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Judith Stamm, member of the Swiss National Parliament and President of the Federal Commission for Women's Equal Status:

"We women have had all we can stand...!"

Judith Stamm, Member of Parliament for Lucerne and since 1989 President of the Federal Commission for Women's Equal Status, talks about the work of the Commission, "equal pay for equal work" and other matters concerning equal status for women. Her views on our official policies concerning women can be summed up as: "The rate at which equal status for both sexes is being implemented can only be described as 'sluggish'."

Swiss Review (SR): Since 1971 women have had the vote in Switzerland, and since 1981, equal status for men and women has been guaranteed in the Federal Constitution. So the time may be ripe for celebrating in 1991 a twenty-year and a ten-year jubilee. Can we celebrate them with as much pride and enthusiasm as we shall be doing for the jubilee commemorating the 700th anniversary of the Confederation's existence?

Judith Stamm (JS): To that question, I can only give you an answer that has two aspects. On the one hand Switzerland has

one takes into account the entire field of activities in which women could and should participate in the centres of decision-making, thus in industry and science for instance, it is evident that we have as yet hardly started. At the Federal College of Advanced Technology (the "ETH") there are more than 400 professors – but only three of them are women. So, to answer your question, yes, we can celebrate to some extent in 1991, but there is no reason for arranging a riotously exuberant festival.

SR: Since the beginning of this year you have been President of the Federal Commission for Women's Equal Status. What targets have you set?

JS: Fundamentally what we aim for is to "mix in" everywhere and to bring out the standpoint of women to whatever is under discussion. To give a practical example, we are still working on the social insurance project: the Commission has stated its views in the matter of pensions for the elderly and their dependants ("AHV") and in relation to occupational welfare, while at present a working group is examining the disability insurance situation. A study is also being made regarding "Women and Politics". This study has to be completed in good time

special activities in connection with the 1991 Jubilee celebrations. I am thinking furthermore of examining at some later date the important theme of "Foreign Women in Switzerland".

SR: How do you feel about the pace at which progress is being made in the area of equal status?



Judith Stamm as lawyer: "Some careful thinking will have to be given to the setting of quotas."

JS: I can characterise that pace quite clearly in a single word: "sluggish". Lawsuits in connection with equality of wage rates are often allowed to drag on and on in a manner that is inexcusably irresponsible – and the situation is not better in many other areas. I must say to you that we women have had all we can stand – more than flesh and blood can bear, enough to provoke a saint! The Federal Council admittedly appointed an expert committee at the end of May to study and report on the theme "Switzerland tomorrow", and to work out scenarios for the future of our country. A praiseworthy action. But do you know how many women were included in the 16-person team? Just three! The underproportionate representation of women in what are called the extra-parliamentary expert committees that are so important as the bodies giving advice to the Federal Council and the administration generally, is a serious mistake. Of 370 such expert committees only 15 were presided over by women, and the proportion of women members of such bodies is only around 8%. In relation to this state of affairs, it is very likely that the female members of the National Parliament will be taking very energetic steps in an attempt to ensure that the changes needed will be effected more speedily than usual.

SR: So you are in favour of what people call the "quota system", whereby there would



Judith Stamm as President of the Commission for Women's Equal Status: "We mix in everywhere!" (Photos: Lisa Schäublin)

introduced and adopted – albeit with customary Helvetic slowness – the equality of rights for the entire adult population, but on the other hand these rights – at all events in theory – are nowadays undisputed and unquestioned. We have moreover made rapid and considerable progress, as can be seen from the representation of women in Swiss parliaments and governments. But if



Judith Stamm as politician: "Women are grossly under-represented."

so that conclusions can be drawn from it prior to the next Federal elections. Further themes are the revision of the existing law on hours of work (with special reference to the banning of night-shift work and Sunday work for women) and the vast field of genetic technology. We are also planning some

Men and women have equal rights. The Law provides for equal status, above all in the family, in education and in work. Men and women are entitled to the same remuneration for work of equal value.

Federal Constitution

be a numerically prescribed female representation in all councils, committees and so on?

JS: I would like to be a bit cautious for the moment about this idea. For the immediate future I consider that we should try to bring about an increase in the proportion of women in such bodies on a voluntary basis. But if in the next five to ten years progress is still going on at the same foot-dragging rhythm as today, some sort of legislatively compulsory quota procedure will have to be considered.

SR: One particularly conspicuous and objectionable form of discrimination is – as you have already mentioned – the still widely persisting inequality of remuneration of men and women for work of the same value and standard. Is it not time for Parliament to put its foot down?

