



Last September, Zoya Novozhilova, Soviet Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Switzerland, presented her credentials in

Bern. A Russian language and literature teacher by training, Zoya Novozhilova admits that it has never been her ambition to become a diplomat. Moreover, nothing in her life heralded this radical change.

Born during World War II, Zoya was the tenth child in a farming family. They lived in a small village in the centre of the European part of Russia. On graduating from school with honours, Zoya studied by correspondence at Voronezh University and worked at school. To gain some extra money, she accepted a job offer from the District Committee of the Young Communist League (YCL), a mass youth political organization, when the school was closed for summer holidays. Quite unexpectedly, the job appealed to her and Zoya spent the next 20 years in different posts in elective YCL bodies, including the YCL Central Committee. She was then appointed Deputy Minister of Education of the Russian Federation, one of the 15 constituent republics.

How could a girl from a common farm family reach such a high position, given the fact that very few Soviet women have been promoted to top government posts? According to Novozhilova, work is what she loves most of all. But she is no bluestocking. This charming elegant woman with lively dark eyes has a close family; her husband is a university professor and her son a secondary school graduate.

Important decisions are taken by all of them together. The proposal to pursue a career in diplomacy made Novozhilova think a lot. She was of two minds because of a complete lack of experience. So, she asked her family's opinion. When the initial amusement had passed, they suggested she accept the offer.

Shortly before her departure from Moscow, Zoya Novozhilova met Baron Thyssen-Bornemisiz. "Is your appointment a result of *perestroika*?" he asked. "It is not the result but only the beginning," she said. Zoya is the second Soviet woman after Alexandra Kollontai (a Soviet

Zoya Novozhilova, Soviet Ambassador

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stateswoman and politician, Lenin's associate, who headed the Soviet diplomatic mission in Sweden from 1930 to 1945) to become a high-ranking diplomat. But she is certain that there will soon be more women in diplomatic work. Women can come to agreement more easily than men. Besides, traditionally the home-maker, a woman seeks mutual understanding and trust, security and peace.

The Soviet mass media have often referred to Zoya Novozhilova as a model "contemporary Soviet woman." But what meaning does Zoya put into this notion? For her, the "modern woman" is one who

grasps and expresses most fully the ideas and the spirit of the times. She is sorry she cannot devote as much time to her family as she'd like. She thinks the Soviet government was right to take measures to enable working women to devote more time to their children and family.

Her plans as ambassador boil down to promoting co-operation and mutual understanding with the host country. The main goal is to gain friends for her country, friends in the broadest sense of the word. "This will become possible only when the country you are ambassador to has confidence in you," said Zoya Novozhilova.

