

Where power and beauty mix

But do they really?

Swiss politics is replete with the powerful and beautiful. But is appearance everything? Is power to be coveted? What of inner values and professional performance?

Is Micheline Calmy-Rey, the Swiss Foreign Minister, a finished product? Or is she merely a brand politician who attracts more attention for good styling and a perfect outfit than for political performance? Admittedly, she does not make such a naive impression as the current president of the Confederation, Samuel Schmid, whose suits would be more at home at a horse fair in the Jura than at a diplomatic reception. But is appearance everything? What about inner values and professional performance?

The power and the glory

Nowhere else do we find such an intense encounter between power and beauty as in the Swiss federal capital of Berne—which is still not appreciated at its true value. But let's stay for the moment with Micheline Calmy-Rey. As Financial Director of Geneva Canton, she achieved worse results than was known when she was elected to the Federal Council. In other words, she transferred from her cantonal career to a national profile on top form. Is the foreign policy she pursues since then anything more than the foam on a cup of cappuccino?

Professional foreign politicians doubt that, but do grant her this: "Calmy-Rey does everything just right, but in the wrong places"—by which they mean that she has had photo opportunities at the border between North and South Korea

where, unfortunately, nobody no longer remembers her visit. Or, that she turns up in Palestine and immediately annoys the Israelis and supports a largely privately financed Mid-East initiative. All this causes diplomats to shake their heads. One of her models must surely be the former Austrian Foreign Minister, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, who now works for the EU and left no trace behind her. The ambitious power lady Calmy-Rey cannot often be seen in the places where Swiss destiny is decided—read, Brussels and Washington. Be that as it may, other politicians in the country envy her for her ballooning hair-do and her fashion consultant.

And those who have it

Which of us doesn't still remember the unlucky Federal Council member Ruth Metzler, who was toppled by the CVP with the help of the FDP and who stumbled from one banana skin to the next under the guidance of her unfortunate PR consultant. In the end, she was left with her pretty little Swiss-German nose and a fat pension for the next 50 years. Ruth Metzler was so bereft of style and content that she is still looking for a job today (although very discreetly). But, after all, like former Zurich Cantonal Councillor Eric Honegger (who did waive his state pension) she can still go cycling and jogging. Calmy-Rey is in a different class altogether. »»»



At cantonal level, Zurich Cantonal Councillor Rita Fuhrer led the field for a long time. Although she was put in place by the SVP with her fresh and tough style, she soon gained the confidence of not only those around her but also of the electorate. However, this keen cyclist (“the lovely Rita”) has slimmed down of late and is showing distinct signs of wear. Probably not least because of Zurich Airport, which has saddled this magistrate with a dossier that just cannot be won. Even the most elegant image cannot hide the fact that she has gotten the backs up of many people in Zurich, St Gallen, Thurgau, Schwyz and Aargau—in other words, a great many people. And so the charming winner has turned into a typical Zurich lady, whose smile is now only to be seen when she thinks she has power under control.

Her free-thinking Ticino colleague from a prominent family of lawyers, Maria Masoni, is certainly an impressive lady who has been waiting for years to make the breakthrough to Berne, but is hampered by the cabals of her own party and those of her own home canton. Her prospects in Berne have probably become even worse now that the election of Fulvio Pelli as chairman of FDP Switzerland has given Ticino a chance to turn up trumps again in the federal Parliament.

Masoni’s situation contrasts with that of Elisabeth Zölch, the Director of the Berne Department of the Economy, whose star has been rising for the past six months, despite an abrasive political programme. She has equipped her canton with structures to facilitate an upturn and the annual budget deficits are a thing of the past. Elisabeth Zölch proves that things are going better again for her and for her canton. She radiates energy and demonstrates strength.

With Doris Fiala, the rising star of Zurich (who has taken on a perfectly ungrateful job as chair of the Cantonal FDP), we have a candidate whose self-confidence is presently obvious. Contrary to all expectations, she humbled National Councillor Filippo Leutenegger, who was her opponent in

the decisive vote. Today, she is strengthened by the election of Fulvio Pelli, who is in a different class from “Filippo National”. Doris Fiala, who tends to be surrounded by weaker men, is preparing to take Berne by storm. Like Calmy-Rey, she combines fine style and plenty of actionitis. The rest is a matter of good luck—or the favours of the gods, as the Greeks knew when they were laying siege to Troy.

To run down Doris Leuthard, chair of the CVP and heroine of the Aargau, here would be a frivolous venture. The self-assured lady from Aargau, who knows where she is going, is probably the best politician among the women mentioned here. But with the CVP she is riding a “wonkey” (a donkey with three legs). So she is another example of something that Franz Steinegger already knew and from which he took advantage: the party always loses impact while the last warming rays of the sun are gathering over the head of the chairperson.

The women belonging to the Swiss SP, who had the wind in their sails one year ago, have now taken their seat on the back benches. Simonetta Sommaruga, the brilliant Berne cantonal councillor and outsider in her own party, has produced some evidence in her new book that she wants to remain true to the dominant SP. She has an equally stylish presence as Federal Councillor Calmy-Rey, but is perhaps a little less shrill; so she will have to wait for the stars to be right to enable her own ascent to continue.

Today's demand: fashionable females with political talent

Power and beauty seem more visible today among women in Berne and all over the country than among our menfolk. Today, the demand is not for bold Wilhelm Tell characters but rather for fashionable females with political talent. <<<

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