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Battle over political direction

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The “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” has been the focus of media and political interest since mid-December, and not just in Switzerland as the NZZ is the only Swiss newspaper to attract attention internationally. What has happened? The editor-in-chief, Markus Spillmann, a high-profile journalist, was ousted by the Board of Directors, not officially but *de facto*. The editorial staff, which includes over 200 journalists, protested against the Board’s plans to appoint Markus Somm as Spillmann’s successor. Somm, also a well-known journalist, leans very much to the right politically. He is also a close friend and the biographer of Christoph Blocher, the Vice-President and driving force behind the Swiss People’s Party (SVP).

The decision on who will be the future editor-in-chief of the 234-year-old NZZ, which is closely allied with the FDP. The Liberals, was unclear at the time of writing this editorial. The “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung” wrote: “There is tremendous disarray”, with its “inept behaviour” the Board of Directors has “created a shambles”.

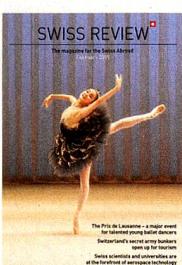
This showdown undoubtedly reflects the struggle over the future direction of Swiss politics. The liberal outlook and differentiated criticism of the NZZ and its editor-in-chief is a thorn in the side of those close to the SVP and they are attempting to bring the newspaper into line with their positions for the current election campaign.

Georg Kohler, a professor emeritus of political philosophy at the University of Zurich, has a profound understanding of Swiss politics. His analyses are so clear-sighted that he is held in high regard by all political parties. He will provide observations during the electoral campaign and reflections upon it this year in a column in every issue of “Swiss Review”. On page 12 onwards of the current issue, Kohler looks at the decision-making process, the “classe politique” and compromises.

The article in the December issue of “Swiss Review” on the row over languages and the debate about the early learning of French and language teaching in Swiss schools generated a tremendous response. What we found surprising was that in the readers’ letters and comments from the Swiss Abroad the vast majority regarded the early teaching and knowledge of the second major national language, in other words French or German, as more important than the teaching of English at primary school level. Here is a quotation that reflects the view of many people: “(Almost) everyone will learn English sooner or later because it is an omnipresent, prestigious and useful language.”

I would like to thank all our readers who also expressed their opinions – constructively without exception – on the new layout and the new website.

BARBARA ENGEL



Cover photo: Miko Fogarty, an 18-year-old Swiss Abroad from California, is one of the great hopes at the Prix de Lausanne.
Photo: donated