Transcription of the interview with Jacques Delors — Part 2 — Jacques Delors's career before becoming President of the European Commission (Paris, 16 December 2009)

Caption: Transcription of the interview with Jacques Delors, President of the Commission of the European Communities from 1985 to 1995, conducted by the Centre Virtuel de la Connaissance sur l'Europe (CVCE) on 16 December 2009 at the Paris-based premises of the think tank 'Notre Europe', of which Jacques Delors is the founding director. The interview was conducted by Étienne Deschamps, a Researcher at the CVCE, and particularly focuses on the following subjects: the origins of Delors's interest in European integration, the influence of the personalist movement, the National Planning Board, Jacques Chaban-Delmas, social dialogue and 'New Society', Delors's early experience in the European Communities and role as Member of the European Parliament, and European political parties.

Source: Interview de Jacques Delors / JACQUES DELORS, Étienne Deschamps, prise de vue : Alexandre Germain.- Paris: CVCE [Prod.], 16.12.2009. CVCE, Sanem. - VIDEO (00:41:44, Couleur, Son original).

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I. The origins of Jacques Delors's interest in European integration

[Étienne Deschamps] Mr Delors, very soon after the war, as a young adolescent, you embarked on a career as an activist in the Christian student youth movement, more precisely in the …

[Jacques Delors] … in the JOC.

[Étienne Deschamps] … the Young Christian Workers Movement, that's right. Was it at that time, just a few years after the end of the war, that the idea of a rapprochement among nations which had only recently been enemies was something which already attracted you into the public debate?

[Jacques Delors] It was my father who taught me it. He'd been 90 % disabled in the 1914–18 war, left for dead on the battlefield, so he'd been horrified to see the events of the 1930s and other things coming and he'd always taught me when I was young that ways had to be found of reconciling people. So it's to my father that I owe that.

[Étienne Deschamps] And — this question may sound a bit abrupt — but would it be right to say that for you as a young man just emerging from a period of occupation, Germany, the hereditary enemy that people were now aiming to come to an understanding with, was a […]

[Jacques Delors] It was fairly simple for me, I had a German penfriend because I studied German at the Lycée Voltaire before the war. Then, as I went to seven secondary schools, the languages changed. I was worried about what had become of him. Secondly, I had to hide so as not to be sent on compulsory labour service, the STO. I moved. But when the Liberation came, bearing in mind what my father had said to me, I thought that what needed to be done was […], and then I also knew from history that the Treaty of Versailles hadn't been very well thought-out from the point of view of peace in Europe, so the outcome of all this was that at the age of 19 I thought we needed to find a solution. But I'd just had a year of dropping out of ordinary life to avoid the STO, I had my school-leaving certificate. I thought my parents had done enough for me and I ought to work. So as soon as the Liberation came, and really because it was what my father wanted, I joined the Bank of France.

[Étienne Deschamps] And in movements like the JOC, were European questions something people talked about at that time, or not yet?

[Jacques Delors] I was in the JOC mainly from 1936 to 1940 and then again from 1944, and at that time what mainly concerned us were the problems of the working class, its role, the lack of Christians or the lack of enough Christians in that community. As soon as I got the job at the Bank of France, I joined the union to carry on with my work — well, I say my work — my involvement as a member of the Young Christian Workers Movement, which taught me a lot, because not all my comrades had had the good luck to stay on at school till the school-leaving exam at 18. They had left school at the age of 14 or 15, or 16, so all that taught me a lot about inequality. When it came down to it, my great motivation was the struggle against inequality

more than Europe.

[Étienne Deschamps] In the late 1940s, early 1950s, there was obviously a great deal of European excitement surrounding the ECSC and other schemes which did or did not come off, and there were European movements remarkably committed to federalism which were active in Paris and elsewhere. As a young man at that time, were you aware of these structures or involved in them?

[Jacques Delors] No, because until 1952 I had to combine work, studying, union business and my involvement in a basketball team which was high in the league, so that was quite enough to be getting on with. I was married, I had children, so I wasn't very aware of all that. How it came about was through trade unionism and the reluctance of a minority of the CFTC (the French Confederation of Christian Workers), which later became the majority, to sign up to a form of European integration which would be too dominated by Germany. Most of all, we wondered whether France would be able to really commit to the movement, which meant that we were in favour of Europe, but we wondered whether France would be capable of standing fast. There you are, that's what accounts for the articles I was able to write, under the pen name of Roger Jacques, since my position as an official of the bank prevented me from doing more, so what were saying was: 'If only France can hold out!' That was the issue that concerned us. But the appeal from Robert Schuman had touched our hearts and our minds, as I was saying to your colleague a short time ago.

