

Interview with Charles Ruten: the Nouvelles Équipes Internationales (The Hague, 29 November 2006)

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[Étienne Deschamps] I would like to start our talk by focusing on the period immediately after the war, in 1947, when you took part in the first meeting of the *Nouvelles Équipes Internationales* in Chaudfontaine, near Liège. What do you recall about this ceremony, this meeting, and how did you come to be taking part?

[Charles Rutten] Well, if I may start with your second question, at that time I was Second Secretary of the Netherlands Catholic People's Party (KVP). In particular I was in charge of foreign relations and contacts with parties in other countries, in so far as we were able to travel. It was in that capacity that I took part in the Chaudfontaine meeting, accompanying Emmanuel Sassen, who was the Vice-President of the KVP. He subsequently served as a member of the Euratom Commission. So there we were. I had also taken part in a whole series of preparatory talks, and these discussions focused mainly on the question of the form that cooperation between Catholic or Christian parties might take, but also what we should call them ... One of the main problems that arose was the question of the name. In the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and Germany all the parties openly proclaimed that they were Catholic or Christian, whereas in France this was out of the question, given the principle of secularism. The Popular Republican Movement (MRP) was strongly against any reference to a Christian basis, though it obviously accepted that the MRP was inspired by Christian principles, such as Papal encyclicals — notably *Rerum Novarum*. In the end we reached a compromise, choosing the *Nouvelles Équipes Internationales* [New International Teams] as our name, which was about as neutral as you could find because it meant nothing, nothing at all. But even so we felt that just the fact that we were cooperating and meeting regularly was sufficiently important to accept this negative aspect. So that was one of the most important issues. I recall — though it was a long time ago, more than 60 years — I recall that there was a lot of talk about a sort of programme or joint policy statement, on which we failed to agree. We settled on a very vague text. I remember that there were two points at issue, starting with the problem of decolonisation. The Germans and Italians were in favour of citing the principle of decolonisation, whereas obviously the French, Belgians and Dutch were completely against the idea. So we did not agree on that.

Another problem was the nationalisation of major industries, specifically steel and so on. I particularly remember that the Luxembourg delegate — I don't recall his name — kept referring to ARBED, because in Luxembourg the ARBED [steelworks] embodied Luxembourg itself, and he was absolutely against the idea that Luxembourg might one day be nationalised.

There you are, those are the memories I recall. It was a meeting — it was two years after the war — which in itself was most remarkable, the fact that we met up without any very clear idea of what we wanted, but we did want to meet, to talk, to communicate and share our experiences. That was very important.

I remember that in the evening we used to play ludo, as there was no roulette in Chaudfontaine, or at least nothing more frivolous than ludo.

[Étienne Deschamps] Did you have the feeling at the time that the Christian Democrats already had an overall project for European unity or for specifically European issues?

[Charles Rutten] No. No, there were not yet any clear ideas. Once again, you must not forget that it was only two years after the war. The Hague Congress was only held the following year, in 1948, so people's ideas were far from clear, even in a rudimentary form.

No, we wanted to meet, we wanted to reach beyond borders ...