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Julia Steinberger

Last autumn, activists blocked ten busy streets in Swiss cities. The movement refers to itself as Renovate Switzerland. It is campaigning for more buildings to be renovated so that they save energy. Activists claim this could be implemented quickly and contribute to protecting the climate. The protest was designed to draw attention to that. In Berne, Julia Steinberger, an internationally renowned climate scientist and Professor of Ecological Economy at the University of Lausanne, also put on a high-vis jacket and sat on the motorway. The 48-year-old said, "Our planet is being rendered uninhabitable before our very eyes. We have to do everything to save our future." When the police arrived, Steinberger glued her hand to the asphalt.

She was then roughly dragged away. The rather dangerous blockade lasted half an hour, the commotion afterwards lasted a lot longer. That was the plan, but the scientist's radical behaviour was harshly criticised by some in political circles. Some said it was an unseemly way for a public official to behave. Even the media asked: aren't research and activism supposed to be separate? Steinberger's answer was that science has spent long enough delivering data. The Geneva-born scientist worked on the report published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 2022. She realised that all the research results had failed to produce enough action. An alternative approach was now needed to make people realise the urgency of the situation. She feels that "peaceful civil protest" is legitimate. The University of Lausanne did not prevent its lecturer from protesting. Professor Julia Steinberger thus became the serious face of the climate movement in Switzerland.   SUSANNE WENGER

Canton Basel-Stadt becomes a climate pioneer

Canton Basel-Stadt is aiming to become climate-neutral by 2037, i.e. to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions. The population of the city canton voted for the measure in November 2022. This makes Basel-Stadt a climate pioneer. This is the most ambitious environmental political goal ever set in Switzerland. Climate neutrality for the whole country is set to be achieved by 2050. The city of Zurich is aiming to become climate-neutral by 2040, and Berne by 2045.   (MUL)

Federal Council extends the 'S' protective status

Because the war in Ukraine is not expected to end in the near future, the Federal Council is extending the 'S' protective status for asylum seekers from Ukraine. Initially, the decision was taken to provide refugees with protection and support for one year, i.e. until March 2023. Now, however, these protective measures have been prolonged by a year.   (MUL)

Federal railways losing millions

Swiss Federal Railways (SBB) generates most of the electricity it needs in its own hydroelectric power plants. Owing to this year's severe drought, however, the SBB needed to purchase large amounts of electricity and is forecasting a loss of 180 million Swiss francs for 2022. The sharp rise in energy prices triggered by the war in Ukraine is thus hitting the railway company full force.   (MUL)

Valais votes Yes to assisted dying in retirement homes

Accompanied dying, also known as assisted suicide, is legal in Switzerland. In the Catholic and conservative-leaning Canton Valais, however, many retirement and care homes do not support it. A cantonal referendum is now set to correct this. A good 75 percent of voters approved the proposal to allow assisted dying in all retirement and care homes in Valais in future.   (MUL)

Green Liberals campaign for the EEA

The unresolved, non-contractual and therefore increasingly cloudy relationship between Switzerland and the European Union (EU) is making alternative solutions sound more attractive. The Green Liberal Party (GLP) pushed in December for Switzerland to enter the European Economic Area (EEA). As a reminder, Switzerland voted very narrowly in 1992 against joining the EEA. The GLP is arguing that the non-EU countries of Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein have done very well out of their EEA membership. Switzerland, on the other hand, is making no headway in renegotiating a framework agreement with the EU and is getting bogged down in the details. Entering the EEA would provide a rapid solution with long-term stability for Switzerland, the GLP argues: EEA entry has already been brokered and covers the entire internal market, including the bilateral aspects. Whether Switzerland would actually be accepted into the EEA is another matter entirely.   (MUL)