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Emil Steinberger



Emil Steinberger, known simply as “Emil”, celebrated his 90th birthday in January. The Lucerne native remains Switzerland’s most successful and best-loved comedian. Emil has been making most of the country laugh since the 1970s, his popular appeal spanning the demographic and political spectrum – a trick that would seem impossible these days. His stage and television performances, as well as a “sabbatical” year in the Knie circus ring, are ingrained in our collective memory. Many of us can still recite some of Emil’s famous sketches by heart – police headquarters, telegraph office, mountain guide, country sayings, or the father with the “Swedish model” pram. The comedian, who began working life as a postal worker, has always relied on minimal props, his facial expressions, gestures and words sufficient to leave his audience rolling in the aisles. Explaining Steinberger’s past success, which extends to Germany, the “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” wrote: “Emil embodies something quintessentially Swiss. Not just a certain awkwardness, but also that small man on the street struggling to cope with the finer details of life. Although his humour is never mocking.” Steinberger’s role in “Die Schweizermacher”, the hit film parodying Switzerland’s tough naturalisation rules, is unforgettable too. At the age of 60, Emil left Switzerland to live in New York. He returned to Switzerland – and to the stage – in 1999. His most recent tour ended last December. Steinberger now resides in Basel. He opened an account on Twitter a couple of years ago and continues to be his happy-go-lucky, kind-spirited self. “Total strangers have told me how I have been an influence in their life,” he recently said in an interview. “Others say they mimic me when they are at home.” Emil never wanted this attention. “All I wanted was to perform and make people laugh.”

SUSANNE WENGER

UBS acquires Credit Suisse; the federal government and the SNB plough billions into the deal

Big bank Credit Suisse (CS) is no more after being taken over by its rival UBS – the outcome of a highly volatile week in March for the Swiss banking sector. The merger almost feels like a shotgun wedding. According to the UBS board, it was necessary to stave off disaster for the Swiss banking sector and the Swiss economy. Faith in CS had collapsed over a dramatic few days at the beginning of March, as customers and investors started withdrawing billions of Swiss francs from the bank. In addition to home-made problems, the plight of certain US banks further drained confidence. On 16 March, the Swiss National Bank (SNB) granted CS an emergency loan of 50 billion Swiss francs. The intervention was of little use, with the Federal Council and the Swiss Financial Market Supervisory Authority (FINMA) eventually forcing CS and UBS executives to the negotiating table on 19 March. By that Sunday evening, UBS had acquired CS for the sum of three billion francs. Finance Minister Karin Keller-Sutter has sold the takeover as a private-sector deal for the greater good. Nevertheless, it is another government bailout in all but name, albeit with the indirect involvement of another bank. The government and the SNB have pledged as much as 250 billion francs to backstop the sale, while the government has invoked emergency legislation to provide a further 9 billion in loss guarantees. CS’s demise as an independent entity is a historic moment. Founded as Schweizerische Kreditanstalt (SKB) in 1856 by railway pioneer Alfred Escher, the bank played a key role in building up Switzerland’s modern infrastructure.

(MUL)

A call for greater urgency on climate change

The world must act faster on climate change, according to the latest scientific report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Presenting its findings in Interlaken (canton of Berne), the IPCC said that the risks posed by global warming are even greater than they were when the previous IPCC report was published nine years ago. Relatively small temperature rises can now lead to more extreme events like droughts and flooding. Limiting global warming to 1.5°C or well below 2°C is the goal, but more effort is needed from countries around the world – including Switzerland. More on pages 10 and 11.

(TP)

Marco Odermatt sets new points record

In winning this year’s Men’s Overall World Cup, Swiss skier Marco Odermatt set a new record by becoming the first man to collect over 2,000 World Cup points in one season. Odermatt, 25, skied consistently well to break the previous points mark that had stood for over 20 years. He claimed 22 podium finishes in 26 races.

(MUL)