

Interview with Pierre Pescatore: atmosphere and working method at the Château de Val Duchesse (Luxembourg, 10 September 2003)

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[Étienne Deschamps] Do you think, Mr Pescatore, that the relative isolation, geographically speaking, of Val Duchesse, of the Château de Val Duchesse in Auderghem, might have influenced the climate of the diplomatic negotiations? Were the negotiations protracted? What were the working hours? What degree of complicity existed among all these men who were somewhat isolated from the big city? What memories have you kept of all these things?

[Pierre Pescatore] Extremely agreeable memories, because we were on our own in this park, in this rather gloomy château, and we negotiated from October until February, so it was wintertime. Since we were confined there, within these relatively limited surroundings, we had a lot of contacts, and we took a lot of our meals together. I remember that we would go out by a back gate to where there was a good Belgian bakery where we would buy a simple lunch, sandwiches and anything we could get there. We used public transport, we had timetables to follow; we knew when we would begin but never at what time we would finish, so there were a lot of meetings that overran, and, to cap it all, meetings that took place at night. It was a kind of *convivencia*, as the Spanish say, a moral and physical cohabitation. We would meet in the corridors and hear about what was going on in the other groups, then, lastly, there were the night-time meetings — but those took place in Brussels, because of the transport problems. So we would make our way to Brussels for dinner, and after dinner we had a conference room in the Hotel Métropole.

In the Hotel Métropole, we held a whole series of night-time meetings; I found these meetings a blessing, because I can remain wide awake until the early hours, and good compromises are usually secured between two and three o'clock in the morning. It was above all during those night-time meetings that we worked like some sort of human machine made up of brains operating together; it was an extraordinary atmosphere, extraordinarily cooperative. We had phrases that were already formulated for us: 'the Council, acting by qualified majority,' shall decide this or that in the form of 'regulations or directives'. An entire legal and institutional structure, all that was always in our minds. I was never again to witness negotiations that were so dense yet so objective, at least where our group was concerned. We were all there as lawyers sharing a common professional training, all steeped in the Roman legal tradition. And it was there that I discovered certain roots that enabled me to understand other people properly. Another factor came into play during these negotiations, the hierarchical factor, because, as lawyers, we understood one another so well that we were truly on the same wavelength. We instinctively had a clear preference for settling our problems ourselves, at our level. We dreaded referrals to the Heads of Delegation meeting that we could no longer control; for instance, I heard more than once, when we were finding it difficult to solve a problem ourselves, a kind of threat voiced by one of us: 'Look here, if we cannot agree on this here, it will have to be referred to the Heads of Delegation.' That was the ultimate deterrent, so all the problems were solved cordially, by agreement and unanimously, among ourselves, and could be referred as they stood to the Heads of Delegation. Since our work had been extremely well done — for we had some excellent draftsmen in this group — and everything took place in the course of conversational exchanges, we really drew up the texts jointly, with those who could draw up a draft in French being at an advantage. All the texts were in French, so basically all the work done by the Legal Group was referred intact to the next level. And that is what, in my opinion, gave the Community and its legal texts their intrinsic strength and structure, which even the attacks made by General de Gaulle were unable to undermine.