

Interview with Paul Collowald: the origins of his European vocation (Sanem, 27 and 28 June 2002)

Source: Interview de Paul Collowald / PAUL COLLOWALD, Étienne Deschamps, prise de vue : Alexandre Germain.- Sanem: CVCE [Prod.], 27.-28.06.2002. CVCE, Sanem. - VIDEO (00:02:31, Couleur, Son original).

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Last updated: 05/07/2016

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[Étienne Deschamps] When the war came to an end, had you already been made aware of European affairs?

[Paul Collowald] Since my family has its origins in Lorraine, in the Moselle region itself, and I was born in Alsace, you will appreciate that in these border areas one is drawn either towards some sort of chauvinist stance, which may well be quite honourable, or towards one that is European. You will have understood that I opted for the European position. That is why, when I began working for the *Nouvel Alsacien*, when I was still quite young and since I spoke German well I had studied the German press, my Chief Editor said to me: 'I am sending you to Germany for 48 hours. Cross the Rhine, sort yourself out and bring me back a report on German youth after Nazism.' This is how in Offenburg I came across Fr Jean du Rivau, a Jesuit, who had launched one of the first Franco–German initiatives which led to the establishment of BILD, the International Bureau of Liaison and Documentation, chaired until just recently by Joseph Rován, who himself had been in Dachau concentration camp — that is just to give you an idea of the set-up. As a young journalist, it was crossing the Rhine that marked this turning-point for me, for in my youth, when I was studying for my baccalaureate, it was the Maginot line and the Siegfried line. This was the post-war period; I crossed the Rhine and I wrote my first report on the damage wrought by Nazism on our youth, as we would say today.

I wrote quite a few reports like this, and when the Council of Europe opened its doors in August 1949 there began for me what was an adventure both personally, as I think we shall see, and, at the same time, professionally, one linked to Europe and close to Robert Schuman.