[Étienne Deschamps] A few years before, the CFTC had very quickly, and especially through the ECSC or the Economic and Social Committee of the ECSC, in Luxembourg, become involved, like a great many other trade unions, in […]

[Jacques Delors] And it also had a member in the High Authority whom I knew well and who taught me a lot. So there you are, the CFTC was there, even the minority which used to oppose us on other issues was there and fundamentally … But as for me, you see, you have to understand what my schedule was like, I used to spend eight or nine hours a day at the Bank of France, then I would go and be an activist at the CFTC, then on to Vie Nouvelle, and so I was extremely busy. I wasn't born with a silver spoon in my mouth, you see. So it was a great deal of work for me, but I did it.

[Étienne Deschamps] You mentioned that the call by Robert Schuman, his declaration of 9 May 1950, left a mark on you, as it did on all the young men and women of your generation. Were you also sensitive to the European project and European points of view, over and above the personality of Schuman himself and the MRP (the Popular Republican Movement)?

[Jacques Delors] Yes, because I was a member of the MRP for nine months, but to be honest I didn't like it. Not to criticise, just to mention in passing that I didn't like it. But even so I always kept, even being more left-wing — first of all, the Jeune République — a large party before but a small party when I was in it — then the Unified Socialist Party. I was, after all, very sensitive to European viewpoints, which accounts for the good luck I had when I became President of the European Commission to be at the crossroads between the Socialists and the Christian Democrats without any difficulties. I was able to have a dialogue with both of them, and every possible opportunity for doing it.

[Étienne Deschamps] Did you ever have a chance to meet Robert Schuman?

[Jacques Delors] No, I didn't. I met the Head of his Private Office, who became my boss at the Bank of France, but I never had the opportunity of meeting him, although in 1962 I was in at the establishment of the Commissariat Général au Plan, the National Planning Board, but unfortunately I never had the pleasure of meeting him in my life. But I used to keep up with him at a distance, and I more or less got to know him, but it took me some time. I myself, at the beginning, was in favour of reconciliation, then I was for the building of a balanced Europe without too much domination by Germany, to be frank, and then I began to develop all these ideas in greater detail, somewhere around 1958 to 1962, that was it.

II. The influence of the personalist movement

[Étienne Deschamps] In 1953, when you and your wife joined the personalist Vie Nouvelle movement, were you aware of the European ideas which were already being advocated between the wars by Jacques Maritain and Emmanuel Mounier — and, if so, did you share them?

[Jacques Delors] Yes, I had read up on all that in my spare time. I'd read it all and it had made a great impression on me, especially Maritain, who now has his foundation in Rome, I believe. It was always my underlying inspiration, so to speak. So, over and above events which I wasn't always capable of evaluating properly, I wasn't in a position of responsibility, but I was perfectly sensitive to it, and especially from the European point of view, to Maritain. And then there was a revelation, it was when Hannah Arendt talked about forgiveness and promise. There you are, I said to myself, there is the formula which will justify the path they are following. She published it at the beginning of the 1960s, but forgiveness which does not mean forgetting, and the promise that the new generations in Germany would be brought back into the community completely convinced me and I have to say that that was the moment when I realised that Robert Schuman's appeal — excuse me for saying this, people will say it's Christian — was of a high spiritual value. Not just political but spiritual. And that was the day when I said: 'There you are, your path is mapped out.'

[Étienne Deschamps] Did you meet Maritain and Mounier?

[Jacques Delors] No, I didn't meet either of them, but I used to be around *Esprit* magazine, including writing articles as early as the 1950s, and communitarian personalism is still my line. As it isn't the magazine's line any more, I can go ahead and say it. *Esprit* is still an interesting magazine, I have a subscription to it, but it never talks about communitarian personalism any more, a philosophy that to my mind is a conception of man who isn't alone in the world, who also defines himself in relation to others, and that is what gave communitarianism, which is so disparaged nowadays, its essential value. So disparaged now. If I say I am a communitarian today, everyone in France pours scorn on me. What does communitarianism mean? It means that I'm not alone, that I don't make myself what I am by myself, that I also make myself what I am with others. It means that my personality is a multiple personality, also because of other people. It isn't a political system, communitarianism, it's a philosophical system. These days, unfortunately, apart from the movements in Spain, Italy and South America … next year, thanks to some comrades, we're going to hold a meeting on personalism in Rennes … But I've remained faithful to the cause, I've explained it in several magazines, with rather modernist thinking coming from those who concern themselves with the human mind at the moment, but I'm standing by it. I stand by it and I think there is a link between that and my commitment to Europe.

