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Susanne Wille



Susanne Wille will take on what is probably the most difficult job in Swiss broadcasting when she becomes director general of the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SRG SSR) on 1 November – with responsibility for 7,000 staff around Switzerland. The public broadcaster comprises four regional companies: SRF for German-speaking, RTS for French-speaking, RSI for Italian-speaking and RTR for Romansh-speaking Switzerland. SRG SSR also includes the swissinfo website, which provides news and background reports from Switzerland in ten different languages for an international audience.

Funded by a licence fee, SRG SSR faces an uncertain future. The “CHF 200 is enough!” initiative is due to be put to voters in 2026, its right-wing supporters aiming to reduce the annual radio and television licence fee for private households from 335 to just 200 francs – and exempt companies from the levy entirely. Approval of the initiative could spell very frugal times ahead for SRG SSR, which hopes that Susanne Wille is the person to avert the worst and convince the electorate to vote no. Wille, who used to front television programmes and currently heads the SRG SSR cultural department, is a popular journalist best known for her work in German-speaking Switzerland. She said she wants a public broadcaster “that listens and belongs to everyone”. The 50-year-old has instant appeal and is considered favourably by those who want SRG SSR to remain a strong public broadcaster despite a drop in audience share. Yet the new director general has no option but to cut costs, given that the Federal Council wants to meet the SVP initiative halfway by reducing the SRG SSR licence fee to 300 francs. Wille will have some unpopular decisions to make.

THEODORA PETER

Political outcry over OASI miscalculation

The federal government admitted in August that it had miscalculated its financial projections for Switzerland's old-age and survivors' (OASI) state pension scheme, saying that an incorrect calculation formula at the Federal Social Insurance Office had caused it to get its sums wrong by 14 billion francs. It turns out that OASI is in better financial health than previously thought. The erroneous forecast also has political ramifications, especially because it was a key argument in the popular vote of 25 September 2022 on raising the retirement age for women. These overly pessimistic figures were even included in the material sent to voters ahead of the plebiscite, which eventually saw a narrow majority of 50.5 per cent approving an increase in the retirement age. The Swiss Green Party, in particular, is now calling for a rerun of the vote. Its president Lisa Mazzone has already said it will take the matter to Switzerland's highest court, the Federal Supreme Court. The Swiss Social Democratic Party, meanwhile, immediately demanded that the voter-endorsed 13th OASI pension payment now be introduced ahead of schedule, from 2025 onwards, arguing that there is indeed money in reserve. Centre-right and right-wing politicians have also reacted strongly, their main message being that the botched calculations have eroded public confidence – precisely at a time when the federal government is actively warning of drastic cost-cutting measures ahead (see also page 9).

(MUL)

Paris Olympics – Switzerland wins eight medals and narrowly misses out on nine more

Chiara Leone (26) was the Swiss hero, taking home gold in the women's 50-metre rifle three-position event. Julie Derron (triathlon) and Steve Guerdat (individual horse jumping) collected silver, while Swiss competitors also won five bronze medals: Zoé Claessens (women's BMX racing); Audrey Gogniat (women's 10m air rifle); Roman Mityukov (swimming, men's 200m backstroke); Roman Röösli and Andrin Gulich (rowing, men's pair); Tanja Hüberli and Nina Brunner (women's beach volleyball). Swiss Olympic achieved its medal target, but satisfaction at this result is tempered slightly by the fact that Swiss athletes finished fourth in nine disciplines, narrowly missing out on the podium. Switzerland also finished further down the medal table than usual, in 48th position. (MUL)

See “Swiss figures” on page 19 for details of a Swiss exploit of a different kind at the Olympics.