

World



The new "Euro-President," Simone Veil



Premier Maria de Lourdes Pintassilgo

EUROPE

Year of Women

Two more in Maggie's footsteps

No one was willing to attribute it entirely to Margaret Thatcher's groundbreaking election in Britain. And, certainly, no old-fashioned male politician was yet prepared to step aside chivalrously. But, suddenly, 1979 in Europe seemed to be turning in a year of victorious political women.

In Strasbourg, the spanking new European Parliament chose as its first President the elegant and brainy Simone Veil, 52, a former French Health Minister, a Jewish survivor of the Auschwitz death camp and one of the Continent's hottest political properties. In Lisbon, President António Ramalho Eanes abruptly chose as interim Premier Maria de Lourdes Pintassilgo, 49, a chemical engineer and women's rights advocate now serving as Portugal's delegate to UNESCO in Paris.

Riding on the support of her own centrist Liberals, plus a loose coalition of Christian Democrats, British Conservatives and French Gaullists, France's Veil won her post on the second ballot, with 192 out of the 377 valid votes cast. Two leftist candidates, Italian Socialist Mario Zagari and Italian Communist Giorgio Amendola, went down to defeat with 138 and 47 votes respectively. Veil's victory thus demonstrated the effective dominance of the center-right parties in the Parliament, whose members were picked in direct elections throughout the nine European Community countries last month.

For a political body that considers itself historic, the election of a victim of Nazism symbolized the enduring European reconciliation to which it is committed. Veil regularly tops the polls as the most popular political figure in France. In Strasbourg, it was hoped that her grass roots appeal could help the untested new Parliament make up with prestige and in-

fluence what it lacks in constitutional power.

Veil has made a strong public impact ever since President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing picked her from a senior judicial post to serve in his Cabinet in 1974. A mother of three, she strenuously campaigned against tobacco and notorious French alcoholism, liberalized rules governing contraception, and successfully led a long and bitter legislative campaign for legal abortion. The new "Euro-President" quickly gave the Parliament an early sample of the no-nonsense grit behind her gentle smile. When Protestant Ulster Unionist the Rev. Ian Paisley heckled Irish Prime Minister Jack Lynch for delivering part of his speech in Irish Gaelic, Veil rapped her gavel and, in softly spoken French, effectively told him to shut up.

In traditionalist Portugal, voters and politicians alike could not help being tantalized by the choice of Pintassilgo as the stopgap Premier charged with forming an interim government to prepare for early elections this fall. The country has been without a government since early June when a reformist Cabinet of political independents headed by Carlos Alberto Mota Pinto resigned under Socialist and Communist censure motions. An independent herself, Pintassilgo has been described as both a "Catholic militant" and a "pure social democrat." As Minister of Social Affairs in the first provisional government following the army-inspired Flower Revolution of 1974, she was best known for promoting the introduction of equal rights for women into the country's new constitution.

If her program is approved by the lame-duck Parliament, she will become the first woman to govern Portugal since Queen Maria II in 1853. The chipper diplomat, who is single, is undaunted by that prospect. She acknowledges Maggie Thatcher's political pioneering. "We have always imitated the English," she quipped last week. "After all, we only started liking our own port wine after they did." ■