[Étienne Deschamps] I was going to ask you that question. Would you say that that commitment to Europe of yours has been guided, spurred on by personalism?

[Jacques Delors] My father, who was a born personalist, my father, you see, I really have a great deal of admiration for that man who between the wars never […], well, as I told you, he ended up on the battlefield at Verdun. A German officer wanted to finish him off and he got out of it, even if they did shoot at him again. But my father was like that, a great fighter in the Great War — a dreadful war — who said: 'We can't go on like this!' That's an important message. Perhaps it was the greatest message he ever gave me, I've always held onto it, that and the communitarian personalism I still believe in. There aren't many of us left.

[Étienne Deschamps] And how were you able to put this communitarian personalism into practice in the active political life you then embarked on?

[Jacques Delors] The Left. There's this saying by a Swiss writer that 'Nature is on the right, man is on the Left'. That's all. I think that believing in man means being on the Left. After that you can then start defining it in different ways. There are people in the present majority who think like me. But that's it, that's my point of view, I believe in man with my eyes open.

III. Activities and training at the National Planning Board

[Étienne Deschamps] In 1962, you joined the Commissariat au Plan, the National Planning Board. What mark had Jean Monnet left on his former associates at that time? I know you were close to someone like Jean Ripert.

[Jacques Delors] Oh yes, very close! I was very lucky on that one because the Bank of France, despite my working there, had agreed to my being the CFTC representative on the Economic and Social Committee. And I produced a report on the objectives of the Fourth Plan which Jean Monnet, thanks also to Ripert; which Mr Massé, I should say, working at the National Planning Board, saw, and he recruited me to the Planning Board, the best years of my life, 1962–68, at the Planning Board. It was really wonderful! An intellectual atmosphere, an atmosphere of social dialogue, wonderful! I can never thank fate enough for giving me that period of my life. For me, it was the best I ever had. So I was as happy as anything, the Bank of France agreed to release me on secondment, saying: 'It's a pity, because you had a good career going at the Bank of France,' but I was absolutely drawn to it. Jean Ripert, Paul Lemerle, the head of the economic department, those people … and as for me, I've always been passionate about public service, I was sorry I hadn't … well, the Bank of France is public service too, I suppose — but for me public service is fundamental. Even today, I only believe in that. As a vocation.

[Étienne Deschamps] And was Jean Monnet someone people still talked about at the rue de Martignac?

[Jacques Delors] Yes, they talked about him, they talked about the committees on modernisation, about that concerted action in the committees, but also the fact that the Commissioner for Planning, who was a genius that no one talks about any more, Pierre Massé [sic]. There had been Mr Hirsch, the grandfather of the current Martin Hirsch, to give you an idea, for people who'll see this. And then there was Pierre Massé, who was an EDF man, a wonderful man, who wrote things that are forgotten now. That man had ties to the President of the Republic, General de Gaulle, the Prime Minister. So we were playing an important part, intellectually and even politically. It was a marvellous training ground for me because … I've always been lucky. At the Bank of France, even when I was young, I had the Governor sending me back a paper I'd drawn up enthusiastically the evening before, because it was six pages long, and he said to me: 'Two pages, Mr Delors!' And then the same with Massé, which means that I learned to work, I didn't know how to work. I have learned a great deal from others, and those people […], I was lucky. I'm not saying anything else, I'm not saying I deserved it, I was just lucky. And then I got a lot from Vie Nouvelle and it was a way of working with my wife and so on. All that … there wasn't much time for leisure pursuits as such, but it worked. And the Planning Board was marvellous because in 1963 I was the rapporteur on the miners' strike, a famous strike, which can teach us a lot of lessons for the future, so those were the best years of my life.

[Étienne Deschamps] Europe wasn't top of the list of things which concerned you at that time?

