

Interview with Gaston Thorn: the United Kingdom and Europe (Luxembourg, 6 February 2006)

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[Étienne Deschamps] In 1972 the United Kingdom, Ireland, Denmark and Norway signed the Treaty of Accession to the European Communities in Brussels. It was known that an application by the Norwegians was to follow; however, in the end they were not to join. At that time you were the acting President of the Council of the European Communities. In what ways did the enlargement change the course of European integration, in this instance, one that was obviously not without its effects?

[Gaston Thorn] This enlargement obliged us to think in another dimension. When there were three, or no more than six of us, we became accustomed to seeing things on the small scale, from a narrow, intra muros perspective and then, suddenly, it all opened up. And those of us that had a certain feeling for politics could foresee at the time that the enlargements were not over yet. And we know what followed. So it was an important, absolutely important moment.

[Étienne Deschamps] As you are aware, entry of the United Kingdom into the European Communities raised numerous debates and questions with positions taken both for and against. What position did the Luxembourg authorities take concerning the British dossier?

[Gaston Thorn] We were absolutely pro. Luxembourg was perhaps rather more so than the others. We were for the entry of Great Britain, given our attachment to Great Britain's contribution to Luxembourg during the war, and we have never made a secret of this gratitude, manifesting it on every occasion. Yes, it is a fact.

[Étienne Deschamps] Do you recall far more reserved positions being held by some of your colleagues as well as interminable discussions aimed at persuading them effectively to open the door?

[Gaston Thorn] Far more reserved positions being held by nearly all of them. And, forgive me for saying so, particularly by the French.

[Étienne Deschamps] And were you not aware at the time that the British might interpret the Community procedure quite differently from the founder States, with the risk in the long term of creating some tension?

[Gaston Thorn] Our French friends were not reluctant to explain to us, most clearly, that the Community and enlargement signified something quite different for the English than for us. They were, of course, right.

[Étienne Deschamps] Yet, despite that, you were prepared to take the risk?

[Gaston Thorn] Despite that. We thought that that was the route to take.