

Interview with Catherine Lalumière: a People's Europe (Paris, 17 May 2006)

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[Étienne Deschamps] 1984 was clearly a turning point, an important year, because it was the year in which the Fontainebleau European Council took place. And among the issues discussed by the Ten at the Fontainebleau European Council was that of a People's Europe. We know how much François Mitterrand was attached to this notion, to this concept. What did it involve? What were the real implications of this People's Europe?

[Catherine Lalumière] A People's Europe was indeed something that was discussed a great deal. In many ways it is similar to the issues that are being debated at the moment, in 2005–2006. A working group had been set up under the chairmanship of Mr Adonnino, a very Europe-minded Italian, a professor, a legal expert, who was very familiar with these issues. The Adonnino group had made some proposals to bring Europe closer to the people, in a spirit of democratisation, one might say now. And that inspired a number of measures that would later follow, including the Single Act. But they were exactly the same problems as today.

Quite simply, at the time, it was the beginning of a process of realisation: the realisation that, insidiously, a gulf was forming between the European institutions, which met in Brussels — the Commission, the Council, the beginnings of the European Parliament ... we were right at the start of all that — and the general public. And the problems — the solutions would come, they would gradually start to come — the problems were recognised at that time, but the seriousness of the problems has increased since then. And it was 1984. The Adonnino group was in 1984.

[Étienne Deschamps] 1984, 1985, 1986 ... Decisions were being taken and, once again, President Mitterrand played an important role; we can think back to particularly memorable photos in which we see him displaying a European passport. That might seem to be a mere detail, but do you remember the difficulties involved in the introduction of this European passport?

[Catherine Lalumière] As far as the European passport itself is concerned, I don't have any precise memories of particular difficulties. But we were aware that it was a false European passport, because it was a national passport, granted under the aegis of the European Community — now it is the European Union — but it is exactly like the issue of citizenship: we are citizens of Europe because we are citizens of a Member State of Europe. It is necessary to have national citizenship or go via the offices that issue passports at the national level first. There is no direct European citizenship, it is always indirect citizenship, and for the passport it's the same thing. It is a passport which is a national passport, but one issued with Europe's 'blessing'.