[Jacques Delors] Well, yes, it was, because I was interested in Europe, I talked a lot about it in *Citoyen 60*. If you have the collection, you'll see that we did a lot of articles. We were very European-minded, unlike part of the Left. And we were also on very intimate terms with Michel Rocard, who was the great man of the new Left. It wasn't me, it was him. And who worked a lot. Earlier, there were a lot of things that tied us together and the clubs were cosied up to at the time. Jean Moulin, for example, but ours too. So if you look at the collection you'll see that we produced a lot of issues about Europe. In the midst of general scepticism too.

[Étienne Deschamps] In many things you've written, you've explained the reasons for your attachment to the work and the personality of someone like Pierre Mendès France. You'll be aware that historians and militant Europeans, or at any rate federalists, are still to this day inclined to view Mendès France's work for Europe, strictly his work for Europe, rather critically, and I'm thinking particularly of the EDC. At the time, the early 1950s, were you personally judgemental about the action taken concerning Europe?

[Jacques Delors] I think that on that, and only as far as I'm concerned, you do need to draw some distinctions. To begin with, I would never have gone into politics if it hadn't been for Mendès France — because it was a way of viewing the State, the dialogue with the citizens, which suited me perfectly. When he was in power, I wasn't involved. But friends helped me a lot, like Simon Nora and others. That's the first point. Secondly, concerning the EDC, I felt deep down that it was too early for it. I knew it wouldn't get past the Assembly. We had to fight long and hard for him to become truly European afterwards, because perhaps at the start with the EDC it wasn't feasible, it was too early. I don't think people's hearts were in it. But at the end of the years of his political life, at the beginning of the 1960s and so on, he became more European. But frankly he wasn't at the outset. There was a question mark, but not because of the EDC. Generally speaking. He also thought France wasn't ready for it. And then he didn't have my approach. My approach was communitarian, so we didn't have the same approach. We argued a lot. I often saw him afterwards, we argued a lot. But afterwards he became very European. And up to 1980, he became very European in the 1970s and 1980s, but he wrote a book, *La science économique et l'action*, which was really a book where — people talk about Keynes nowadays; they should read that book. Even though some of the things it says are dated now. There was something inspiring there in the best of what there is in Keynes. All that touched me too, because we wondered whether France would take the road leading to modernisation. It's not just a question of rebuilding but of taking the turning towards the first process of modernisation — now there's a second modernisation going on — the first steps towards modernisation.

[Étienne Deschamps] Which accounts for the attachment you still have for the work you were able to do at the National Planning Board.

[Jacques Delors] Oh yes, for me that was fundamental. It was my happiest professional experience, but not only that — we did a lot of things. And today it's all forgotten, they've even abolished the Planning Board and replaced it with a CAS (a Centre for Strategic Analysis). But they've forgotten one thing, which is that the Planning Board was in a society in difficulty, like French society, and it isn't the only one. You're Belgian, are you? Right, then you'll know. In this kind of society in difficulty, a place where everyone can say frankly what they think — the intellectual can give his assessment, the employer can say what his difficulties are, the trade unionist can say what's worrying him — it's essential. It's all very well having a good adviser at the Élysée, nothing can replace a place like that, and it was killed off. And at the time we […], you know, when I was drafting the report on the miners' strike, my wife invited every trade unionist to dinner, every trade union, to tell them […] — it was all about reports — it wasn't about ticking them off, it was so as to understand them better. And to tell them there were things that could be done and things that couldn't be done. That body, the National Planning Board, set up by Jean Monnet and run by Mr Hirsch and Mr Pierre Massé, it was a central institution for an extremely centralised society, a divided society which was already anxious about its future. And that institution was managed remarkably well by those three men. Jean Monnet was mostly about reconstruction, modernisation, he used to frighten the bosses when he would say to them: 'We're going to increase everything by 50 %.' Martin Hirsch [sic] wasn't there long but he was a European, and Massé of course was a genius. And then there was Jean Ripert, who did whatever he could. But nowadays the institution is […], even people on the Right say to me: 'Why didn't they keep the National Planning Board, when we have problems with public expenditure and revenue and we need some forecasting done? If it came from an external institution, it would carry greater weight.' So France has lost out there, it's an unfortunate decision by the Prime Minister, Mr de Villepin.

[Étienne Deschamps] And the National Planning Board was also a training ground for other, less public figures who were nevertheless heavily involved in European questions. I'm thinking of someone like Paul Delouvrier.

