Interview with Paul Collowald: the Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Korean War (Sanem, 27 and 28 June 2002)

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[Étienne Deschamps] What do you remember of the August 1950 meeting of the Assembly of the Council of Europe?

[Paul Collowald] Ah, I must say that that was one of the most extraordinary meetings I have ever attended. Why so? First of all, because following the initial euphoria, which I had witnessed, what was the situation in August 1950? It was after the Korean War, which had been declared on 25 June, and those were anxious times: 'Are we moving towards a third World War?' and so on. Meanwhile, on 9 May, there was the Schuman Declaration. For some months Schuman had been timetabled to come and explain to the Council of Europe, this European forum, what he intended to do — establish the ECSC, work for Franco-German reconciliation — so, for the Council of Europe this event had been foreseen, whilst the Korean War had not, and the agenda was disrupted. I was there and, suddenly, I found this extraordinary man Churchill addressing the Assembly: 'Look here. Of course the statutes of the Council of Europe not only do not provide for us to discuss issues of foreign and defence policy, but they probably forbid us to do so. But we are politicians! How could one imagine that all these important people' — apart from him, of course – 'who are gathered together here can talk about Europe and so forth, without taking account of the international situation, which is almost tragic. We must adopt a Resolution proposing the establishment of a European army!' The establishment of a European army … Winston Churchill, August 1950, in Strasbourg. At once, of course, the journalists dashed for their telephones — we did not have these modern conveniences — and there was a great sensation. Afterwards, things calmed down and someone said: 'All right then, we must make a draft.' Paul Raynaud, who was one of the important figures along with Georges Bidault in the French delegation, Paul Raynaud said: 'At the end of this Resolution, I propose that Winston Churchill be appointed Minister for Defence.' You know, it seems quite surreal to say this today. Without any powers, without … This Assembly proclaims itself, saying: 'This is what must be done: a European army, a Minister for Defence, it is Churchill.' Then Churchill says: 'Now then, we must calm down.' And it comes to an end with a text, which I do not have to hand but which shows clearly that, in some circumstances, when you have a forum, which has no powers but contains a number of important figures, and which proclaims itself the conscience of Europe — this could happen tomorrow morning — then things happen.