

## Interview with Charles Rutten: the Hague Congress (The Hague, 29 November 2006)

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[Étienne Deschamps] In May 1948, the famous Congress for Europe was held here in The Hague. You took part in this event. Once again, what recollections do you have of the event and what sort of atmosphere was there at the meeting?

[Charles Rutten] Yes, indeed, I took part in the Hague Congress, in the same capacity as the meeting at Chaudfontaine, that is to say I was Second Secretary of the Netherlands Catholic People's Party (KVP), in charge of foreign relations. In this capacity I was a member of the preparatory committee for the Hague conference, primarily in charge of material questions.

One might say that there were two layers to the atmosphere. In formal terms it was not an intergovernmental conference, but it was attended by a lot of government representatives. That was the official side, but there was another side, and that was the participation of young people. Thousands of young people had travelled to The Hague to take part in the demonstrations and meetings organised on the sidelines.

The first, official level was fairly formal. There were talks between ministers and politicians on the issue of a federation or simply an intergovernmental organisation. The principle of intergovernmental relations was prevalent at that point, at that level. On the other level, all the talk was about federalism. The young people wanted something quite different from what existed, from what they thought had led to the war, so a change of course was needed, with fresh resources. I remember Henri Brugmans, who was there, giving enthusiastic speeches and, how can I put it, bringing a spark, a certain enthusiasm, to the youth meetings, which were mainly held outdoors.

That was the atmosphere in general. Obviously the young people were disappointed by the official outcome of The Hague, as there was nothing new, and that was what led to the Council of Europe. The Council of Europe was in fact the fruit of the Hague Congress, and the Council of Europe was purely intergovernmental, as you know.