
Simone Veil: a woman of many firsts

Simone Veil, noted feminist and former European Parliament president, has passed away. Parliament pays tribute to her great contribution to European integration

A survivor of the Nazi concentration camps and central figure of feminism in Europe, Simone Veil became the first president of the directly elected European Parliament in 1979 and the first woman to hold the post. She passed away on 30 June 2017.

Paying tribute, European Parliament President Antonio Tajani referred to her as "the great president of the European Parliament, conscience of the EU, campaigner against anti-Semitism and defender of women's rights". "Her message on women and anti-Semitism remains relevant to this day," he said in a statement.

Veil was born on 13 July 1927 to a Jewish family in Nice, France. With her family, she was arrested in 1944 and sent to the Nazi concentration camps in Auschwitz-Birkenau, Bobrek and finally Bergen-Belsen. Her parents and brother died in the camps.

Already a renowned politician in France, where she became minister for health in 1974, Veil was elected member of the European Parliament at the first direct elections in 1979. The new Parliament elected her as its president for a period of two-and-a-half years. She thus became the first president of the directly-elected European Parliament and the first woman president of any EU institution.

Speaking at the constitutive meeting of the new Parliament, she said: "I intend to devote my entire time and energies to the task before us. I am convinced that the pluralist nature of our assembly can serve to enrich our work and not act as a brake on the continuing construction of Europe."

Veil also served as chair of the legal affairs committee and as a member of the environment, political affairs, foreign affairs and security committees as well as the subcommittee on human rights. In addition she was a member of the special committee on German reunification established in 1990.

During her time at the Parliament she also held the positions of chair and vice-chair of the Liberal and Democratic Group, which later became the Liberal and Democratic Reformist Group. Having served as a member of the European Parliament for 14 years, she returned to French politics in 1993.

In 1981 Veil was awarded the prestigious [Charlemagne Prize](#). Her name also appears on the esplanade in front of the main European Parliament building in Brussels, named [Agora Simone Veil](#) in 2011.

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