

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 46 (2019)
Heft: 1

Rubrik: Top pick : Pierre Maudet

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Pierre Maudet



Having once dreamed of becoming a Federal Councillor, he now risks finding himself out of a job. It is said that the higher they come, the harder they fall – and this certainly suits the erstwhile strongman of the Geneva Cantonal Council, Pierre Maudet, who has been forced to cede most of his responsibilities in the wake of the Abu Dhabi affair. The scandal centres on a luxury trip in 2015 for the councillor, his family and his chief of staff paid for by the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. Maudet had claimed that a friend had picked up the tab. What followed was a steady stream of lies, confessions, excuses and new insights into a nebulous system of political financing. Less than a year before the federal elections, meanwhile, The Liberals (FDP) find themselves under pressure due to rivalries between the party's liberal and radical wings. Pierre Maudet is hanging on, even though he is facing legal action over claims he accepted benefits following an inquiry launched in 2017. How could this master communicator and unflappable army captain, who was re-elected in a first-round ballot in 2018, commit such blunders? The leading theory borrows from Greek tragedy in the form of the concept of hubris, that arrogant sense of superiority among human beings that invariably attracts cruel punishment from the gods.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

Geneva halts e-voting

The Canton of Geneva has announced that it will halt its e-voting project by February 2020 at the latest. This surprising announcement is a setback, as for 15 years the canton of Geneva has been considered a pioneer in the field of e-voting. The Geneva government says its decision has been taken for financial reasons rather than on safety grounds. Geneva's withdrawal has far-reaching consequences since other cantons also use the Geneva system. It is still unclear how these cantons will react to Geneva's pullout in the near future. However, it is clear that the cantons of Basel-Stadt, Berne, Fribourg, Lucerne and Geneva will continue to be allowed to carry out trials with electronic voting. The Federal Council has just renewed the initial licence for this.

(MUL)

Federal Council presents framework agreement

At the beginning of December, the Federal Council published the eagerly awaited draft of the Framework Agreement with the European Union (EU). The agreement is intended to regulate in which areas and to what extent Swiss law will have to be adapted to EU law, which is constantly evolving. However, the publication of the draft treaty only provides limited clarification. The Federal Council itself neither approves nor rejects the draft. It is now starting a consultation procedure and will then examine whether it is necessary to seek further discussions with the EU.

(MUL)

Basel's trade fair closes

The Muba Basel trade fair has come to an end after more than 100 years. It will take place for the last time from 8 to 17 February 2019. First held in 1916, it attracted more than a million visitors in its heyday. Its closure represents a general trend. The Zurich branch of Muba, Züspa, was held for the last time in 2018, as was the Comptoir Suisse in Lausanne. The two agricultural trade fairs Olma (St. Gallen) and BEA (Berne) are continuing.

(MUL)

When avalanches shape culture

UNESCO has added the centuries-old knowledge of how to deal with the risk of avalanches to its "Intangible Cultural Heritage List". Switzerland submitted its candidacy together with Austria. In both alpine countries, avalanche protection has led to a new collective approach to hazards and new strategies, says UNESCO. This includes the training of search dogs, snow analyses, avalanche documentation, protective structures and the training of mountain guides.

(MUL)