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Autor: Tschanz, Pierre-André
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President of the Confederation in 1996

Jean-Pascal Delamuraz, the navigator

This year Jean-Pascal Delamuraz is President of the Confederation for the second time. He presumably hopes that 1996 will be calmer than his first term of office, which was in 1989 – the year

Pierre-André Tschanz

of the secret files scandal, the parliamentary commissions of enquiry, the forced departure of the first woman federal councillor, the institutional crisis at home, the transformations in Europe and the end of the Cold War abroad.

The Swiss ship of state was certainly knocked about, but with this expert navigator at the helm it passed through that year of profound depression without major damage. It was a period of frustration for JPD, for the atmosphere neither at home nor abroad allowed him to spread his wings as he would have wished. The circumstances required a low profile, which is always difficult for an ambitious fighter.

So that first period in office revealed to us a side of JPD which had been virtually unknown until then: that of a man who keeps his fists in his pockets. He showed that he could be something quite other than the 'political animal' which we knew him to be. Symptomatic

of this was the giant photo published on the eve of 1989 in Lausanne's tabloid daily, 'Le Matin': JPD taking an enormous bull by the horns. «He charges like a bull. But with humour and sensitivity to boot», read the caption. The image of him that Claude Frey, President of the Federal Assembly last year, remembers is "that of a driving force which carries others with it".

This driving force is the result of a brilliant analytic mind and a power of imagination which never sleeps, compounded by a genius for communication. Delamuraz likes to use the familiar form when he talks to people: he is Jean-Pascal to nearly half of all Swiss citizens. He cracks jokes to put people at their ease, whether he is talking to one person or to a large number. He gets carried away by his own humour, and this is why some in German-speaking Switzerland do not take him too seriously. There are circles which do not appreciate the "light-heartedness" of the French speakers, particularly when it comes to a high dignitary of state.

Criticised because he is too much of a Romand, Delamuraz' Gallic temperament is also expressed in his love of good food (he is said to be an enthusiast of Chinese cooking, but that is not the

reason why he returned to China last autumn at the head of a joint economic delegation!) and white wine (Vaudois whenever possible).

But Jean-Pascal Delamuraz also has a taste for power. To the point of exasperating his detractors and the ambitious whose way to the top he blocks. Great pressure was put upon him to leave office last autumn when Federal Councillor Otto Stich resigned – since he entered the Federal Council in 1984 at the same time as Stich. The hour had not come, explained Delamuraz after allowing those who wanted to see the back of him to dangle in the wind. It is also his taste for power which enabled him to overcome a number of health problems over the last few years as well as the setbacks to the Federal Council's European integration policy of which he was the architect. Jean-Pascal Delamuraz' dream was to be on the photo of heads of state and government at the European Union's Intergovernmental Conference in Lisbon later this year. His dream will not come true. ■



In the first session of the new parliament all members of the Federal Council were confirmed in their posts: (from left to right) Jean-Pascal Delamuraz (Economic affairs), Arnold Koller (Justice and Police), Flavio Cotti (Foreign Affairs), Adolf Ogi (Military), Kaspar Villiger (Finance), Ruth Dreifuss (Home Affairs), Moritz Leuenberger (Transport, Communications and Energy). (Photos: Michael Stahl)

