

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 33 (2006)
Heft: 6

Rubrik: Review of the year 2006

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Olympic glory

Switzerland won no fewer than 14 medals at the Winter Olympics in Turin, just one short of its all-time record set in Calgary in 1988. Switzerland's clutch of five golds, four silvers and five bronzes put it in eighth position overall in the medals table. Swiss Olympic, Switzerland's sports governing body, has therefore decided to change the formula by which it distributes money to winter sports over the next four years. The main beneficiaries of this will be the snowboarders, who fared best in Turin, winning three gold medals.

Second woman elected to Federal Council

Following the resignation of Joseph Deiss from the Federal Council, Doris Leuthard (CVP) was elected to replace him in June. She now heads the Federal Department of Economic Affairs. There is already much speculation about who will get the "big seven" cabinet posts after the general election in 2007. The "NZZ am Sonntag" newspaper predicts that National Councillor Martine Brunschwig Graf (LPS/GE) could take over from Pascal Couchepin.

King Roger

The world's Number One men's tennis player outdid himself yet again in 2006. After winning the 43rd tournament of his professional career in Madrid, Roger Federer led the ATP Champions Race with an incredible 1374 points, beating his own record of 1345 points from last year. In 2006, the man from Basel also reached the final of the French Open for the first time, won back the Australian



Open (after winning it for the first time in 2004), successfully defended his Wimbledon and US Open titles, and clinched his first Swiss indoor title in Basel.

Christoph Blocher slips up repeatedly

In his third year on the Federal Council, Christoph Blocher has once again created waves. His gaffes did not go unnoticed back at home. During an official visit to Ankara in October, Blocher criticised Swiss anti-racism legislation which criminalises genocide denial. And at a session of the National Council's Federal Commission, he made controversial comments on Swiss development aid in Africa, which became public when they were leaked to the press.

Air pollution at record high

In the first three months of the year, the concentration of dust particles in the air over Switzerland hit new record levels. In the country's cities in particular, concentrations sometimes reached up to four times the maximum permitted value. At the request of Transport Minister Moritz Leuenberger, 12 cantons subsequently introduced 80km/h speed limits on their motorways, thereby cutting air pollution by up to 10%. In September, the cantons agreed a joint concept to combat air pollution, and in October the Department of the Environment tabled a bill on three of the 14 measures proposed by Moritz Leuenberger.



Crumbling Alps

On 23 June, a 40x50-metre slab of unstable rock in Uri canton was blasted away after six huge boulders in the Gottard Massif had dislodged and crashed down onto the A2 motorway. Meanwhile in the Bernese Oberland, a 250 metre-long fissure opened up on the eastern flank of the Eiger. Almost 2 million cubic metres of rock now threaten to fall off. An approximately 300,000 cubic metre chunk of rock detached itself in mid-July.

Global warming

In July, temperatures in Switzerland reached their highest levels in 140 years. According to MeteoSchweiz, temperatures were 4.5-5.5 degrees Celsius above average. Heavy thunderstorms caused numerous rivers to overflow and created mudslides. In the Valais, floodwater from the Dranse ripped up rail lines, derailing a train on the St. Bernard Express. Fortunately, no-one was injured.

Swiss return from the Lebanon

More than 850 Swiss nationals were able to flee the war in Lebanon with the aid of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. Micheline Calmy-Rey went to great lengths to ensure the Geneva Convention was upheld. In September, the Federal Council agreed to increase its humanitarian aid to Lebanon by CHF 15 million. Switzerland therefore donated a total of CHF 20 million in financial assistance.

Tunnel accident

On 13 September, a serious accident occurred in the Viamala Tunnel on the A13 motorway in Grisons. Nine people were

killed in a fire that broke out after a collision between a coach and a car.

Next stop: Euro 2008

At the football World Cup Finals in Germany, Switzerland finished top of its group before being knocked out by Ukraine in the second round. In October, Köbi Kuhn announced his intention to step down as the coach of the Swiss national squad after the European Championships in 2008, which will be held in Switzerland and Austria.

Referenda in 2006

The results: The federal decision to amend the Constitutional articles governing education (coordinating inter-cantonal cooperation on education) was approved; the new Foreigners' Act and amended Asylum Act were approved; the popular initiative on "National Bank profits for the AHV" was rejected; the federal law on cooperation with the states of eastern Europe was approved; and the federal law on family allowances was approved.

Amazing comeback

Martina Hingis celebrated her big comeback to the WTA Tour in January, and is currently eighth in the world rankings. She is also now Switzerland's Number One tennis player again. In 2006, Hingis won tournaments in Rome and Calcutta, reached the final in Montreal and Tokyo, and made it through to the quarterfinals at both the Australian Open and French Open. ALAIN WEY