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President of the Confederation

Kaspar Villiger, a shy man

His eyes grey-blue, twinkling and dancing behind square-frame spectacles, his expression questioning, in constant movement, looking for contact, searching for something familiar, his face

Pierre-André Tschanz

squarish, his complexion mat, his ears slightly protruding, Kaspar Villiger looks more like a former head boy than one of the seven wise men. Providence has been kind to this elderly schoolboy whose CV did not hint at his future as a statesman.

His first step up was the shipwreck and forced departure of Zurich's Elizabeth Kopp. After Switzerland's first unhappy experience of a woman at the top, a person to be trusted was badly needed: her replacement had to be not a woman, not from Zurich, not famous, but a Liberal Democrat. Kaspar Villiger comes from Lucerne – but he is a Protestant and a Liberal Democrat in a Catholic and Christian Democrat canton. He was not at all famous, and he was just the right man – particularly since his past in industry and his several years in parliament gave an additional sense of security.

The second step up came from the anti-militarists whose proposal to abolish the Swiss army (which got 36% of Yes votes in November 1989) enabled Kaspar Villiger to emerge from the grey shadows. He chose to begin a dialogue with the worst enemy of the Swiss military establishment. And when the anti-militarist initiative fell through it gave him the image of a winner.

His third trump, also at the Federal Military Department, was the discovery of the secret files on Swiss citizens. Villiger showed he knew how to tidy up his department, giving an impression of both efficiency and honesty.

Finally, the disappearance of the Iron Curtain gave him the opportunity of cutting the fat out of the Swiss army. His "Army '95" programme is designed to turn it into an instrument which is

modern, flexible, dynamic, at the service of peace and of the community – to take up the slogans of the public relations experts appealed to by Switzerland's defence minister.

Encouraged by their relative success in November 1989, the anti-militarists went on to polish further the winning

sometimes ironic – particularly with regard to himself, a characteristic of the shy man under perfect control – Kaspar Villiger likes using wit to ease the atmosphere. He tends to choose words which demonstrate determination, and he likes to slip publicity slogans into his speeches and press conferences. Since he arrived in government on February 1, 1989, he has been rarely seen without a public relations professional at his side. Although this systematic desire for top media impact may sometimes be exasperating, Kaspar Villiger has been able during a particularly sensitive period to reestablish minimum confidence in the army and the Federal Military Department.

The new president talks so quickly that one sometimes asks oneself

Kaspar Villiger is no stranger to the "Fifth Switzerland": in 1992 this year's President of the Confederation represented the federal government at the Congress of the Swiss Abroad in St. Gall.
(Photo: SSA)



image of Kaspar Villiger, this time by trying to block his project of acquiring new fighter aircraft. Following a very well run referendum campaign, he again came out victorious in July 1993.

His winning streak ended a year later with the failure of the project concerning Switzerland's participation in the blue helmet operations of the United Nations.

Rather unassuming, full of humour,

whether he can really think as fast as that! And he has been known to put his foot in it. This also gives away his shyness.

If you should perchance meet the President of the Confederation on a day when he's in a bad mood, bring up the name of Elizabeth Rehn, Finland's former Minister of Defence, and you will soon have a smile back on his face. ■