

Interview with Catherine Lalumière: Franco-German disputes at the IGC (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 (00:08:45, 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_franco_german_disputes_at_the_igc_paris_17_may_2006-en-1bebb5c9-3fd7-4fc2-b982-6db6a65267cb.html



Last updated: 05/07/2016

Interview with Catherine Lalumière: Franco-German disputes in the IGC (Paris, 17 May 2006)

[Étienne Deschamps] You mentioned the extent to which France's partners expected it to be a driving force, to play a role of initiator, to provide a stimulus. How was this put into practice during the negotiations? What were the priorities of the French Delegation? How did France approach these negotiations, and how did it judge the actual outcome of the negotiations, and was that represented in the Treaty?

[Catherine Lalumière] It also had two wishes, and it doubtless had others as well ... I shall not go into the issue of foreign policy, but, already at that time, France would have liked political cooperation — what we called political cooperation — to be more powerful. I shall leave that issue to one side. However, I remember quite clearly two issues in which France hoped for progress: social policy and culture.

We were a little disappointed by the results in those areas. It must be said that we had a lot to contend with, as Germany did not support us. So, without Germany, we did have some problems. Now, as for social Europe, you will understand why the government wanted to make progress in the area of social Europe. There was some progress made. For example, with regard to working conditions, to social dialogue, there were some legal bases in the Single Act which then enabled the Commission, at the instigation of Jacques Delors, to make considerable progress in terms of social policy — the Val Duchesse talks, and so on — on a small, narrow basis, but one which was, nevertheless, in the Treaty, he got out of it all that he could.

However, we did not achieve, for example, what would be enshrined in 1989 in the Community's Social Charter. It was not until 1989 and the Strasbourg Summit that this list of social rights was laid down in a text which was commensurate with the Treaties ... and, moreover, the Charter was not actually in the Treaties. So, in 1985, we did not have this list of social rights. So, where did the resistance come from? I have a very clear memory of meetings with my German counterpart, who was both very friendly and very forceful. One meeting, in particular, left a very strong impression on me, I must say. We had decided to meet at the Quai d'Orsay in order to try to find a common platform.

So, I welcomed my counterpart when he arrived in the morning, and we got to work. At the end, he was literally pressed up against his chair, saying to me: 'Never, do you hear me, never will the German Government accept what you are asking for in terms of social policy.' So, what was the reason for this outright refusal? The Germans actually had two lines of argument — and this was in 1985, but we found out about these two arguments at a later date. The first was, 'Careful, the Community must not be responsible for everything, and social policy, each social security system ... Each country is very attached to its social security system. The Community must not invade everything, must not interfere in everything. So be careful, watch out.'

All the more so because it was a government which did not pursue the same policy as the French Government. German Christian Democracy is not anti-welfare, but it did not have exactly the same ambitions as the left-wing French Government elected in 1981. So that was a first line of resistance, that the Community should not interfere and, at all events, everyone is master of his own house and has policies which are not the same, so therefore ...

Then there was a second argument. In Germany, it is above all the Länder (the regional authorities) which are responsible for social issues, and the Länder do not want the Bund (central government) to delegate its powers to the Community, powers which are not those of the Bund but of the Länder. So those were two reasons to say 'No'.

We managed to agree on a few things here and there, and these things turned out to be fruitful, forming the basis on which Delors was able to make a certain amount of progress on social issues. Social Europe was not non-existent during the period following the Single Act. We had the basis.

Culture. This was the same sort of thing. François Mitterrand actually specifically hoped that the Community would have powers in the area of culture. This was quite natural, given the importance that he

placed on culture; it was in line with the policy which he had entrusted to Jack Lang, it was completely natural. However, there was resistance from other countries, in particular Germany, saying: 'Careful, culture, education, be careful'; because even those who tend to see culture as a gimmick consider it to be very important, as it is representative of a nation's identity. So, for the Community to meddle in this area ... careful, careful. That was an initial reason to say, 'Watch out'.

And, once again, Germany was saying that culture was an issue for the Länder. It was not an issue for the Bund, and, therefore, it was certainly not an issue for the Community. So, there we met with resistance. It was not until the following Treaties, the Treaty of Maastricht, that there was a section, albeit a modest one, on culture.

However, it was useful to be very aware of this resistance and of the reasons for this resistance in these two areas, social policy and culture, because this resistance still exists today. That explains why, in the areas of social policy and culture, the 'We should ...', 'It is just a question of ...' attitude does not work. There are fundamental reasons why a great deal of people, who are Europeans, say: 'Careful, these are two areas where we need to think twice before entrusting powers to a supranational body.' Because they both affect people deeply. Social policy and culture are very intimate issues. They are part of the identity to which people are very attached.

That was very clear at that time, in that IGC, it was very clear, and it was, perhaps, the biggest clash, in the area of social policy, the biggest clash with Germany. They took the view, 'No, never, we will not give in.'