

Quota System

German Politicians Abandon Patriarchy To Woo Voters

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BERLIN — The crowd of journalists cheered, "Congratulations, Miss Bundestag!" Dagmar Enkelmann, 38, the mother of three children aged 5, 14 and 17, was flabbergasted.

"Am I at the wrong event?" she asked.

In 1990, the year of reunification, chauvinism was still at the core of politics in the German parliament. Male members of the press corps in Bonn had held a poll judging female legislators not on political acumen but on, well, physical attributes.

And Enkelmann had just learned that she was the winner of the mock-and mocking-beauty contest.

She who laughs last laughs best. When German voters went to the polls last October to choose the second parliament since reunification, Enkelmann was re-elected. She represents the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), the reform Communist Party in eastern Germany. Women make up 45 percent of the party's delegates to the Bundestag.

The three leading liberal and left-wing parties in German politics—the Social Democrats, the Greens and the PDS—have adopted quota systems to ensure female representation in their ranks. In the Alliance 90/Greens, 59.2 percent of the deputies are women. The Social Democrats have reached 33.7 percent.

In contrast, only 14.3 percent of Chancellor Helmut Kohl's governing Christian Democrat parliamentarians are women.

Rita Suessmuth, a Christian Democrat who is president of parliament, is one of the few women who have made it to the top within the conservative coalition.

"Up to now I was of the opinion that we did not need the quota, that we would manage without it," Suessmuth said shortly after the elections in October. "Unfortunately, I am forced to realize that we need a regulated procedure."

Her demand did not meet general acclaim from her political sisters, but it did reach a sympathetic ear with Kohl. Cognizant that only 28 percent of women younger than 34 had voted for his party, Kohl summoned Suessmuth and party secretary Peter Hintze and demanded that the "patriarchal pattern within the party" had to be broken.

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