

## Interview with Catherine Lalumière: the Internal Market Council (Paris, 17 May 2006)

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[Étienne Deschamps] Mrs Lalumière, thank you very much for meeting us here in Paris, at the Maison de l'Europe, today, 17 May 2006, to discuss your European career at the service of a united Europe. I would like to begin by talking about the early 1980s, because in 1981 you were directly involved with European issues through the State Secretariat for Consumer Affairs, attached to the Ministry of the Economy, Finance and Budget. During the early 1980s, people began to talk more and more actively about the single internal market. What did this issue involve, and how were you confronted with this new question?

[Catherine Lalumière] I think that it was really purely by chance. On the initiative of the German authorities, we were talking more and more about the internal market and the need to speed up the completion of the Common Market. Germany had requested and secured agreement for the convening of meetings of the 'Internal Market' Council of Ministers. This was added to the already long list of other Councils of Ministers and technical meetings, as only the Council of Foreign Ministers was able to take a decision.

As for this Internal Market Council; in the French Government, no one really wanted to attend these extra meetings. The Foreign Minister, Claude Cheysson, did not have time. The Minister for European Affairs, Roland Dumas, did not have time. The Minister for the Economy and Finance did not have time ... no one had time. In the end, I think that people said, 'There is always Catherine Lalumière, in the Consumer Affairs sector'. Consumer Affairs is a sector of the economy ... the market ... I wonder whether it was a little the idea of the housewife's market, the 'weekly shopping basket', it's similar to the internal market ...

I was sent to these meetings of this new Internal Market Council, and I must say that that was where I became aware of European issues and I became very interested, especially during the French Presidency in the first half of 1984; I was actually Chairman of the Internal Market Council. That was an excellent introduction to being Chairman of a Council — whether the Internal Market Council or another Council — because we are fortunate enough to have Presidency officials who support the President-in-Office and we learn a huge number of things. So I became very interested, and as for the way in which such or such an argument must be put forward, negotiating with the various parties, etc., to carry a decision — this Internal Market Council taught me a lot. That was the start of my interest in European issues.

So you see it was pure chance, really, because there was this new Council and the French Government didn't know who to send to this Internal Market Council — which actually turned out to be a very important Council, because, shortly afterwards, when Jacques Delors became President of the Commission — he took up office on 1 January 1988 — he gave considerable impetus to the completion of the internal market. On reflection, I realise that, in practice, this Internal Market Council was very important, very interesting. In any case, it was a remarkable place for learning.