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Sportsman of the Year

Roger Federer was crowned Swiss Sportsman of the Year for the fourth time after already picking up the award in 2003, 2004 and 2006. Berne's Simone Niggli-Luder – who has won 14 world titles in orienteering – was named Sportswoman of the Year. The best team award went to Team Alinghi for its second consecutive victory in the America's Cup.

Flat-rate tax

Obwald will become the first Swiss canton to introduce a flat rate of taxation. 90.7% of the electorate approved an amendment to the fiscal law. In June, the Federal Court ruled that degressive taxes favouring wealthy taxpayers – recently approved by the people – were unconstitutional. The authorities wasted no time in responding.

Record losses for UBS

Initial estimates indicate that UBS lost more than CHF 16 billion in a half-year – unprecedented for a Swiss bank – following the American mortgage credit crisis. Switzerland's biggest bank also posted a loss for the whole of the 2007 financial year. Federal Councillor Hans-Rudolf Merz is expecting “a fall in tax revenues of several hundred million francs.”

Switzerland ranked highly

Switzerland is one of the top countries in the world in terms of logistical performance. The World Bank evaluated the ability of 150 countries to connect to global markets to dispatch goods. Switzerland was ranked in seventh place.

Planet football

The final countdown has started. The Swiss team now knows who it will face in the



EURO 2008 DRAW: The coach of Switzerland's national soccer team Jakob "Köbi" Kuhn, Portugal's coach Felipe Scolari, Turkey's coach Fatih Terim, and Czech coach Karel Brueckner, from right, hold the trophy during the Euro 2008 final draw in Lucerne, Switzerland, on Sunday 2 December, 2007.

first stage of the 2008 European Championships – the Czech Republic (7 June in Geneva), Turkey (11 June in Basel) and Portugal (15 June in Geneva). Let's hope everyone supporting the team gives them a boost after several defeats in 2007. Switzerland has been drawn in an “ideal” qualifying group for the 2010 World Cup in South Africa. The Swiss squad will face Greece, Israel, Moldavia, Latvia and Luxembourg.

Around the world in a solar-powered car

Louis Palmer from Lucerne has set out on a 50,000 km journey taking him through 50 countries in 16 months in a car powered only by solar energy. Such a feat has never been achieved before. The “Solar-taxi” project – a joint venture between Switzerland and Germany – was designed by four Swiss universities. After setting off from Lucerne on 3 July, Palmer reached New Delhi in November, where he was greeted by Micheline Calmy-Rey. He arrived at the climate conference in Bali in early December. www.louispalmer.ch

Tax on CO₂

The tax on CO₂ entered into force on 1 January 2008. It aims to encourage companies and the public to use fossil fuels (heating oil, gas) more effi-

ciently. Switzerland is committed to reducing its CO₂ emissions by 4 million tonnes by 2010 (by 10% compared to 1990) under the Kyoto Protocol. The tax will initially rise to CHF 12 per tonne and could then be doubled or even tripled if targets are not met.

Martina throws in the towel

Martina Hingis announced her retirement from tennis at the beginning of November after testing positive for cocaine at Wimbledon. Hingis, from St Gallen, returned to tennis in December 2005 after calling an end to her career in 2003. She finished 2006 ranked seventh in the world and was still ranked nineteenth before announcing her retirement.

Proud to be Swiss

According to the Credit Suisse annual survey on the concerns of the nation, 43% of Swiss people are “very proud” of their nationality (21% in 2006) and 43% are “quite proud.” Security, neutrality, the landscape, prosperity, precision, freedom, the Alps, the banks and cleanliness are the main attributes that Swiss people associate with their country.

Unemployment amongst young people

Unemployment amongst the 15 to 24 age group fell by 22%

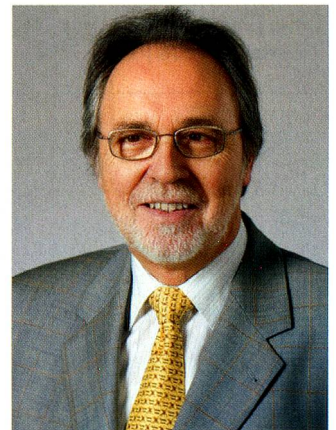
to 17,534 in 2007. At 3.2%, the unemployment rate amongst young people is still higher than the average rate of unemployment (2.8%).

A second presidency

Pascal Couchepin – a Federal Councillor since 1998 – was elected President of Switzerland for 2008 by a comfortable margin, taking over from Micheline Calmy-Rey. This is the second time the Minister of Home Affairs has been leader of Switzerland after his first term in 2003.

Human Rights Prize

Dick Marty from canton Ticino received the 2007 Human Rights Prize in Berne



from the International Society for Human Rights (ISHR), for his work on the illegal activities of the CIA in Europe. Marty, a member of the Swiss Council of States from Ticino, denounced the existence of secret CIA prisons in Poland and Romania in two reports to the Council of Europe.

Postal champions

The Universal Postal Union announced that the Swiss are the postal service champions, with an average of 713 items sent by each person every year. Switzerland came ahead of the USA (667) and Norway (573).

ALAIN WEY