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Carole Durussel



How many Swiss can say they have had the privilege of setting foot in Antarctica, the continent of land and ice? At least one: Carole Durussel, from the canton of Vaud. Last November, she reached the South Pole by sea together with 67 other woman scientists. “Antarctica’s different shades of white and blue will remain etched in my memory forever,” she declared on returning to Argentina on 2 December. This three-week expedition was organised under the aegis of the Homeward Bound foundation, which aims to increase the visibility of women in natural sciences. This NGO, founded by four women, believes that gender equality is good for the environment. Why the South Pole? Because its virgin territory lies at the heart of the concerns about the climate and pollution. The voyage to the end of the earth included a number of meetings, notably about leadership.

Carole Durussel fell in love with the sea when whale watching as a little girl. She studied marine environment sciences and holds a doctorate in international environmental law. Based in London, she is Deputy Secretary of the OSPAR Commission for the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic, an area impacted by overfishing and industrial waste. She contributed her expertise to the drafting of a treaty designed to protect marine biological diversity in areas of the high seas. Her voyage to Antarctica brought together women in highly visible positions. “You need role models if you are to get to those high-level positions,” argues Durussel. The contacts made during this expedition will be “an invaluable asset” for her future work, she says. STÉPHANE HERZOG

Switzerland prepares Ukraine peace summit

Switzerland plans to host a Ukraine peace summit this year, announced President of the Swiss Confederation Viola Amherd and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy following a joint meeting in January. Amherd said all countries that respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine are eligible to attend the conference. Volodymyr Zelenskyy would be particularly happy to see countries from the Global South at the event: “It’s important for us to show that the whole world opposes the Russian aggression and that the whole world supports a just peace.” Moscow immediately questioned the rationale behind a Ukraine peace summit in Switzerland, saying that Switzerland is not the neutral intermediary it claims to be. Nonetheless, there was an initial meeting in New York shortly afterwards between Swiss Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis and his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov. According to Cassis, they discussed “war and peace”. Cassis described the exchange as a first major step towards dialogue. (MUL)

Old Swiss trams bound for Ukraine

Berne and Zurich are renewing their tram fleets. Both cities will send their old but still fully roadworthy trams to Ukraine. The trams will be used in Lviv and Vynnytsia. The State Secretariat for Economic Affairs will organise transport to the war-torn country and training for the staff of the Ukrainian transport companies. Switzerland has a tradition of exporting its old but well-maintained Swiss trams to partner countries. For example, trams from Berne have been running in Iași (Romania) and green Basel trams in Belgrade (Serbia) since 2003. (MUL)

No more visa requirement for Kosovo

As of 1 January 2024, Kosovars no longer need a visa to enter the Schengen zone, which includes Switzerland. Kosovars can now stay in the Schengen area for up to 90 days without a visa. This waiving of the visa requirement is especially helpful for those visiting family. And that means something in Switzerland, where so many people have Kosovan roots. (MUL)

ETH Zurich strengthens its focus on AI

ETH Zurich has received possibly the biggest donation ever made to a Swiss university: German entrepreneur Dieter Schwarz, former boss of the retail chain Lidl, is financing 20 professorships over the next 30 years at the ETH, with a particular focus on artificial intelligence (AI). This also entails expanding the ETH to Germany, where the university is establishing a teaching and research hub in Heilbronn. Heilbronn is Dieter Schwarz’s hometown. The exact amount of the donation has not been disclosed but is thought to be in the region of several hundred million Swiss francs. (MUL)