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Magdalena Martullo-Blocher



She is head of one of Switzerland's biggest companies and is one of the nation's most successful and wealthiest entrepreneurs – and she has also climbed quite a few rungs up the political career ladder. Magdalena Martullo-Blocher, CEO of Ems-Chemie-Holding, is a 49-year-old mother of three and has been a Swiss People's Party (SVP) National Councillor since 2015. Switzerland is wondering whether the daughter of Christoph Blocher, the dominant figure in the SVP, will now dedicate herself fully to politics or remain in business.

Her professional track record suggests she will pursue the second option. Under Martullo-Blocher's leadership, the specialist chemicals group based in Domat/Ems in Grisons is enjoying even greater success than when it was run by her father, whom she replaced as CEO after his election to the Federal Council in 2003. Last year's trend of positive revenues continued into the first quarter of 2018.

She also says at every opportunity that she would rather be in business than in politics. However, if Switzerland was in peril, she would probably have to bite the bullet and steer national government on the right course: "In an emergency situation, such as if the EU suddenly and unexpectedly started putting us under great pressure, I would probably consider office," she told various media outlets when asked whether she wanted to become a Federal Councillor. Not only does she resemble her father in terms of style and appearance, her methods are also the same. She disguises her political ambitions as a "duty" to protect the Swiss nation and people from disaster and ruin. In March 2018, Magdalena Martullo-Blocher replaced her retiring father on the party's executive committee, one of the most powerful positions in the SVP. Even on the day before the election, her father was saying that she didn't actually want the position. She "had" to take it.

JÜRGEN MÜLLER

The Sion 2026 Olympic bid is withdrawn

Switzerland will not bid for the Winter Olympics in 2026 after all. This is despite the Federal Council approving almost a billion Swiss francs for the Sion 2026 bid in April. Its aim was to use existing sports facilities in the four cantons of Valais, Fribourg, Berne and Grisons. But on 10 June, the people of Valais voted against a 100-million-franc cantonal contribution to the Games at the ballot box (also see the editorial on page 3). The bid has been withdrawn as a result. Financial and environmental concerns were key factors in the proposal's rejection. (MUL)

Exchange of newspapers between Tamedia and Blocher

The upheaval in the Swiss media scene is continuing with major restructuring measures. In April 2018, the former Federal Councillor Christoph Blocher sold the "Basler Zeitung" – which he had acquired six years earlier – to Tamedia, the Zurich-based media group. In return, the company handed over the "Tagblatt der Stadt Zürich", which is distributed to all households, and other local newspapers to the SVP politician. This deal sees Tamedia further strengthen its dominant position in the Swiss media landscape. In contrast, Blocher is focusing on free local newspapers. In 2017, he acquired the Zehnder-Verlag, which has 38 titles. (JM)

The papal Swiss Guard is expanding

The Swiss Guard, the small armed force which serves the Vatican, is expanding. Christoph Graf, Commander of the Guard, says that growing security requirements make the increase in numbers – from 110 men at present to 135 – necessary. The Swiss Guard, founded in 1506, is responsible for guard and ceremonial duties at the Vatican, but also for the personal protection of the Pope. The number of guards last rose in 2000 from 100 to 110 men. (MUL)

Swiss development aid fell in 2017

CHF 3.05 billion – which equates to 0.46 % of gross national income (GNI) – was the amount earmarked for Swiss state development aid in 2017. That is almost half a billion Swiss francs less than in the previous year. The federal authorities indicate that it is the "lowest amount since 2013". They believe the decline has to be put into perspective because expenditure on asylum seekers fell sharply. These costs are included in development aid. Alliance Sud, the umbrella development organisation, has voiced criticism of the reduction. It argues that Switzerland has once again missed its self-imposed target of increasing the proportion of development aid to 0.5 % of GNI and is a long way off the international goal of 0.7 %. (MUL)