

Interview with Jacques Santer: the debates in the European Parliament on his appointment as President of the European Commission (Sanem, 3 May 2006)

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[Étienne Deschamps] Some days after the Brussels Extraordinary European Council, you were heard by the European Parliament and by the various political groups of the European Parliament in Strasbourg. What do you remember about the atmosphere that surrounded the confirmation and the votes, the support and sometimes the opposition?

[Jacques Santer] It was a very delicate situation because of what had gone before. On the one hand, the MEPs, even those in the Christian Democratic group and the European People's Party, who were fairly close to Jean-Luc Dehaene, as they were to me, said: 'But why did Major give his agreement and his support to Santer's nomination, whereas he vetoed Dehaene's?' That did not help my case; that is certain. First of all, my group and those of the centre-right voted for me, while all the others voted against. Everybody told me: 'It is not against you personally, but against the way the European Council behaved when nominating the President of the European Commission.'

Well, I was confirmed, but it was quite close; I believe that there were fewer than 30 votes or so determining the outcome. But I should say that that was the most difficult hurdle; things went very well afterwards. However, that hurdle was the most difficult and most delicate. Immediately after that, there was quite a highly charged atmosphere in Parliament as well. Parliament, for the first time, wanted to take a stand against the Council on the nomination of the President of the Commission. As a result I had a hard time at the investiture, and to some extent later on too. But that was partly due ... all that, you must realise, was partly due to antagonism between Parliament and the Council; this was a Parliament which did not have very much power at the time and which sought any opportunity to strengthen its authority against the Council. I was the first victim of this, just as I was again later on. But that was the underlying significance of this antagonism between Parliament and the Council.