

## Interview with Charles Rutten: the issue of the seat of the European Communities' institutions (The Hague, 19 November 2006)

**Source:** Interview de Charles Rutten / CHARLES RUTTEN, Étienne Deschamps, prise de vue : François Fabert.- La Haye: CVCE [Prod.], 29.11.2006. CVCE, Sanem. - VIDEO (04:08, Couleur, Son original).

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**Last updated:** 05/07/2016

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[Étienne Deschamps] In that period, during the early 1960s, were you involved directly or indirectly in the discussions regarding the seat of the institutions?

[Charles Rutten] Yes; however, the discussions regarding the seat occurred in a number of phases. There was no agreement when the signing took place: that was postponed until later. After the signing, Monnet came up with the idea that a federal district, like the District of Columbia in the United States, should be created. A federal district where all the institutions of the European Communities, that is of the ECSC and the common market — as it was called at that time — and of Euratom should be grouped together. A federal district which would enjoy absolute autonomy, which would possess its own administration, and so forth.

There was nothing on this point included in the treaty, so it was an invention of Monnet's, who thought that creating a federal district would be a strong driving force towards those more federal structures emanating from Val Duchesse. Well, the governments did not want to hurt Monnet's feelings, so they set up a committee of experts to study where the best place for a European federal district might be. These experts, after I cannot recall how much time, returned with a unanimous recommendation: it ought to be built in Nice — not in Nice itself, not in the town, but on the heights outside. Of course in those days the Côte d'Azur was not as developed as it is now, and for a variety of reasons, especially because of the climate, they thought that it would be a good idea.

The officials were very, very pleased — they preferred Nice to Brussels, if you do not find that shocking... But no, the recommendation was rejected and the question remains open. The Luxembourgers, of course, insisted that, at all events, what they had obtained in the past would remain in Luxembourg, and that a number of the new institutions should be set up in Luxembourg. They said: 'We are a small country; we do not benefit very much from the European Community, but it is important, for example, that by setting up institutions like the Court and the European Bank — you know — the Grand Duchy can also benefit from it.'

France insisted on Strasbourg as seat of the Parliament and, in the end, we agreed on Brussels, for purely practical reasons, as provisional seat of the other institutions. It was very, very inefficient and it led to an incredible squandering of money — and continues to do so today — but no other solution has ever been found. And I fear that this will continue to be the case.