

Interview with Jacques F. Poos: the fifth enlargement of the EU (Sanem, 16 April 2004)

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[Étienne Deschamps] It is 16 April 2004 and I am in Sanem, in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, with Jacques Poos, to whom I am very grateful for coming here today. Before beginning this interview on Community issues, I should like to ask you a very general, very vague question which is highly relevant now. As you know, on 1 May this year, the European Union will expand to include ten new Member States. What do you believe to be the implications of this massive enlargement towards the East of Europe and, in practical terms, what will it change in the European setup?

[Jacques F. Poos] The implications are huge, because this is the European Union's biggest enlargement; we are well aware that an enlargement is a change in stature and it will create a host of difficulties, which cannot be foreseen beforehand but which will only come to light afterwards. It will change the European Union fundamentally, for the ten new countries will arrive with very strong national loyalties; no sooner have we managed to mitigate the latent nationalism of the present Member States than a new upsurge arrives, which will further trouble the waters. I fear that the draft European Constitution will not help matters because it strengthens the powers of the European Council, which is the intergovernmental body, and it weakens the Commission. The enlargement combined with the new Constitution, which will probably be implemented at the end of the year, after ratification by the national parliaments, will not really lead to a strengthening of the European integration process. Of course, there will also be economic difficulties in terms of adaptation, because this time the new Member States are joining the club of the rich, with a vast disparity in the standard of living and economic development. The current Member States, those that we call the 'honest countries', are not ready to 'pull out all the stops'. There is no Marshall Plan and we should have a European Marshall Plan so that, in ten years' time, there will be burgeoning economies in Eastern Europe.

[Étienne Deschamps] Do you think that these countries, these ten new acceding countries, or at any rate most of them, are really ready and conscious of what is involved when playing according to the Community rules?

[Jacques F. Poos] They are ready at the legal and legislative level, but they are not ready, or not completely ready, at the administrative level; those who will have the task of applying the Community acquis and those — the courts of law, for example — who will have the task of judging breaches of the Community acquis are still cutting their teeth and will take a good few years to find a working rhythm.

[Étienne Deschamps] And do you think that the states — the Fifteen — are properly or sufficiently prepared for this enlargement, or have they rather been pushed into it by current issues, the geopolitical sequence of events, a sense of urgency?

[Jacques F. Poos] Yes, yes. Both are true; I think that the general feeling among the Fifteen was that this enlargement was a logical consequence of the end of the division of Europe. We have a treaty which states that any European State may apply to become a member of the Union, as long as it signs the Treaty and meets the conditions. There were firstly the Copenhagen criteria, the political criteria that they have fulfilled: that they be democracies which respect human rights. That is the case. And, secondly, there were lengthy negotiations on the acceptance of the 31 chapters established by the Commission and, gradually, they have also met the economic conditions. So, from that point of view, the work was well done.

[Étienne Deschamps] You just said that any European country is, in theory, a prospective member. So I should like to ask a rather delicate question: what do you think of the possible accession, one day, of Turkey? Do you think that Turkey is a country which has the potential, as a European country to accede to an even larger European Union — or not?

[Jacques F. Poos] Turkey was already given the green light by the Member States of the European Union back in 1963, if I remember rightly, with the signing of the first Association Agreement. Since then, this phrase 'prospective member' is repeated in every Treaty and every contact with Turkey. It is a European country; part of Turkey is in Europe. It is a European country, historically, because it has played a major role in European history — not always a positive role at the time of the Ottoman Empire — and it is a European

country by its aspirations. I do not deny the fact that Turkish intellectuals and businessmen do not look to Central Asia but to Europe and the Mediterranean for their future. That is true. But they bring with them a tradition which is still very much forged by the military, and their constitution still has elements left over from this period of military dictatorship; the military plays far too important a role. For example, what we do not know, or what many people do not know, is that the army has a seat in the Education Council. It is not merely the foreign and security policies that it dominates — with the Cyprus issue, that was very clear — but also domestic policy. That is unacceptable for a democratic country. They must undergo radical change. Are they able to do so this year? Question mark ...