[Jacques Delors] Yes, there was also Mr Ortoli, the Commissioner at the Planning Board, appointed by Mr Pompidou. That changed him, François-Xavier. He was a remarkable man even so, unfortunately, and I miss him. He had an extraordinary power of diagnosis. He understood all that when he came to work at the Planning Board. He realised it was a vital crossroads for French society and one which has gone now. Other countries have tried it, I've talked about it to Mr Prodi, with what happened in Italy; in the Netherlands it's even more clear-cut. In extremely divided societies, even if the divide between social classes isn't as bad as it used to be, we need a body like that in France. Unfortunately they wanted to turn it into a think tank,

fascinated as they were by British and German ideas, which are different but which they didn't apply. In Britain, it's a few people in the Cabinet Office; in Germany it's a Council of independent thinkers, but they haven't found the right answer. We had the right answer, and now we've lost it.

[Étienne Deschamps] About the personal relationships you made a point of maintaining in these negotiations when you were at the Planning Board, that social dialogue, have you been able to keep it up, or have you at least tried following the same practice when you've been in front-line European jobs?

[Jacques Delors] No, firstly in 1969–72 with Chaban-Delmas, an experiment people take no notice of now, because when we decided to give some thought to the anniversary of May 1968, 40 years later, we went straight from Gaullism-Pompidouism to Giscard, but that experiment, which went on for three years, was a very important one. It really was then, as people on the Right used to say, that we restored good industrial relations, in inverted commas. So it was a really important experiment and I remembered it when I was appointed President of the Commission. I remembered it. I was appointed in June, and as early as July 2004 I telephoned UNICE and the CES and said to them: 'See you in January at Val Duchesse!' because I don't think anything can be done without that. It's an essential feature of the European model. So a lot was done, a lot more than people think today, and it's been forgotten. That, perhaps, is what I'm most proud of deep down — because it wasn't easy. When I did it, there were ten friends around the country who said to me: 'We wouldn't bet one ecu on it working.' And it did work. But it wasn't a case of moving forward shrouded in mystery. The trade unions, you see — you can read the book about the trade unions which Emilio Gabelio is bringing out in Italian in the next few weeks, with a respected Italian historian — you'll see that it wasn't […], it meant a lot to them, too.

IV. Jacques Chaban-Delmas, social dialogue and 'New Society'

[Étienne Deschamps] You've mentioned the kind of man Jacques Chaban-Delmas was. Talk to us a little about the 'New Society'. What was it all about, and what was the nature, the essence of that singularly French plan in the international context of the time?

[Jacques Delors] Already in the 1960s, when he was President of the National Assembly, Jacques Chaban-Delmas had called together some really important figures, including Mr Laroque, the father of social security in France, and Mr Chalandon, to have discussions with them about the future of France. He'd been struck at a meeting with Johnson, who succeeded Kennedy if I'm not mistaken. He'd talked to him about the great society. It was he who'd thought up that expression, because he thought that after May '68 people had to be offered a prospect of convergence, not division — division between generations, between social classes, and so on — so it was his idea. And so, when he put it to me, I said to myself: 'The country, France has been very shaken by what happened in 1968, we must prevent things going from bad to worse.' So we went with a man even more important than me, Simon Nora, who worked with Mendès France. A man who had made his choice carry weight. So Chaban-Delmas wanted to give France the prospect of progress and reconciliation and convergence with the social aspect elevated to the same level as the economic aspect. Unluckily, the experiment did actually succeed, and the people who were most afraid of the outcome got peaceful industrial relations. Because a lot of people were afraid after May '68, they put up with it for three years, but after three years they said: 'That's enough of that! Things have calmed down again, let's get back to the good old traditions we're used to!' So Mr Chaban-Delmas was turfed out, not as a result of political horse-trading or for ethical reasons but simply because the people who were running France said: 'That's enough of that! It's too bold, what he's doing, we're going back to a quiet life.' That's what it was. It's a disgrace to French society, but that's how it happened. You will notice, though, that all the journals that have looked at the 40 years since 1968 have neglected to mention that episode. I'm not saying it because I was part of it but because I've been given an opportunity of speaking for the historical record and it needed to be remembered.

[Étienne Deschamps] It is strange, indeed, that two people you've been talking to us about in this interview, Jacques Chaban-Delmas and Pierre Mendès France, are curiously pretty well forgotten by the younger

generations today.

[Jacques Delors] Well, there you are.

