


Interview with Catherine Lalumière: François Mitterrand’s commitment to the accession of Spain and Portugal to the European Communities (Paris, 17 May 2006)

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[Étienne Deschamps] What did President Mitterrand think of these internal hesitations among the French people?

[Catherine Lalumière] You know, François Mitterrand understood the French mentality very well. I don't believe that he was surprised. But it did not throw him off course. The need to achieve results, which I mentioned earlier, remained: 'They will join; sort it out, negotiate as best you can — but it will happen.'

[Étienne Deschamps] Because Mitterrand, precisely, focused on the political and symbolic implications of this accession.

[Catherine Lalumière] Of course. Of course, and history proved him to be absolutely right. That just goes to show how important political commitment is. I am not defending stubbornness; that is quite a different matter. However, after giving careful thought to the situation, if a statesman has views about major issues which will have significant consequences, it is his responsibility to express a conviction, a decision, and to bring everyone else along with him.

I must say that, during this time, being responsible for European Affairs was a very comfortable position. I would not say that the negotiations were easy — no, technically, they were not easy — but I was in a comfortable position as I was able to base my actions on a clearly formulated political conviction. And Mitterrand personified this clearly formulated political conviction. If I had been in total disagreement, I knew where the door was, I could resign; but no, I shared this conviction. I would probably not have been capable, personally, of setting the tone as he did, but he was the President, so it was his role. We put into practice what he considered to be beneficial both for France and for Europe.