts Switzerland – Second World War was established by a Federal Decree of 13 December 1996. Its task was to shed light on dormant assets, that is to say the assets deposited with the Swiss financial centre between 1933 and 1945 that the persons entitled to them had not recovered after the war.¹ It was chaired by the historian Jean-François Bergier, who died in 2009.²

The Commission's research programme quickly expanded beyond the question of assets to include economic relations with the Axis powers and the turning back of refugees.³ With a budget of CHF 22 million, the Commission published twenty-five monographs, amounting to more than 11,000 pages, and a 500-page synthesis report translated into four languages.⁴ More than 120 researchers contributed to its work.⁵ The final version of the report was published on 22 March 2002.⁶

The reception of the final report was paradoxical. According to swissinfo, the interest of the government and parliament in the Commission's work fell sharply after the global settlement of 1998, and parliament never debated the report; in May 2002 a motion calling for such a debate was rejected by the Legal Affairs Committee of the National Council.⁷ The report of a conference held twenty years later notes that the publication of the final report provoked only a muted reaction, public interest having moved on to other matters.⁸

Jean-François Bergier himself considered that the Commission had produced a report that answered many questions but also raised new ones.⁹ The historians who took part in its work continue to stress that much remains to be explored. The same interview published by the University of Geneva notes, in another field, that the Mandela monument inaugurated in Geneva in 2015 makes no mention of Switzerland's support for the apartheid regime, which, according to the participants, illustrates the

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persistence of certain things left unsaid.¹⁰ Part I, devoted to relations between Geneva and Africa, will return to this question.

Caution. The Bergier Report is the most extensive historical inquiry ever conducted into Switzerland's role during the Second World War. Its political reception was limited, and some of its findings remain contested in conservative circles. For practitioners, it is an indispensable reference source on the history of wealth management and banking supervision.

1 Notes

1. "Usages et mésusages des recherches historiques", Le Courrier, 24 November 2022. ↩
2. "Vingt ans après le rapport Bergier, beaucoup reste à explorer", Université de Genève, 19 May 2022. ↩
3. "Le rapport Bergier, 2002-2022. Quel bilan ?", infoclio.ch, cited above. ↩
4. Le Courrier, 24 November 2022, cited above. ↩
5. Université de Genève, 19 May 2022, cited above. ↩
6. Le Courrier, 24 November 2022, cited above. ↩
7. swissinfo.ch, "Le rapport Bergier, un an après", cited above. ↩
8. infoclio.ch, cited above. ↩
9. swissinfo.ch, "Le rapport Bergier, un an après", cited above. ↩
10. Université de Genève, 19 May 2022, cited above. ↩

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