

GISCARD D'ESTAING

PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN CONVENTION AND FORMER PRESIDENT OF FRANCE

Valéry Giscard d'Estaing was born on 2 February 1926 in Koblenz, Germany, where his father headed the finance department of the Allied High Commissioners in the Rhineland. At the age of 18 he joined the 1st French Army and took part in the campaigns in France and Germany (1944-45) for which he was decorated. After graduating from the Ecole Polytechnique and the Ecole Nationale d'Administration, he was appointed Inspecteur des Finances in 1952. From 1959-1962 he held the post of a secrétaire d'Etat (permanent secretary / undersecretary) in the Finance Ministry. Under the presidency of General de Gaulle he became Minister for Finance and Economic Affairs in the Georges Pompidou cabinets from 1962-66. Under Georges Pompidou's presidency, Giscard d'Estaing was Economics and Finance Minister from 1969-1974 in the government of Chaban-Delmas and Messmer. He founded in 1966 the Fédération Nationale des Républicains Indépendants (FNRI), which three years later merged with the Action Committee for the United States of Europe, in keeping with the wishes of Jean Monnet, in order to support Great Britain's second EEC candidacy. In 1970 Valéry Giscard d'Estaing assumed the presidency of the OECD Council. After presenting to the EC Council a plan for economic and monetary union in 1970, he took part in 1972 in developing the Werner Plan, whose projected goal was monetary union by the end of the decade.

In May 1974 Valéry Giscard d'Estaing was elected President of the Republic of France. In this capacity he unflinchingly pursued a policy of rejuvenating the building of Europe, supported in this by Helmut Schmidt. The two men pushed monetary union by initiating the European Monetary System (EMS), which was launched on 13 March 1979. During his seven-year incumbency, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing actively sought to give new impetus to the European institutions.

In line with the 1970 Davignon-Report on foreign policy cooperation, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing proposed in December 1975 the creation of the European Council, in order to give a new boost to political cooperation, which at that time was deadlocked. The European Council, which was institutionalized in 1986 by the Single European Act, would play a major role in the building of Europe and the development of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).

Valéry Giscard d'Estaing spoke out for more frequent use of the majority vote in the European Union Council of Ministers. He also wholeheartedly endorsed giving more power to the European Parliament. He favoured not only expanding its budgetary powers but also electing it by universal suffrage, which after protracted negotiations was given approval in the form of the Act of Brussels of 20 September 1976, which followed directly after the institutionalizing of the European Council. The first elections to the European Parliament by universal suffrage took place in 1979. While championing the building of Europe, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing also made a lasting contribution to international solidarity. In 1975 he presented a proposal for North-South partnership, which found expression in the Lomé accords concluded between the EEC and the countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP). With Chancellor Schmidt and US President Gerald Ford, he convened the Rambouillet economic summit, at which it was agreed to institute the G7.

After resigning the presidency in May 1981, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing continued to be politically active on the national, regional and European levels. He became chairman of the Union pour la Démocratie française (UDF), holding this post from 1988 to 1996. He was repeatedly elected to the National Assembly as a deputy – in 1984, 1986, 1988, 1993 and 1997. In March 1982 he was elected Conseiller général in Puy-de-Dôme, and again in 1985. In 1986 he held the office of Regional Councillor of Auvergne, which he held twice more in 1992 and 1998. Since 21 March 1986 he has been President of the Auvergne Regional Council. From 1989 to 1993, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing was a member of the European Parliament. Until 1991 he was Chairman of the Liberal, Democratic and Republican parliamentary group. He actively supported France's "yes" in favour of joining the Treaty of Maastricht. After the Treaty took effect, he pleaded for a relaxing of the Maastricht criteria (inflation rate, public debt). Concerned about the lack of progress towards monetary union, he founded together with Helmut Schmidt in 1986 the Committee for the Monetary Union of Europe. Helmut Schmidt presented in 1988 the "Action Programme", from which several proposals were adopted by the Delors Committee, now commissioned with the task of making a study on economic and monetary union.

As President of the Auvergne Regional Council from 1986, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing was from 1992 to 1998 the President of the Association of Regional Council Presidents (APCR). In October 1997 he was also elected President of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CCRE). He is actively involved in the cause of strengthening the regional administrative bodies in the framework of the European Union. For the European Parliament he presented a report on the subsidiarity principle, a report which would become one of the foundational elements of the Maastricht Treaty. From 1989 to 1997 he held the office of President of the Mouvement international européen (International European Movement). He is also President of the Institut pour la Démocratie en Europe (The Institute for Democracy in Europe). The heads of state and government who met in December 2001 for the Laeken summit elected Valéry Giscard d'Estaing to the leadership of the Convention on the Future of the European Union, which has been engaged since 1 March 2002 in drafting and editing a constitution for Europe.

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