

Interview with Gaston Thorn: Europe in the world (Luxembourg, 6 February 2006)

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[Étienne Deschamps] Some years later, between 1975 and 1976, you chaired the 30th session of the General Assembly of the United Nations in New York. Did this experience help you to evaluate Europe's influence more accurately, and if so, how? — The influence of Community Europe on the world stage, on the international stage.

[Gaston Thorn] Yes, of course. Above all it enabled me to assess the relative lack of influence that we had in the world, because Europe, Europe, Europe... was a continent. To our American friends for a start, and, after them, all the others, it did not really mean very much. They were our former allies, but no more than that. I was always surprised just how little importance our friends, and even our allies, attached to European integration. It meant nothing to them; it was just a word, an expression, a work in progress, but one that was intangible, impalpable.

[Étienne Deschamps] And in your opinion this was due to a lack of information, a lack of interest, a lack of will on the part of the Europeans to inform international opinion of what they were and what they wanted to do?

[Gaston Thorn] A lack of everything, but essentially, to cut a long story short, it was a failure to affirm ourselves as Europeans. They said that it was just a word: 'We are Europeans'; it was rather like when de Gaulle once alluded to [a kid leaping onto a chair] scratching, capering and bleating 'Europe! Europe! Europe!' but what did it mean? That's about it. Right from the start, in the first years, we did not manage to give substance to this word 'Europe', to this plan for Europe.