

Interview with Paul Collowald: the address delivered by Winston Churchill in Metz on 14^oJuly 1946 (Sanem, 27^oand 28^oJune 2002)

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[Étienne Deschamps] Could you recall for us the circumstances of the decisive address given by Winston Churchill in Metz on 14 July 1946?

[Paul Collowald] Now there you are talking about an event that I should describe as one of regional, national and European significance. Such events are rare. Why 14 July 1946? Well, it is just that the mayor of Metz had the idea, and I should add, the cheek to invite Churchill, this immensely important figure, in order to celebrate the first 14 July following the liberation of these valiant peoples of the East once the war was over, and Churchill accepted, since, universal suffrage being what it is, he was a simple citizen. It was democracy there too: his citizens, his fellow citizens had said: 'Enough, we shall give the power to Labour.' Well, good. So, when Churchill came to Metz, who was he greeted by? Well, that was... I enjoy these connections, these historical coincidences. He was welcomed by what is known in Tour de France parlance as the le regional, the local hero: namely, Robert Schuman who, at 60 years old, had embarked on his ministerial career. In 1946, he was Minister for Finance and the Government told him: 'Look here, the least we can do is have a Minister of the Republic present to receive Winston Churchill.' So it was Robert Schuman who was there to welcome him, with celebrations and speeches; then he went on from Metz to Thionville, since Thionville is the town where Robert Schuman had been the Member of Parliament for years, and I believe he also went to Luxembourg. So, along this regional trajectory there came a national event. And why European? Quite simply — at the time I was only fleetingly aware of this, but afterwards I did some research in the archives where I discovered something that I had not come across anywhere else — it was in Winston Churchill's speech, where he addressed the people of Metz from the heights of I do not know which balcony, uttering this famous phrase: 'Take warning, I am going to speak to you in French.' And he followed by making his speech in French, prefacing it with complimentary remarks to France, saying how we had fought so well together and so forth. In passing he acknowledged the presence of General Giraud and he stressed the importance of uniting Europe in the post-war period. Obviously, he gave no technical details or anything. And I recall that he laid great emphasis on one phrase — I should have learnt this off by heart — where he stated that only France could take the initiative and she could, and must, do so in order to advance Franco-German relations, which would be indispensable for post-war Europe. If they did not succeed, nothing would. Right. What struck me, I shall summarise this very briefly, was that it was almost a sort of... 'rough copy' would be too pejorative a description... a prefiguration of an event well known in all the history books: 'the September 1946 speech made at Zurich University', where Churchill said: 'Let Europe arise!' That is how it ended; he pointed out that a partnership between France and Germany must be given priority, and it was essential that we proceed towards — translating the English expression — 'a kind of United States of Europe'. A kind of United States of Europe. Right. You must admit that it showed quite remarkable intuition. There again, of course, there are several variants in the history books that I have read. There are those who say with some irony — and they are not entirely wrong: 'Churchill gave good advice to others, but for the United Kingdom, it was the special relationship with the United States, it was the Commonwealth, that counted; 'we are an island', and so forth, 'whereas you...' he did not put it quite like that, of course, 'on the continent you really ought to make peace, build Europe,' and so on. He gave good advice, obviously, one may smile at that. But, nonetheless, I find that in terms of intuition, it was quite remarkable, even though later on he himself said, as our German friends would say: 'Ohne mich' — without me. I regarded this famous Metz speech, the prefiguration of the Zurich speech, as a very interesting link in the chain; and also, as a result of my listening to a recording of Churchill, the fact that we spoke earlier of the Council of Europe, of those great days and of my personal recollection of Friday 12 August, but what I did not tell you is that when my first meeting, my first interview, with Robert Schuman was over — for I was a journalist working for the *Nouvel Alsacien* — my day's work was not yet over, because on 12 August Winston Churchill spoke in Strasbourg before 20 000 Strasbourgeois in the place Kléber, during a meeting organised by the European Movement. His remarks about Europe were very interesting but at the time, with the usual malice typical of all journalists, my ear was at once caught by the beginning, by Churchill's old trick: 'Take warning, I am going to speak to you in French.' The place Kléber resounded with the applause. This is just to describe the — almost audiovisual — impression, that I gained of the extreme eloquence of people like Churchill, Paul Henri Spaak and others such as Pierre-Henri Teitgen on the one hand, and since we are dealing with the Europe of that period, the almost total lack of this quality among people like Robert

Schuman and Jean Monnet on the other, who were highly effective when it came to ten or so people in an office and by virtue of their job were obviously used to frequently addressing an audience, but who used no tricks, nothing at all, just fundamental conviction and depth. As a result I find myself with the same unanswered question, given that we are in a television society: today, would people like Schuman and Jean Monnet be successful on television, or not? There I have one thing I am sure of but also my doubts. I am certain that conviction and authenticity will always succeed, but, as I have been made aware: 'You may be right, but will listeners or the television audience receive the communication? Are they capable nowadays of distinguishing between the individual's authenticity, sincerity and conviction and what is taught on public relations courses and elsewhere, when you can see all sorts of characters carrying off the most extraordinary acts, although you know that it is just an act, that it is just for show?'