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Withdrawal in stages



The situation is delicate. In the wake of Fukushima five years ago, Federal Councillor Doris Leuthard announced Switzerland's withdrawal from nuclear energy, and the whole world reported on this courageous step. Is Switzerland a pioneer in the field of alternative energy? The strategy for 2050, which Parliament will decide upon in the summer, certainly aims to achieve this objective.

However, the situation has changed in the meantime. The Fukushima effect has long since fizzled out, including in Switzerland. While the halt on constructing new nuclear power stations in Switzerland is effectively finalised, existing ones are not being decommissioned provided they are "safe". Nor is there now to be a time restriction on Switzerland's five nuclear power plants.

Much would point to a partial climb-down from nuclear abandonment if it were not for the latest development. While Parliament has rejected a time restriction, the operators themselves have started extricating themselves from nuclear power. They officially confirmed for the first time what had long been suspected behind the scenes – Swiss nuclear power is not economically viable. Mühleberg will be the first Swiss nuclear power station to be decommissioned in 2019 – and indeed voluntarily for financial reasons.

This issue's focus article examines the current state of affairs. What will happen to Beznau I, the world's oldest nuclear power station? Who should be financially liable for unprofitable nuclear power stations? How long does the demolition of a nuclear power plant actually take?

The path to a Switzerland free of nuclear power will undoubtedly be a long and arduous one despite the courageous start made five years ago.

MARKO LEHTINEN, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Cover photo: Dada author Hugo Ball in Cubist costume
in 1916 at Cabaret Voltaire (photo: Keystone)