

## Interview with André Dubois: the association of the OCTs with the EEC (Brussels, 8 December 2006)

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[Étienne Deschamps] There is, however, one point, according to the archives and certain personal accounts, which led to quite serious tension during the negotiations: it was the issue concerning the association of the overseas countries and territories. I should like to hear your recollections of these negotiations, because they seem to have been of special interest to Belgium, given that on occasions Paul-Henri Spaak was later criticised — in the press or by the parties in opposition — for having sold out certain Belgian colonial interests. Which memories have you retained of this specific issue in the negotiations, which at times seems to have almost brought the negotiations to a standstill? A solution was found in the end, but how did you experience this discussion from your side of the fence, and what can you recall of it today?

[André Dubois] Well, this issue was brought up by Mr Pineau at the Venice Conference, which approved the Spaak Report as a basis for negotiation. But the Spaak Report did not mention the overseas countries and territories, so therefore he agreed on the Spaak Report, but put conditions concerning other issues, namely that overseas countries and territories become associated.

Why was this so?

Firstly, there was a twofold request: customs-free access for exports from the colonies to the common market and considerable financial aid. Why? France did not want to cut itself off from its colonies at a time when the first stirrings of independence were being felt, and when France was in the process of reviewing its relations with its colonies. Furthermore, they were in the throes of the Algerian war, with its concomitant economic and financial difficulties, so, for them, funding the development of the colonies was a burden that was increasingly difficult to bear.

There was one highlight in these negotiations: with the intention of persuading its partners, one day France invited to Val Duchesse Mr Houphouët-Boigny, who was a minister at the time — if my memory serves me well — a minister in the French government and the future President of Ivory Coast, and made a passionate plea for Euro-African cooperation. Of course, the problem posed to its partners by France was not an easy one. First of all, it was psychologically difficult for countries like Germany and Italy, for they were being asked to finance colonies that had been taken from them at the close of war — world wars, especially the first. It was not easy psychologically. There was also some reluctance on the part of these countries... not to commit themselves to a colonial adventure, but to cooperate in a colonial adventure over which they had no control regarding its evolution. Then there were, of course, the financial demands, which were not negligible. As a result, the whole business encountered a very guarded welcome at the outset, and it was only at the end, two months before the end of the signing, that a meeting of the Heads of government had to be called in order to settle the issue.

You mentioned Belgium; in fact, there were two types of problems. But I shall return to these later. However, early on, I think I can remember Mr Spaak returning to the Committee of Heads of Delegation and stating: 'Look here, the Belgian Government does not want the Congo to be included in this process.' I do not know whether he added — but I shall do so — that the government did not want to lose an iota of its authority over its colony. That was in 1957. In 1960, what happened? Independence for the Congo. So I believe that in the end it was political vision in this matter that carried the day. Everyone realised that it was really important to implement this process, and this was revealed to be probably one of the most fruitful cases of political intuition displayed by the authors of the Treaty, since, as you are aware, the association of the overseas territories paved the way for the Conventions of Yaoundé and of Lomé, which are still in force today under the Cotonou agreement. For the whole Cold War period, it enabled the African countries to maintain a policy of non-alignment, and that was very important politically.

The other difficulty that Mr Spaak had to face in this matter was that under the financial agreement all the countries paid, whereas the countries that had the colonies received. Not that they received very much; I think we paid — I have not the figures in my head — but the bottom line showed 5 million ecus in favour of the Netherlands — which, as we know, always defended their financial interests, just as everyone did in

these negotiations — and finally he was able to convince the Belgian government that in such cases, it was just not worth it.

The other personal memory that I have kept of the end of the negotiations, was Paris, at the Matignon Palace: we all saw Mr Mollet, Guy Mollet, the Prime Minister, walking in the Matignon gardens with Chancellor Adenauer and an interpreter, to return shortly afterwards with the financial agreement. Mr Adenauer had not spoken at all throughout the day, leaving Mr von Brentano to defend the case for German financial interests — which was a tough one since they were the biggest contributor; I believe that at the end they were paying 200 million units of account for five years. I think it was more or less the equivalent in dollars, at the time. He put this figure on the table, saying: 'There. Now the negotiations are over. We will not go any further, but we do not want to cause Europe to fail over this issue.' These are the personal memories that I have retained of these negotiations, with two occasions, two highlights: the visit by Houphouët-Boigny and the meeting in Matignon.