[Étienne Deschamps] And it's a question which historians, however old they are, are asking. How can it be that figures such as those …

[Jacques Delors] The whole make-up of France needs reviewing by historians, the way France is made up, its self-regard, its fantasies, its aspirations and its frustrations need reviewing in the light of those two events. Not just because there was colonialism in one of them and May '68 but, in a more general way, to try to grasp the place France holds in Europe and the world. Those two had situated it very well. Mr Pompidou too, in his European policy. It needs saying.

V. Early experience in the European Communities and role as Member of the European Parliament

[Étienne Deschamps] During the 1970s, the European Commission asked you several times to join groups of experts looking into economic and social questions, since that was your area, your main centre of interest as regards public life. What were these missions of experts and, generally, these discussions that you took part in?

[Jacques Delors] Well, there were three committees, I'll spare you the list of them. I'll just say I was the chairman of the third one. That showed there was a great deal of curiosity on the part of the Directorate-General for Economic Affairs at the Commission. And as for me, having decided because of a disagreement to give up my post as General Secretary for Continuing Training, which I owed to the fact that I had drafted the 1971 law on continuing training in France, I had left the government; instead of going into business, I had opted for academia. And I was happy, as a European and because of my *Échanges et Projets* club, to be able to be involved in these three groups. I learned a lot. I saw officials with real curiosity open windows and understand what was going on in the world. You could say that all that prepared the ground for my arrival at the Commission, but they were the ones who prepared it themselves, not me — it was them. And it was really exciting to see how people worked with the resources they had, and I had the opportunity of meeting some talented people there. I'll give you the name of one of them, because he's been completely forgotten: Giorgio Ruffolo, an Italian, whom I recommend you to consult sometime. He served as Commissioner for Planning in Italy, he is a remarkable intellectual. He's well worth seeing and listening to. So I saw all those people, and as well as my teaching work and my research centre at the University of Dauphine it meant I was able to stay in the picture in European circles. And that really — it was a coincidence — smoothed my way into the European Parliament. You could say I was getting vocational training despite myself.

VI. European political parties

[Étienne Deschamps] At the end of the 1970s — 1978–79 — you agreed to stand for election to the first European Parliament elected by direct universal suffrage.

[Jacques Delors] Low down on the list. Low down on the list because I was a sort of chicken in a flock of ducks as far as the Socialists were concerned. So I was low down on the list but we got so many people elected that I got a seat. And then, when they had to find a chairman for the Economic and Monetary Committee — dear oh dear! — well, they put me there. I was in luck again.

[Étienne Deschamps] Do you remember there being any particular buzz going round France among your potential voters during the election campaign for this Parliament which, for the first time in its history, was really being elected by direct universal suffrage?

[Jacques Delors] No, I didn't see any great stir among public opinion, to tell you the truth. We did our job, and as for me my job was mainly at the European level. I'd been made responsible for organising meetings in all the European countries, so I did that, I was in charge of that. And then on top of that, my position on the list was such that I didn't think I would be elected, so a fine gesture from me might help them. Then, by chance, I was elected and the unexpected thing was that nobody […] since the French Socialist party was able to get the chairmanship of a committee — the Economic and Monetary Committee — it didn't much interest people, so they put me there.

[Étienne Deschamps] And once you were elected, having never been a member of a national parliament before, did you feel …

[Jacques Delors] Oh, it was exciting, because to start with there was the subject area — the Economic and Monetary Committee. That meant the common market, competition, the small amount of work there was on currency at the time — of course there was the EMS. It was a committee people looked down on. As for a big committee, that was the Budget Committee, cornered by the Germans, or the Foreign Trade Committee, so I learned a great deal and in particular I got a lot of help from the Commissioners. The Commissioners who were there from 1979 to 1985 helped me a great deal: Jenkins, Thorn, Davignon — wonderful! — Ortoli. They all helped me. Lorenzo Natali, a remarkable Member of the Commission. So you see I was lucky there, I was able to get my committee to work. They saw that the committee worked, not because I was good at it but because I had ways of working and, when it came down to it, that committee, before I arrived, had been very attentive to the European Parliament, very attentive. So I […] a lot. I said to myself: 'Why doesn't it work? It's not because of the committee. It's because it's being held up at the government level.' Hence the Fontainebleau European Council, where François Mitterrand, with his particular form of genius, broke the logjam. But if you'd asked me, let's say: 'How's the committee getting on?' I'd have said: 'Just fine, they're very able and all that, but they aren't the ones who decide.'

