

## Interview with Nicole Fontaine: the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2000 (Brussels, 5 February 2008)

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[Étienne Deschamps] In the second half of 2000, France held the rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Do you remember the way in which the European Parliament and the French Presidency were able to prepare for this Council Presidency, this event and especially, of course, the Nice European Council, which you mentioned earlier? How was the institutional relationship between the rotating Presidency and the European Parliament established for such an occasion?

[Nicole Fontaine] It was not a good Presidency. I think that we need to state things plainly. I am not revealing any secrets, I believe that everyone realises it. The cohabitation also had a particularly negative effect, it must be said, and relations were very difficult. During the French Presidency, yes, Mr Moscovici, who at the time was Minister for European Affairs, often came to see us because he had been a Member of the European Parliament ... so he often came to see us, but there wasn't really any ...

[Étienne Deschamps] The fact of your being French didn't change anything?

[Nicole Fontaine] No.

[Étienne Deschamps] It didn't simplify or complicate certain things?

[Nicole Fontaine] No.

[Étienne Deschamps] It was entirely secondary?

[Nicole Fontaine] Entirely secondary. Yes. Entirely secondary, and in practice the failure of the Nice Summit was due to the fact that ... there was no real political will to make the necessary concessions for a Union of 25 that could work. Everyone arrived with the sole aim of defending their own territory, and rather than saying: 'What can I bring to the marriage to make it a success?' They wanted to know: 'How shall I be able to hold onto ... Who'll get my share ... How shall I get back ...? And it was very, very bad ...

[Étienne Deschamps] Of course. It was a guaranteed failure.

[Nicole Fontaine] And at 4 o'clock in the morning when I phoned Jacques Chirac and said to him that I thought that a provisional failure was better than concluding a disastrous agreement ...