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SIMONE VEIL, PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Simone Veil, today elected president of the directly elected European Parliament, was recently voted in a poll to be second only in popularity to the French president himself.

She was the first woman in France to reach ministerial rank, and until recently, held for five years the portfolio on Health and Family Affairs. She intends to give the Parliamentary Presidency her full time.

The esteem in which she is held has not been marred by her controversial legislation on abortion and contraception and which she successfully steered through the French National Assembly.

Madame Veil was born in Nice 52 years ago and later survived deportation to Germany where she was imprisoned until the war's end.

A lawyer by training, she is also a graduate of the French Institute for Political Studies, and began her career in the Ministry of Justice where she served from 1957 to 1969. From 1970 to 1974 she was secretary general of the Higher Council of the Magistracy, concentrating on penal reform and rehabilitation, before moving to the Ministry of Health.

The new President co-authored a book, 'L'Adoption, donnés médicales, psychologiques et sociales' (1969).

She is a Chevalier of the National Order of Merit and additionally decorated for her work in prison administration.

In a recent New York Times interview, Madame Veil was quoted as saying about how the EC should be run: "Europe won't really progress if it tries to impose supranational rules, outside of national contexts. Trying to harmonize national laws is a much better method, bringing countries into similar lines."

"They have to move closer together before they can think together."

She stressed she is fully committed to European integration and added: "General ideas, but if they're not translated into specifics and logistics, they solve nothing."

Madame Veil has also said she would like to develop an inter-party group for women in the European Parliament. "I hope we can establish a woman's intergroup because the condition (of women) is distressing. In national Parliaments women are isolated and have little chance to be effective. There will be many more of us in Strasbourg, and there are very strong women's demands from Europe."

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