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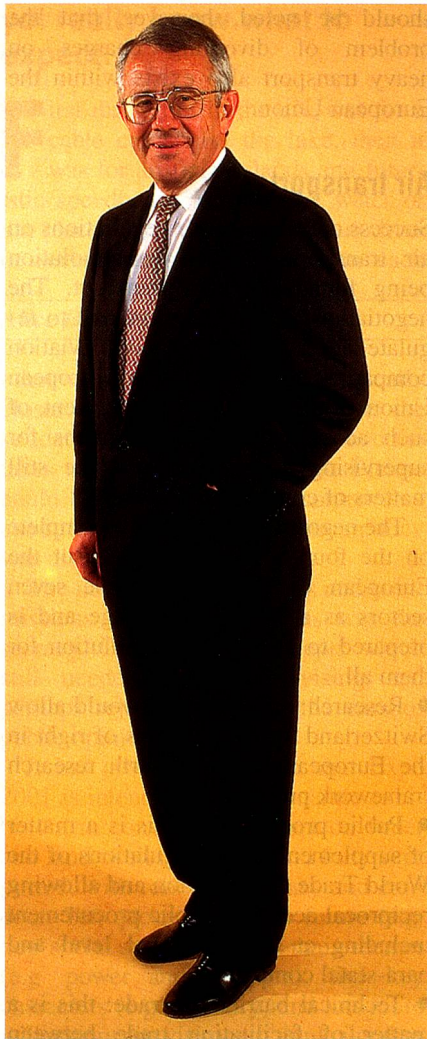
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President of the Confederation in 1997

Arnold Koller the Good



(Photos: Michael Stahl)

Arnold Koller has been a federal councillor for ten years and may one day occupy a special place in the history of our country. Not for what he has done so far but for what he is doing to crown his career, which should

Pierre-André Tschanz

in principle bear fruit next year. It is to be hoped that he succeeds and finds his place in the Guinness Book of Records: as the only federal councillor who has ever succeeded in bringing about a complete revision of the federal

constitution, which is now 123 years old.

During the last 30 years, more than one has failed in this task. If Arnold Koller fails, he will simply be the 95th federal councillor in the history of Switzerland since 1848. He will go down in quasi-anonymity!

The other main achievements of this Roman Catholic from Appenzell are not such as to feature in the history books. Lieutenant Colonel Koller spent his first two years in the executive at the Federal Military Department. This was a sort of limbo while awaiting the Federal Department of Justice and Police, for which Koller the lawyer was specially cut out. His time had come. Zurich's Elisabeth Kopp was tottering. There was also the files scandal. The federal police seemed to have become a state within the state. The Swiss were losing confidence in their institutions.

Arnold Koller was the man of providence to bring order back to the Department of Justice and Police. His competence was recognised, as was his honesty. The federal police was reorganised, its responsibilities reassessed. The office of the public prosecutor of the Confederation changed its role. Mediators were appointed to allow those concerned to read their own files. The security of the state was redefined.

During his first year as president in

1990, Arnold the Good succeeded in re-establishing some of the confidence lost. But other challenges awaited him. Tension surrounding asylum policy was reaching its culmination. There was increased pressure from abroad for Switzerland finally to do something about money-laundering. The large-scale economic negotiations (European Economic Area and GATT) required pressing and substantial legislative adjustments. Arnold Koller, always serene, reacted to these problems, instituted reform, provided explanations, calmed people down. In just a few years he did more than all his predecessors during four decades.

The total revision of the federal constitution is supposed to crown all this. Although his political career is already laid out and his place in the Federal Council fully established, Arnold Koller is no Chancellor Helmut Kohl. Nor is he a President François Mitterrand. He is simply Arnold Koller, honest man, practical politician, conscientious lawyer. After cleaning up the Augean stables, he is now presenting his last bouquet: cleaning up the constitution! ■