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Ylfete Fanaj, a Lucerne trailblazer

Müller, former mayor of Baden in the canton of Aargau and National Council member for the Green party. Müller became embroiled in controversy in 2014 when it emerged that he had sent naked selfies. He did not stand for re-election to the National Council and three years later was voted out as mayor of Baden. His was a case of moral – but not criminal – wrongdoing. In another case, Roberto Zanetti, member of the Solothurn government, was involved in a 2004 scandal over electoral campaign donations, which he repaid. He was not re-elected in 2005, took some time away from politics and was voted onto the Council of States in 2010. Once again, there was no condemnation.

For his part, Pierre Maudet did step down from the Geneva government, but only as a step towards rehabilitating himself. Between the two rounds of voting in the Geneva elections, Green party State Councillor Antonio Hodggers expressed indignation, asking: “When the people decide to vote into office someone who has been convicted of corruption, who has lied to the authorities... what value does that place on ethics in politics?” But in a democracy, it is the people who decide. “Voters wanted to focus on the good and forget about the bad,” concludes Sciarini.

Above all, people vote for human beings

Golder points out that “the media are very quick to make a moral judgment, whereas voters are more likely to look at someone as a human being, with a hope for redemption”. During his most recent campaign, Maudet adopted language and attitudes that underscore people’s fascination with him. “I met him once,” says Stojanovic, who found him to be empathetic and humble. He also points out that Maudet has genuine fans: “a rarity in Swiss politics”. It should be remembered, however, that Maudet showed a much harsher side in his dealings with civil servants. Another fly in the ointment is that, in the words of the appeal court, Maudet “has never accepted, not even in part, the criminal nature of his actions, pleading legal uncertainty in order to escape sanction”.

Going forward, Pierre Maudet “has no choice but to work effectively with his colleagues on the Council of State. It could be that five years from now he will have regained all his legitimacy,” argues Golder.



Photo: Keystone

Ylfete Fanaj’s election to the Lucerne cantonal government in mid-May was remarkable in more ways than one. Fanaj, 41, from the city of Lucerne is the Swiss Social Democratic Party’s first representative for years in what was previously a purely centre-right and right-wing – and exclusively male-run – executive. Ylfete Fanaj has also become Switzerland’s first-ever cantonal cabinet member of Kosovan origin. Kosovans, particularly Albanian speakers, make up one of the country’s biggest immigrant groups. Born in Prizren, Fanaj arrived in Switzerland aged nine at the beginning of the 1990s. Her father was a seasonal worker. Her family settled in Sursee. This small town in the canton of Lucerne was their home for a long time. Sursee shaped her as a person, says Fanaj, who became a Swiss citizen there at the age of 20. Fanaj was good at school but only obtained a commercial apprenticeship after receiving 200 rejections – an experience that she shared with other teenagers from the Balkans. But young Ylfete was willing to work hard. She completed a vocational university entrance diploma and studied social work before becoming the cantonal integration officer of Nidwalden. Fanaj’s political career in Lucerne took the classic Swiss route from bottom to top – from city council to cantonal parliament, from faction leader to speaker. She is now a member of government in the predominantly conservative canton of Lucerne. Her story has attracted considerable attention in both Switzerland and Kosovo. “Change is possible,” was her response. Fanaj, who has a young son, has blazed a trail but refuses to make a fuss. Lucerne’s cantonal government “now reflects our diverse society”, she says instead.

SUSANNE WENGER