[Étienne Deschamps] And did your work on the European Parliament's Monetary Affairs Committee give you a chance to forge ties which, a few years later, when you came back to Brussels, to the Commission …

[Jacques Delors] No, it gave me a chance to forge ties with my mentors, I mean those who helped me a great deal when I was Finance Minister, Ortoli, and those who helped me a great deal afterwards, Natali and Davignon, who is a master on European issues. If you want to understand Europe — I know you've done […], I'm really looking forward to looking at it […] a great master on European issues. So all those people taught me something. You see, I'm always willing to listen and learn. I take note of things, I hold onto my own philosophy of life, perhaps I have some special talent as a conciliator, for bringing points together, but all those people, for me it was […], I was still getting vocational training at that time.

[Étienne Deschamps] Viscount Davignon would be pleased to know what you think — and clearly in a very positive way — of the work he was able to do for Europe. Tell us a little about it.

[Jacques Delors] Impressive, remarkable. President of the Commission, certainly one of the people in our day with the most ability, with Kohnstamm and Peter Sutherland, but him in particular […]. In Belgium, you know, the European tradition is remarkable. There may be difficulties on the national level, but the standard of their representatives and their diplomats is exceptionally high. You have to keep reminding those who look down their noses at Belgium of that. So Davignon, not just in the European Parliament, but what he did on the steel industry, that was remarkable. I don't think anyone else could have done it. I take my hat off to him, it was splendid. To this day, I listen when he talks. He's a wise man. I think the reason why he hasn't been Prime Minister is that he's a Walloon or of Walloon origin.

[Étienne Deschamps] He's French-speaking, French-speaking at least.

[Jacques Delors] He would have deserved it. I know that nowadays, Romano Prodi thinks the same, people consult him. He's a wise man. At the time, though, what struck me was what he did and in particular the attention he paid the Parliament. The only things that aren't known about — people think it's new. But it

isn’t. That Thorn Commission paid a great deal of attention to Parliament, Gaston Thorn himself. He’d put forward some good texts, it wasn’t getting anywhere with the Council of Ministers. What I did was that I managed — a miracle, possibly! — to get the texts through. But they’d drafted the texts. And for that we should pay tribute to the work of the Commission, before I arrived. Frankly, honestly, it isn’t toadying, it’s fair and just.

[Étienne Deschamps] Even though you didn’t stay in the European Parliament for very long, you’ve just told us why that period was extremely important and formative for you. Were you, at the time, aware of the work the European parties or the federations of parties were doing, and were you involved in it?

[Jacques Delors] No, not at that time, I had to wait for the arrival of Mr Rasmussen, the current President of the PES, whom I helped a little, as much as I was able. Really, until that point, if I’d had to do a discouraging broadcast, I would have talked to you for half an hour about the PES, but thanks to Rasmussen that’s changing. But it’s so hard, for example, before a European Council, to get people in government and people who aren’t together. Imagine a meeting of the Party of European Socialists between people in government and people who aren’t. It’s all complicated, so there isn’t yet […] but I want to pay tribute to Rasmussen. He’s done excellent work, though the battle isn’t won yet. He knows it … And it’s the same for the EPP, even though there’s a kind of smugness there because it’s in the majority. But look out! The battle isn’t won. In people’s minds, among people with a sense of public-spiritedness, look out!

[Étienne Deschamps] Do you share the view of those who consider that the European parties, the umbrella organisations, shall we say, for the national parties, have a significant part to play in European integration?

[Jacques Delors] Yes, it’s because of the work that’s been done, including by the Commission, to set up foundations, *Stiftungen*. It’s a good thing, things are working better, things are working better but there’s still work to be done … As we’re in a federation of nation states, even though it’s unfinished, the part the national governments play is important when it comes to teaching people about Europe. Well, there’s a lot left to be done, plus the fact that people say that social democracy is going through a crisis. I don’t like that word. It is going through a crisis because it’s winning on the ground. So it’s rather complicated, as Oscar Fischer put it, to be talking about the crisis of social democracy. When I look at the governments, what they’re doing is social democracy even when they’re on the Right. It’s difficult for the Socialist Party, though, whereas the EPP is living off unearned income with people who think differently, and in the middle, of course, there’s liberal democracy, that counts too. I think that the European Parliament is a good microcosm for seeing what’s happening, analysing it and acting. And it’s playing a more and more important role.