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Markus Seiler



How do you picture the head of a secret service? He presumably has cold, impenetrable eyes and a stern facial expression. Though, it is even more likely that you would not have the opportunity to see him in the first place. The faceless, powerful figure in the background provides great scope for paranoid fantasies and conspiracy theories – in Switzerland, too. The Director of the Federal Intelligence Service has therefore been appearing in public more often recently.

Before the referendum on the new Intelligence Service Act, Markus Seiler appeared first on “Arena” where he defended the bill, which gives the service extensive powers, in a composed but determined and, above all, successful way. The Swiss people placed their trust in him by adopting the new law. The 48-year-old from Thurgau then provided remarkably detailed and candid information in the media about the tasks and day-to-day activities of his team in combating terrorism and right-wing extremism.

Of course, this unusual amenability, composure and the sometimes ingenuous look of the very likeable director do not disguise the fact that the public will never know exactly what goes on behind the scenes at the FIS. That is the nature of the business. However, Markus Seiler, a political scientist and father of four, gave a face to the intelligence service last year and made a small contribution towards bringing the FIS a tiny bit closer to the public.

MARKO LEHTINEN

Swiss are the wealthiest

In no other country in the world are people as wealthy on average as in Switzerland. Private assets stand at USD 561,900 on average (the equivalent of around CHF 568,000). That is the highest figure, followed by Australia, the USA and Norway. Swiss private individuals own assets worth USD 3.5 billion in total. They make up only 0.1% of the global population but own 1.4% of global assets. And their position is set to get even better. Forecasts indicate that average wealth will increase to USD 606,000 by 2020. These figures come from the latest “Global Wealth Report” published by the Credit Suisse Research Institute.

Police want covert surveillance of travel

The Federal Office of Police is to covertly monitor the journeys of potential terrorists in future. The Council of States’ Security Policy Committee has unanimously backed a National Council motion to this effect. The aim is to follow the movements of suspects without their knowledge within the framework of the Schengen Information System. The committee believes this is an effective means of detecting and identifying criminal offences. The Federal Council has already begun work on this issue. The Federal Council imposed entry bans on 26 jihadists between January and the end of October 2016.

Basel wants cleaner heat

Oil and gas are not to be used for heating anymore in Basel-Stadt from 2050, as far as possible. The cantonal parliament of the city canton adopted a corresponding amendment to the energy law by a large majority. The amendment came about as a result of the “Basel renewable” initiative, submitted two years ago, in addition to federal government’s energy strategy and almost 20 motions put forward in the cantonal parliament. The initiative called for the cantonal constitution to stipulate that energy consumption from 2050 would “essentially be met by sustainable, renewable sources of energy”. That would also have included means of transport. The fact that petrol and diesel for vehicles are now excluded at legislative level is one of the most significant adjustments of the legal amendment. The principle of eliminating the use of fossil fuels for heat generation by 2050 through incentives and in a cost-neutral way as far as possible has nevertheless been retained.

Volunteers solve 5,751 puzzles

The library of the Federal Institute of Technology Zurich has around three million photographs, including from the former Swissair archive. However, the press photos in particular are poorly labelled. The library’s management therefore called on the help of crowdsourcing to solve the problem. Hundreds of volunteers helped to improve the information and to classify the photos by contributing their knowledge. Over 8,000 tips had been received by last November. The information on 5,751 images was significantly enhanced as a result.