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Fragile international relationships

UELI MAURER TAKES OVER THE PRESIDENCY OF SWITZERLAND THIS YEAR. Parliament half-heartedly elected the Head of the Federal Department of Defence to the office in December. Even Maurer himself does not appear particularly enthralled by the honour and responsibilities of serving as President of Switzerland. He asked colleagues close to him whether there was any way of forgoing office. Ueli Maurer, who, together with his Swiss People's Party, advocates a policy of isolationism in foreign affairs, is now Switzerland's figurehead in the international arena. The question of whether that is beneficial to our nation has to be raised. This is especially valid in view of the fact that Switzerland's relations with the international community are fragile and we increasingly find ourselves in the pillory on the world stage due to the disgraceful conduct of our banks, our tax policy and for showing a lack of solidarity, to name but a few reasons. Maurer nevertheless seems to have a degree of insight into the different issues although he has asked foreign minister Didier Burkhalter to represent Switzerland in his place at various meetings abroad. You can read more about Ueli Maurer's profile and career in the article on page 14.



One issue of major concern to Switzerland's people and politicians is the healthcare system. Costs are continuing to rise, which is explained by a range of factors. Any proposal put forward to curb spending has to date been fought tooth and nail by one faction or another - doctors, insurance companies or the pharmaceutical industry - and with a high degree of success. In contrast to his predecessors Didier Burkhalter and Pascal Couchepin, Federal Councillor Alain Berset, who has been Head of the Federal Department of Home Affairs for over a year now, appears to be intent on finding solutions and does not shy away from conflict. Our focal article on page eight provides an insight into the problems facing Switzerland's healthcare system and the solutions proposed, as well as a fascinating interview on the ethical aspects of possible cutbacks in medical services.

Finally, I would like to say an official farewell to René Lenzin as a member of the editorial team. He has worked for "Swiss Review" for 20 years, initially as the managing editor and later as the Swiss political affairs editor. René Lenzin accepted a new position on the home affairs desk at the Zurich "Tages-Anzeiger" last year, which will require all his journalistic energy. We wish to thank him for everything he has done for "Swiss Review". He will most certainly be missed by the editorial team. Lenzin's successor is Jürg Müller, a well-known and prominent journalist who possesses an in-depth knowledge of Swiss federal politics. He was a journalist on the Bernese "Bund" newspaper until three years ago and now works as a freelance journalist and lecturer. We are delighted to welcome our new colleague onto the editorial team. He has made his debut in this issue with his profile of Swiss President Ueli Maurer.

BARBARA ENGEL

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Meret Oppenheim, international figurehead of Swiss art, photographed by Peter Friedli. Source reference: SIK-ISEA Zurich