

## PASSINGS

MARGHERITA HACK

### Scientist fought for civil rights

Margherita Hack, 91, an astrophysicist who explained her research on the stars in plain language for the public and who championed civil rights in her native Italy, died Saturday in the Adriatic Sea town of Trieste, where she had headed an astronomical observatory.

The Italian news agency ANSA quoted family friend Marinella Chirico as saying Hack died in a hospital after being treated for heart problems.

Hack was the first woman to oversee the observatory in Trieste, from 1964 to 1987, and was a popular and frequent commentator in Italian media about discoveries in astronomy and physics.

The current director of the observatory, Stefano Borgani, told the television channel Sky TG24 that Hack was one of the first astronomers to "have the intuition" that the future of astronomical observation lay in using space satellites.

An atheist who decried the Vatican's influence on Italian politicians, Hack helped fight a successful battle to legalize abortion in Italy. She unsuccessfully lobbied for the right to euthanasia and also cham-



Associated Press

#### ACTIVIST

The Italian astrophysicist had a knack for explaining things simply.

pioned gay rights. Among her victories was a campaign against construction of nuclear reactors in Italy. A vegetarian since childhood, she also was an advocate for animal protection and lived with eight cats and a dog.

Hack was born June 12, 1922, in Florence. She liked to joke that the "first and last" time she was in a church was for her marriage to Aldo De Rosa, also a Florentine, in 1944. She agreed to a church ceremony only because the groom's parents were religious.

She enrolled at the University of Florence as a student of literature but, after one class, switched to physics. She graduated in 1945 and by the early 1950s was an astronomer at the Tuscan city's astronomical observatory.

— TIMES WIRE REPORTS

news.obits@latimes.com