

## Short biography of Édith Cresson

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**URL:** [http://www.cvce.eu/obj/short\\_biography\\_of\\_edith\\_cresson-en-eofb157e-0f09-4dba-b125-6d2da4ed43b1.html](http://www.cvce.eu/obj/short_biography_of_edith_cresson-en-eofb157e-0f09-4dba-b125-6d2da4ed43b1.html)

**Last updated:** 05/07/2016



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Édith Cresson was born on 27 January 1934 in Boulogne sur Seine and graduated from the HEC School of Management (the girls' division of the school, known as the *HEC jeunes filles*). She has a PhD in Demographics and started her career as an economist. Her political career began during François Mitterrand's election campaign for the 1965 presidential elections, and she joined the French Socialist Party (PS) when it was founded in 1971. She was Mayor of Thuré, Poitou-Charentes (1977–1983), and of Châtelleraut, Poitou-Charentes (1983–1997), and was elected to the European Parliament in 1979.

She left the European Parliament and became Member of Parliament for Vienne (1981) and then Minister for Agriculture in the Pierre Mauroy government. She faced pressure both from French farmers, who were little pleased to see a woman in this Ministry and suspected her of defending their interests in Brussels ineptly, and from France's partners, with whom she negotiated during the major European negotiations on agricultural prices.

After her time spent in Agriculture, she became Minister for Foreign Trade and Tourism (1983–84) in the government of Pierre Mauroy and Minister for Industrial Redeployment and Foreign Trade (1984–1986) in the government of Laurent Fabius. Despite the Socialists' defeat in the parliamentary elections held in 1986, she once again became Member of Parliament for Vienne (1986–1988). From 1987 to 1991 she was also President of the *France Exporte Plus* association, which aimed to help small and medium-sized French businesses enter foreign markets.

After the re-election of François Mitterrand in 1988, Édith Cresson became Minister for European Affairs (1988–90) in the government of Michel Rocard. She was involved in preparations for the French Presidency of the European Economic Community in 1989 and the establishment of the single market on 1 January 1993. She formed the *Groupes d'Études et de Mobilisation* (GEM), through which she was able to be involved in all the major European issues, including the Schengen Agreements, the European automotive industry and public audiovisual services.

Édith Cresson resigned in November 1990 to create a subsidiary of Schneider: Services, Industries, Strategies, International and Environment (Sisie). She was responsible for encouraging French companies to invest in the new markets of Central and Eastern Europe. A few months later, in 1991, François Mitterrand appointed her Prime Minister. The President of the Republic deemed her capable of preparing France for the single market. The government's European policy largely depended on her Minister for European Affairs, Elisabeth Guigou.

In 1992, François Mitterrand replaced Édith Cresson by Pierre Bérégovoy at the head of the government. She again became leader of Sisie, then, on the initiative of François Mitterrand, was appointed a Member of the European Commission of which Luxembourgish Jacques Santer was President. She took over the portfolio of Science, Research, Development, Education and Training, which covered a quarter of the Commission's staff. In 1999, Édith Cresson was caught up in the turmoil which led the Santer Commission to resign. Since 2001, she has led the *Fondation des écoles de la deuxième chance* ('Second Chance Schools' Foundation).