JS: Today it is my view that the principle of equal pay laid down in the Constitution should be complemented by an implementing ordinance. The lawcourts are obviously incapable of interpreting the provision in the constitution which is in itself directly applicable, although it is not so simple in practice. That is why it is necessary for Parliament to deal with this question by means of legislation, and at the same time to define what is meant by work of equal value. There must be a provision for associations and trade unions to have a right to sue, as the individual woman worker would often not dare to bring her employer before the court.

SR: Mrs. Stamm, I should like to express our gratitude to you for your willingness to take part in this conversation.

Interviewer: Jürg Müller

The President

Judith Stamm, who at the beginning of this year became President of the Federal Commission for Women's Equal Status, has since 1983 been a member of Parliament (National Council) for Lucerne. She is a member of the Christian-Democratic People's Party (the "CVP"). From 1971 to 1984 she had been a member of the Great Council of the Canton of Lucerne. She was born in 1934 and grew up in Zurich, where she completed her legal studies, obtaining her doctor's degree. For many years she was active in the Cantonal Police of Lucerne, and was in fact the first woman in Switzerland to become a police officer. She practises today as a lawyer acting on behalf of juveniles.

Career and Reflections of a Swiss Woman Politician

From Geneva to Berne



It is a somewhat daunting task to sum up in a few lines fourteen years of parliamentary life – starting with my "surprise" election to the Geneva Upper Council in 1973, then two years later to the National Council followed by two terms of office in the Council of States in which for eight years I have represented the Republic and Canton of Geneva. I can say that my political career began late, progressed rapidly, was fascinatingly exciting and at the same time rather disappointing, characterised by periods of gloom and sunshine – like every human undertaking. I was fifty years old when for the first time I agreed to put my name down as a candidate of the Liberal party – the same party which several of my ancestors had represented on the Municipal

Council of Onex. My three daughters, by then already grown up, had hardly any need of help or advice from me, and my husband, as a doctor entirely wrapped up in his profession, encouraged me in my endeavour. As a woman in a privileged position I thought it fully justifiable to place my experience and time at the disposal of the broadest public community. Public affairs interested me, I was ready to take on new responsibilities, and I was already a member of several official committees.

Immediately after my election, I committed myself with enthusiasm to causes that interested me. I had nothing to lose and nothing to gain by engaging in politics. Being convinced about this, and desiring to keep my politics in complete accord with my ethical standards – thus obeying the dictates of my conscience rather than the party watchwords and slogans – I have retained my total independence of thought and action. On account of this attitude, I have made a few enemies but have received innumerable expressions of encouragement. I was in a minority in every respect. As a woman – there were only 17 female members of the 244-seat Parliament in 1975. As a French-speaking Swiss – we hardly amount to a fifth of the total population of the Confederation. As a representative of a small party, not a member of the governmental coalition. And finally, as somebody with controversial ideas. Apart from speaking in support of equal rights for men and women, of fair treatment for foreign workers and refugees, of conscientious objectors to military service, I have devoted most of my speeches to protection of the environment, to the East-West conflict, to massive stockpiling of means of destruction, and to the "ditch", that widening gulf which separates North from South.

Ever since the beginning of the 1970's I had become very conscious of the major threats to humanity developing in the last decades of the twentieth century, and have committed myself, both in private associations and in politics, to support for the saving of energy and for resort to renewable sources of energy, to opposition against Creys-Malville (a nuclear power station in France, near Geneva) and nuclear power – either civilian or military, they cannot be disassociated from one another – and have pleaded for Switzerland to adopt a more active and dynamic policy of "good offices", in favour of peace and of a more equitable sharing of this planet's resources between the industrialised countries and those still underdeveloped. Confronted by a political milieu that is – with very few exceptions – more concerned with everyday questions than with anxiety about the future, a milieu that gives priority to short-term economic criteria, a milieu closely allied to the business circles which can be so generous in distributing seats on company boards of directors, those idealists who care first and foremost for the common good, and for the state of the world that we are bequeathing to our children, often get the feeling that they are "talking to a brick wall". For my part, I am convinced that the situation is not as discouraging as it may seem at first, if one considers the commitment of these men and women, of these increasingly numerous youngsters, of these scientists, even of the churches themselves who at the recent European Ecumenical Assembly in Basle decided to add their efforts to the cause of conservation and preservation of human life in spite of all threats – but not much time is left! So on a more optimistic note, let us recognise that there are some encouraging and hopeful signs.

Monique Bauer-Lagier