

**Reuters, BERLIN, 5. April 2002**

When German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder visited the Rotkaeppchen sparkling wine firm in 2000 he slashed the head off a bottle with a sword as tradition demands, downed glasses of wine and rode around on a bicycle.

When Edmund Stoiber, his conservative challenger in national elections in September, came to the factory this week, he hardly touched a drop and sat down for a serious 40-minute chat with staff about the problems of working for an east German company.

The contrast between Schroeder, the four-times married, cigar-smoking northerner and the most media-savvy politician on Germany's staid political scene, and the stiff, teetotal Bavarian grandfather Stoiber could not have been greater.

Now Stoiber's campaign team, desperate to beef up their champion's poor personal popularity ratings, have decided to highlight his media-shyness as a strength.

„He's authentic, he's not someone who has let himself be sand-papered smooth by media requirements,“ Stoiber's campaign manager Michael Spreng said, presenting a series of posters of Stoiber under the slogan „Hard-Edged, Genuine, Successful“.

That makes him the opposite of Schroeder, conservatives say. They have little option but to bank on Stoiber's authenticity, because the Bavarian premier has displayed a singular lack of media skills since his January nomination as conservative candidate pushed him into the national spotlight. His weaknesses became apparent in a television chat show with journalist Sabine Christiansen in January.

Stoiber forgot the name of Deutsche Telekom chairman Ron Sommer in mid-sentence, mixed up the name of the interviewer and came up with sentences so complex one satirist later offered money to anyone who could explain what he was talking about.

#### STOIBER NEEDS COACHING

„He needs to be taught to be more brief and precise,“ said *Richard Schuetze*, chief executive of ipse Communication, a consultancy specialising in public relations coaching.

„Stoiber is honest and authentic, he has passion and is principled. His weakness is that he gets lost in long sentences, is too impatient with himself and others so he doesn't appear as commanding and relaxed as others do,“ *Schuetze* said.

„But his appearances could get entertainment value. If he can laugh about it, it could become a strength.“

Stoiber has challenged Schroeder to televised debates ahead of the election. Analysts said the Bavarian will need to improve his presentation skills to make a good showing.

Schroeder, by contrast, has mastered the art of media appearances, *Schuetze* said.

„He is disciplined and very good at controlling his body language-his head is always straight, eyes always open, he always looks at his interviewer. He is strong in dialogue and in statement.“

„But his weakness is that he does not always appear passionate about what he's saying. One sometimes has the impression he could proclaim the lottery numbers in a statesmanlike way,“ *Schuetze* said.

Stoiber's conservatives lead Schroeder's Social Democrats in opinion polls. But a majority of people would still rather see Schroeder as chancellor than Stoiber, and would vote for the Social Democrat if Germany had a direct voting system.

The Electoral Research Group polling institute says Stoiber's personal popularity has fallen in recent weeks, with 40 percent of people saying they would want to see him as chancellor, compared with 50 percent for Schroeder.

„Stoiber is under pressure. He knows the conservatives stand a good chance of winning in upcoming elections. He is now determined to see it through and visibly feels responsibility for success or defeat on his shoulders,“ *Schuetze* said.

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