

A first : a woman in the Federal Council

Autor(en): **Franzoni, Isabella**

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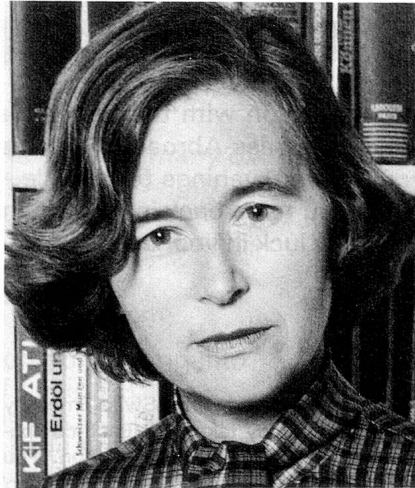
A First: A Woman in the Federal Council

136 years after the foundation of our Federal State and 13 years after the introduction of women's suffrage, a woman has taken on the highest governmental office in our country for the very first time. Her name is Elisabeth Kopp. The Federal Chambers elected her on 2nd October 1984. She received 124 votes in the first round, three above the absolute majority. Her rival, the Aargau parliamentarian Bruno Hunziker got 95 votes.

«Frau Bundesrätin / Madame la Conseillère fédérale» is the successor to Mr Rudolf Friedrich, Head of the Federal Department of Justice and Police, who officially retired on 20th October.

The decision that Federal Councillor Friedrich would retire for reasons of health was made known on 20th August 1984. He had been elected as successor to the other Federal Councillor from Zurich, Mr Fritz Honegger, on 8th December 1982. He was in office only for 22 months, a rather short period for a member of the Federal Government. Nevertheless it enabled one to appreciate Mr Rudolf Friedrich with regard to his moral, intellectual and political qualities.

At the end of August, the race for the succession began within the Liberal-Democratic Party of Switzerland. There were several proposed candidates and forecasts abounded. More and more often, the name of a woman was mentioned, the Liberal Dr Elisabeth Kopp from Zurich, a 48-year old lawyer and member of the National Council since 1979, Vice-President of the Liberal-Democratic Party of Switzerland and Commune President of Zumikon since 1974. Politically she may be called middle-of-the-Party-line. She has worked successfully for ecological solutions. As second official candidate, the Radicals



(Photo: Keystone)

proposed Mr Bruno Hunziker (Aargau), 54 and in the National Council since 1977. He is President of the Liberal-Democratic Party.

By putting forward two candidates, the Liberals left the decision to Parliament.

On that historic Tuesday morning, the dream of many women, whether feminists or not, came true under the cupola of the Federal Palace.

The first in the field in this development had been Mrs Lilian Uchtenhagen who had been proposed as the first woman for the Federal Council in December 1983. Nearly a year later after the failure of the Socialist woman candidate, Mrs Kopp has been successful: and now, a woman is in the Federal Executive, together with six men. From her predecessor, she has taken on the Federal Department of Justice and Police. In the National Council, the special gifts of Dr. Kopp were much appreciated, her strength of character, her moral integrity and remarkable abilities. Her special interests had been the new matrimonial law, ecology and energy policy.

Parliament had demonstrated that, provided the circumstances and the necessary qualities are

right, a woman, too, can reach the highest step on the ladder of a political career. The election of Mrs Kopp has symbolic value.

We must not forget that the parliamentarians had to decide between two extremely capable candidates; of course, they were also aware of public opinion: the will of the people was manifest. A defeat for the woman candidate from Zurich would have found very little understanding.

There were also a few other factors which helped Dr. Kopp to her success. So for instance the support of the Social Democrats who had followed a straight line since their defeat in 1983, also the last-minute support from the ranks of the Christian-Democrats. A further reason was no doubt the wish of the Zurich parliamentarians not to lose their seat on the Federal Executive, which has been theirs by tradition since 1948.

Furthermore, the Liberals, founders of the modern Federal State, did not wish to lose their part in this historic development, specially since the opportunity was favourable.

On 2nd October 1984, a woman was elected to the Federal Council. This is a milestone in our history, whose importance goes well beyond personal success.

Isabella Franzoni

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