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Peter Maurer



Peter Maurer, president of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) since 2012, is stepping down amidst a global storm. Announced last November, his resignation will now take place in September. Swiss diplomat Mirjana Spoljaric is poised to succeed him. And how will the former Secretary of State at the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs be remembered? Opinions are mixed. Positive feedback is notably directed at the president's actions with regard to the weapons of the future and "killer robots". His decision to open the Geneva institution to non-Swiss citizens also garnered him praise.

Although the Berne native's diplomatic skills have been lauded time and again – he has shaken hands with Xi Jinping, Emmanuel Macron, Barack Obama and Vladimir Putin – the outcome of these meetings is a matter of some contention. Back at headquarters, staff members are happy to shift to a less diplomatic approach: one more focused on helping the victims of conflicts. They would have liked to hear their president denounce violations of humanitarian law more strongly. "He embodies the ICRC's tact and discretion, but it's the effectiveness of an action that counts," says an insider. The biggest blunder? Maurer's decision to join the Board of Trustees of the Davos World Economic Forum. This move was roundly denounced by elected officials and former delegates, who stated that "humanitarianism cannot collude with multinationals". During Maurer's reign, the organisation's budget has almost doubled to two billion Swiss francs. Should this be considered an achievement? Some believe that this increase is a double-edged sword, as it will prove difficult to sustain. The task of presiding over the organisation charged with upholding humanitarian law in an increasingly unstable world is most definitely a challenging mission.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

Switzerland elected to the UN Security Council

Switzerland was elected to the UN Security Council for the first time on 9 June 2022. The election by the UN General Assembly was won with 187 out of the 190 valid votes – an outstanding result. Switzerland now has the right to participate in conflict resolution during 2023 and 2024. While the Federal Council hailed the election as a success and a vote of confidence in Switzerland, opponents at home criticised Switzerland for putting its traditional role as an independent mediator between hostile parties at risk by taking a seat on the Security Council.

(MUL)

Swiss National Bank raises key interest rate

In mid-June 2022, the Swiss National Bank (SNB) raised its key interest rate for the first time in 15 years, a reactionary move designed to combat current inflation. According to the SNB, the tighter monetary policy is intended to prevent inflation from spreading even further to goods and services. The increase to the key interest rate was surprisingly significant: 0.5 percentage points, i.e. from -0.75% to -0.25%. Although the rate remains slightly negative, the hike bodes well for savers. Banks are no longer as likely to pass on the burden of negative interest rates to their customers – or if so, only to a limited extent. Mortgage interest rates, on the other hand, could rise further, causing some apprehension among property owners regarding the consequences of the higher interest rate.

(MUL)

Switzerland is now a "cooperative" neutral country

At the World Economic Forum in Davos at the end of May, President of the Swiss Confederation and Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis surprised everyone with a new term: Switzerland is now pursuing the concept of "cooperative neutrality". What his attempt to redefine neutrality actually means in specific terms is not yet entirely clear. The new definition is essentially a reaction to the war of aggression against Ukraine. According to Cassis, even a neutral state must take a stance. "That is why Switzerland is joining the countries that will not stand idly by as mere spectators to this attack on the foundations of democracy." Switzerland supports the EU's sanctions against Russia in their entirety.

(MUL)

Covid-19 review – censure for the Federal Council

The parliamentary Control Committee has criticised the Federal Council for its political handling of the Covid-19 pandemic. In the committee's view, the Federal Council was not quick enough to recognise that the pandemic was a crisis of global proportions that would affect all sectors. The government is also accused of underestimating the pandemic's duration. Furthermore, during the course of the pandemic, responsibility for almost all tasks was assumed by the Department of Health, a decision deemed erroneous by the committee.

(MUL)