

Short biography of Nicole Fontaine

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Nicole Fontaine was born on 16 January 1942 in Grainville-Ymauville, Normandy. She started her career at the General Secretariat of Catholic Education, which is particularly responsible for relations between the private education sector and the public authorities. She was a Member of the French National Education Council (1975–1981) and sat on the French Economic and Social Council from 1980 to 1984.

As a member of the Union for French Democracy (UDF) and the Democratic and Social Centre (CDS), she was elected a Member of the European Parliament in 1984, when Jean Lecanuet, then leader of the UDF, recommended her nomination to Simone Veil, head of the list submitted by this party, as a result of Nicole Fontaine's rise to prominence during the debates on private education at the beginning of the seven-year presidential term of François Mitterrand. She was re-elected to the European Parliament in 1989 (CDS list), 1994, 1999 (UDF list) and 2004 (Union for a Popular Movement list).

She became fourth Vice-President of the European Parliament in the early 1990s, and first Vice-President in 1994. In this capacity, she co-chaired the Conciliation Committee provided for under the codecision procedure comprising representatives of the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. She was therefore involved in the most important European issues.

After the election of Jacques Chirac, whom she had supported, as President of the French Republic in 1995, Nicole Fontaine did not seek to become a member of Alain Juppé's government. She stood for the first time for the post of President of the European Parliament in 1997, but chose to withdraw when the European People's Party (EPP) and the Party of European Socialists (PES) both agreed to support José Maria Gil-Robles (EPP). However, she remained first Vice-President.

On 20 July 1999, she was elected President of the European Parliament. For the first time in 10 years, agreement was not reached between the PES and the EPP. The EPP teamed up with the European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party. As a result, Nicole Fontaine lost her post to the Liberal Pat Cox on 14 January 2002. The two and a half years that she spent as President of the European Parliament saw Nicole Fontaine tackle particularly demanding issues. After the collapse of the Santer Commission, she improved relations between Parliament and the Commission, whose President was Romano Prodi. Moreover, the European Parliament, which enjoyed greater powers under the Treaty of Amsterdam, had to confirm its new position within the institutions of the Union and with regard to the outside world. In the Middle East, for example, she called for the establishment of a regional water authority. The negotiations for the 2004 enlargement were also under way.

As President of the European Parliament, Nicole Fontaine emphasised the need to restore direction to the Union. She called for the European Parliament to be involved in the CFSP and in the work carried out by the IGC in preparation for the Treaty of Nice. In 1994, as a French citizen, she called for the presence of French MPs in the European Parliament with the publication of a work entitled *Les députés européens: qui sont-ils, que font-ils?* (MEPS: who are they, what do they do?)

When Jacques Chirac was re-elected in 2002, she was appointed Minister for Industry in the government of Jean-Pierre Raffarin and left the European Parliament. Between 2004 and 2005, she chaired the Scelles Foundation, which fights against sexual exploitation. She was once again elected to the European Parliament in 2004 and left the Foundation shortly afterwards to concentrate on her role as MEP.