

News

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Tanja Stadler



Tanja Stadler, Full Professor at the Department of Biosystems Science and Engineering of ETH Zurich, was one of the key scientific figures in Switzerland during the pandemic. Within the Covid-19 Science Task Force set up to advise the authorities, Stadler led the panel of experts entrusted with calculating the all-important R number, which indicates whether the pandemic is growing or receding. The Swiss government used the R-number and other data to determine its anti-Covid strategy – a big responsibility for the mathematician, not least after she became chair of the task force in summer 2021. She was 40 at the time and one of the youngest on the committee. “This lady’s numbers determine our freedom” was the headline in one newspaper. Stadler herself is not one for hype. In the public crossfire, the multi-award-winning academic stuck soberly to facts and evidence. Nevertheless, like other scientists who appeared in public during the pandemic, she found herself the target of hatred and threats. However, she never fell into the trap of saying anything political. She always emphasised that she was just explaining the science, and it was up to the politicians to decide what to do. Any signals she may have given were subtle – for example when she appeared for a television interview still wearing a protective mask after the early lifting of restrictions in Switzerland. The task force disbanded at the end of March, but Tanja Stadler continues to study how viruses spread and change. Even as a child, she was interested in scientific phenomena. She has now become an inspiration for other young women aspiring to break into areas of science that used to be dominated by men.

SUSANNE WENGER

Star banker Pierin Vincenz goes to jail

In April, Zurich’s district court found former Raiffeisen CEO Pierin Vincenz guilty of forgery and disloyal management (see also “Swiss Review” 2/2022), sentencing him to three years and nine months in prison and fining him 560,000 Swiss francs. Experts in criminal law said that convicting the banking supremo, who had become entangled in various conflicts of interest, amounted to a landmark decision. Gregor Münch of the “Neue Zürcher Zeitung”: “One or two chief executives may be looking over their shoulder now.”

(MUL)

Switzerland opens an embassy at the Vatican

The Pontifical Swiss Guard has always afforded our country a high profile at the Vatican. But it is only now that Switzerland has expressed its intention to open its own embassy there, with diplomat Denis Knobel set to become its first resident ambassador to the Holy See. The inauguration of an embassy sees Switzerland put to bed its historically fraught relationship with the Vatican. In 1873, the events of the ‘Kulturkampf’ between Catholics and Protestants in Switzerland led to the Federal Council severing diplomatic ties with the Holy See for several decades. It was not until 1991 that Switzerland appointed a diplomat for the Vatican again, and he is still based in Slovenia.

(MUL)

The EU wants clear answers from Switzerland

The relationship between Switzerland and the EU remains a confusing work in progress. Since abandoning talks on a framework agreement in May 2021, Switzerland has been searching for ways to re-engage in dialogue with the EU. However, for the European Commission it is not clear what solutions Switzerland intends to pursue. According to Swiss radio (SRF) sources, Brussels has now submitted a range of questions to Berne. Only when it gets clear written answers to these, it says, will it be in a position to judge whether the Swiss government can bring anything to the table that would form a reliable basis for further negotiations.

(MUL)

The 89-year-old “Heimat” now runs on green fuel

Scheduled boat services on Swiss lakes are a popular mode of public transport. Lake Greifensee now has its first-ever electric-powered ferry. The “Heimat”, built in 1933, will no longer run on diesel but use an electric engine instead. Switzerland’s big ferry companies are likely to follow suit. For example, Lake Constance will soon see its first electric passenger service.

(MUL)

Switzerland wants to spend more on defence

A clear majority in the National Council voted in May to increase military spending to 7 billion Swiss francs a year. Provided the Council of States ratifies the decision, Switzerland’s military budget will rise by 1.4 billion francs. The National Council vote took place against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine.

(MUL)