

Young Campaigner Raises Stakes In Parliament

Lukas Reimann, the youngest member of parliament, takes pride in being Swiss and makes it his mission to defend traditional values.

The poker-playing representative of the rightwing Swiss People's Party spearheaded a vote in February against a labour accord with the European Union.

The reputation that precedes him and his track record are impressive enough. Some see the 26-year-old parliamentarian as the new shooting star of his party.

No less remarkable is the fact that Reimann mounted a challenge against the EU labour deal against the wishes of his party elders, prompting a spectacular party policy reversal.

Now he is again at the forefront of a campaign – this time aimed at bringing down a law on the introduction of biometric passports to be voted on in May.

Not just an avid campaigner, Reimann is parliament's champion of online communication. He boasts the highest numbers of friends on Facebook.

Sitting face-to-face in the parliament lobby during the spring session, you see a different side to him: friendly and modest, nothing showy and no strong statements. It's not what you necessarily expect from a representative of the controversial People's Party.

« If you know a lot about a particular subject you have no reason to doubt your position. » Lukas Reimann

Face-to-face

He's wearing a suit and tie and seems shy at first. He looks straight at you and speaks with a firm voice, occasionally lapsing into party political jargon.

Start him on subjects such as the EU and other perceived threats to Switzerland's independence, and you understand why his supporters trust in his strong convictions and fall sway to his charisma.

"If you know a lot about a particular subject you have no reason to doubt your position," says Reimann.

But he does not rush to form opinions and sometimes has initial doubts.

"I read more than 30 books on Islam over the years. The same goes for my interest and knowledge of the EU. That's what makes me sure about my political position."

Labels

Reimann is uneasy when asked whether he considers himself a conservative. "I don't like being boxed into a category."

He says there are issues where he is definitely liberal, but he hesitates when asked for concrete examples.

He prefers the label of pragmatist and shares with the Greens what he calls "an anti establishment attitude".

Role models for Reimann are hard to find, and there is no use looking for prominent names in his own party. Even his uncle, Max, who is a senator, does not come close.

"He has been important and I often had discussions with him. He is as strongly opinionated as I am," Reimann smiles.

What's this? House of Representatives

Influence

A definite influence was a former politician of the German Liberals of the 1990s. Reimann admires the talent of Jürgen Möllemann. "He was able to explain in simple words the liberal policies: less state intervention, lower taxes, fewer laws and more freedom."

As for his own talents and personal ambitions, Reimann does not believe he is a particularly fascinating speaker or gifted with an exceptional sense for politics. "There are plenty of better orators here in Bern," he says.

His special interests appear to be campaigning and organising, but he says he likes the different aspects of politics. Over the past 14 months he has begun to appreciate the work in parliamentary committees, although it is seldom in the media spotlight.

A priority in his life is his law studies. At the moment he devotes more time to his studies than to his political mandate. But it was the opposite when he led the campaign for a referendum against an EU treaty.

"I have no plans for an executive position in politics," he says convincingly. "But I quite like the idea of being a consultant and running an agency for campaigns one day."

Is there a life beyond debates and campaign politics for someone like him who imbibed politics as a teenager?

Reimann lists hiking, playing cards and watching football among his hobbies. He regrets there's hardly enough time for these activities.

And when it comes to card games he found a way to link hobby and politics. Reimann lodged a motion last year to legalise private poker tournaments.

« I like it when people have a positive image of Switzerland. » Lukas Reimann

Images

The young politician could be considered a typical conservative Swiss, but his personal experience goes beyond the alpine environment.

Reimann spent 12 months in the United States and has fond memories of his stays in Scandinavian countries. As an EU critic he has built up a network of like-minded people, as a look at his travel schedule over the next weeks shows.

He takes time to consider the question as to whether he occasionally feels uneasy about clichéd images of Switzerland as a mountain paradise.

"I like it when people have a positive image of Switzerland," he says disarmingly.

It's true what is said about Reimann. Although it's hard to dislike him, you can't lose sight of the astute tactician behind the boyish face.

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