

Interview with Catherine Lalumière: the Milan European Council (Paris, 17 May 2006)

Source: Interview de Catherine Lalumière / CATHERINE LALUMIÈRE, Étienne Deschamps, prise de vue : François Fabert.- Paris: CVCE [Prod.], 17.05.2006. CVCE, Sanem. - VIDEO (00:09:46, Couleur, Son original).

Copyright: (c) Translation CVCE.EU by UNI.LU

All rights of reproduction, of public communication, of adaptation, of distribution or of dissemination via Internet, internal network or any other means are strictly reserved in all countries.

Consult the legal notice and the terms and conditions of use regarding this site.

URL:

http://www.cvce.eu/obj/interview_with_catherine_lalumiere_the_milan_european_council_paris_17_may_2006-en-2905631e-dbd5-424b-a622-4be178da7526.html



Last updated: 05/07/2016

Interview with Catherine Lalumière: the Milan European Council (Paris, 17 May 2006)

[Étienne Deschamps] In June 1985, you attended the Milan Summit, which was an extremely important Summit as the Ten decided — and this strikes me as rather significant — for the first time by a majority vote, to convene an IGC, an intergovernmental conference, in order to revise the Treaties. Do you remember the atmosphere prevailing in Milan at this time and why the decision was taken in this way to amend what could or should be in the existing Treaties?

[Catherine Lalumière] Yes, I remember the Milan Summit, but not in detail; but you mentioned the atmosphere ... well, I do remember the atmosphere. The atmosphere was not jubilant in Milan. Firstly, it got off to a bad start. That did not really have any consequences, but it did have an impact on the atmosphere.

I remember that the first meeting was supposed to start in the late morning or early afternoon of the day in question, and, very early in the morning, I was at the venue where we were supposed to be meeting. It was natural that I was the first to arrive — the Minister, Roland Dumas, would arrive next, and the President even later; I was supposed to check that all the documents were there, that we were in the offices allocated to us, etc. It was perfectly natural. So I did that, I arrived, I asked everyone how they were, and I was told: ‘Oh dear, there’s trouble, yesterday evening the two aides — including Jacques Attali for France, the German and French aides — not only met, which is natural on the eve of a Summit — but they drafted a text on ...’ I don’t remember on what point exactly, but, anyway, they drafted a text, they issued it and the others were presented with a *fait accompli* and were furious at this method.

I said to myself, ‘This is getting off to a good start.’ I took my files and went to the adjoining offices to see my colleagues from the other delegations. The other countries were very angry, in particular the smallest countries, and were saying: ‘These are unacceptable methods: the two of them meet, they draft a text, they do not consult anyone, they do not inform anyone, and they issue this document to the press, and we are asked to accept without saying a word.’ I spent the first part of the morning trying to patch things up by going to the delegations and saying: ‘But it doesn’t matter, and, anyway, the text is not as bad as all that, you can see for yourselves, they wanted to help, they wanted to resolve the problems between France and Germany ...’ Anyway, I was aware that this was not going down well and that this division which had and which still has to be avoided between the large and small countries — in this case, the small countries ...

[Étienne Deschamps] The fear of being dictated to by the large countries ...

[Catherine Lalumière] Yes, exactly. Care is needed, and I must say that, deep down, I felt that the aides had been rather too enthusiastic. Maybe they had the blessing of their respective bosses, I don’t know, but, anyway, I said to myself, on the eve of a Summit, it is perhaps not worth annoying people, because, afterwards, we shall need them to find compromise solutions for this or that. So, it began like that. For me, in my role with my ointments and bandages to try to heal the wounds, I would have preferred not to have to do it.

So the meeting began, and it was tense from beginning to end. However, I was not personally in the conference room all the time. I came and went, but France was entitled to two places at the Council table: the first was occupied by François Mitterrand and the second by Roland Dumas. But I could clearly see that the general atmosphere was quite tense.

So, on the agenda, if I remember correctly, there was one thing that went quite quickly and quite well, and that was the White Paper on the Internal Market, which had been proposed by the Commission, in other words by Jacques Delors, and which was approved straight away — well, it would subsequently be reviewed in the autumn, but the green light was already given in Milan. The idea of reforming the institutions, however, of which Jacques Delors was wholeheartedly in favour, met with strong, very strong resistance. Of course, in order to reform these institutions, it was necessary to convene — this is laid down in the Treaties — an IGC, an intergovernmental conference. The Italian Presidency could see that there were some countries who were not in agreement.

There were no precedents, because, at that time, the Treaty of Rome had never been touched, had never been reformed. But, anyway, it could be considered that this decision to convene an IGC had to be taken unanimously. At the time, unanimity was the rule. However, we could clearly see, and Bettino Craxi, the Italian Prime Minister who was chairing the Summit, could clearly see that he would not secure unanimity. And then the Italian Presidency achieved a remarkable feat, but it was not contrary to the Treaty, it was an interpretation in the absence of precedents. We thought that we needed unanimity, but Craxi said: 'No, it is not necessary at all. I shall put it to the vote and we shall convene an IGC if we have a majority.' That is what he did.

Three countries refused. Greece, Denmark and Ireland refused to attend the IGC; the others voted for the IGC. Of course, Craxi's feat, putting it to the vote, forcing it through to a certain extent, gave rise to a number of comments. In fact, he was right. He was right, because, *in fine*, the three reluctant members did take part in the work of the IGC, and they ended up signing the Treaty, which was the Single Act. So, the fact that the Italian Presidency forced it through turned out to be a good thing, but, at the time, of course, it came as a shock.

The first shock was that three countries were against, were recalcitrant, and the second was that it was forced through. I remember the press conference which was held by François Mitterrand at the end of the Summit — because, traditionally, everyone holds press conferences — so I attended the one held by François Mitterrand, and the tone of his address was pessimistic. He said: 'This intergovernmental conference with three countries who are against, it does not look good.' So, of course, the entire French Delegation was gloomy and had the impression that it was a Summit which had not gone very well.

I remember convening a meeting with my Private Office and the officials of the Ministry who were with me, and I said to them: 'Listen, at our level, we are not at the top of the political ladder, we are at Junior Minister level, and, at our level, we have to achieve results. In other words, we have to do all that we can so that, at the end of the IGC, there is an agreement, with results which achieve as much as possible. However, we must — no hesitations, no discussions about what has happened or not happened, the success or lack of success in Milan — we have an intergovernmental conference and we must make the best possible use of it.'