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Livia Leu



Livia Leu has the hardest job in Swiss diplomacy. The Federal Council has appointed her as the new chief negotiator for further talks with the EU on the Swiss-EU framework agreement. Leu has a monumental task ahead of her – a nut that was too hard to crack for her predecessors. However, this 59-year-old leading diplomat has overcome other notable challenges during her long career. In 2008, the then Foreign Minister Micheline Calmy-Rey appointed Leu the new Swiss ambassador to Iran – making her the first-ever female head of a foreign diplomatic mission in Tehran. Leu also represented US interests in Iran during her time in this role (Iran and the USA have had no formal diplomatic relations since 1980). For example, she helped to secure the release of three young American tourists who had been held at the notorious Evin prison for two years on suspicion of spying.

After almost five years in Iran, Leu returned with her family to Berne, where she subsequently headed the Bilateral Economic Relations Division within the Federal Administration. She then took on the prestigious role of Swiss ambassador to France in 2018, before being reassigned to the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs by Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis last autumn. Now the government is pinning its hopes on Leu to break the Swiss-EU logjam. Speaking to the media for the first time in her new post, she said that she was “looking forward to this big challenge”. On how much bargaining scope there was in Brussels, Leu – ever the diplomat – gave little away to journalists. But she did say that “creative solutions” were needed. In other words? “More than just a plan A or a plan B.”

THEODORA PETER

No turns to yes

SVP doyen and former Federal Councillor Christoph Blocher will receive a 1.1-million-franc pension. After being ousted from the Federal Council in 2007, the billionaire publicly declared that he would not draw his ministerial pension entitlement. But he made a U-turn in July 2020 by demanding a backdated pension worth 2.7 million. The government has now decided to pay him 1.1 million francs – and do everything in its power to prevent similar episodes in future. (MUL)

Serious allegations against Darius Rochebin

Star journalist Darius Rochebin featured in the last issue of “Swiss Review”. However, serious allegations were made against him shortly after we went to press. According to the newspaper “Le Temps”, employees at French-language Swiss broadcaster RTS have made sexual harassment complaints against a number of executives. One of those accused is Darius Rochebin. Gilles Marchand, director general of the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation and previously head of RTS until 2017, admitted mistakes and called for an urgent investigation. We await further details. (MUL)

The CVP remove their Christian label

The Christian Democratic People’s Party (CVP) are ditching the “C”, having decided in November that their new name will be “The Centre” from 2021 onwards. They say that removing the adjective “Christian” from their name will make it easier to appeal to urban voters in the middle of the political spectrum. The CVP, whose conservative and Catholic origins date back to the 19th century, have been represented in the Federal Council since 1891. (MUL)

The BDP merge with the CVP

In future, Swiss politics will have one party less. The Conservative Democratic Party (BDP), founded in 2008, will also be part of “The Centre”. That is to say, it is merging with the CVP. Both parties have stood shoulder to shoulder at federal level in recent years. The CVP are strongest in Catholic areas of the country, while the BDP performs best in the cantons of Berne and Grisons. (MUL)

“Marriage for all” becomes a reality

Switzerland has paved the way for same-sex marriage. In December, the Council of States ratified the National Council’s decision to allow same-sex couples to tie the knot. Lesbian couples wanting to start a family will also be able to receive sperm donations. (MUL)