

Interview with André Dubois: the ceremony to mark the signing of the Rome Treaties (Brussels, 8 December 2006)

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[Étienne Deschamps] The fact that you took part directly in all these negotiations justified your also being present at the ceremonial signing in Rome on 25 March 1957 of the treaties creating both the European Economic Community and Euratom. I presume that you have kept a particular memory of that occasion, a cherished memory. Would you tell us something about it and what you remember of that historic day?

[André Dubois] I think that everyone that took part in the signing of the Rome Treaties, including the signatories themselves probably, if not the signatories themselves in particular, have retained an unforgettable memory of that day. Why is this so? As I have said in the past, everybody was aware, after the disappointments of the EDC — of the political Community — that we had succeeded in bringing about a highly ambitious revival of the European integration process. Clearly, the ECSC had played a pioneering role, but integration on a purely sectoral basis would not open the way to the developments that the Rome Treaties led to. So it is true that it was a highly memorable occasion.

The ceremony, as we know, took place in the Great Hall of the Horatii and Curiatii in the Roman Capitol. I have found out that it was on a Monday, at six o'clock in the evening, because that morning there was still a committee meeting of the Heads of Delegations as well as a ministerial session held to settle some issues that had remained pending. I have told you that we were negotiating right up to the last minute in Rome, and in the afternoon we paid tribute to Alcide de Gasperi, who was one of the founding fathers of Europe, as you are aware.

So there was a sea of journalists, photographers and ambassadors... There was also television there, although it was only in its early stages, in black and white. Then the ministers proceeded with the signing and afterwards, in their speeches, they all stressed the importance of what had taken place. I can pass on something that is not widely known: the negotiations had not quite been finished, so the Treaty had not been drawn up in its entirety and certain points needed to be completed afterwards. They signed three texts during the session — Euratom, the Common Market and the Final Act — and then there remained a series of other acts that they signed that evening during the reception that the Italian Government gave in the Palazzo di Venezia. There some room had been set aside for certain young officials, of which I was one, whose task was to invite the ministers to sign them, because the ceremony had gone on too long.

Another memory, one that we all share, is that it was raining in Rome but all the bells in the city were ringing. Since it is the eternal city, that really means something, doesn't it?

The walls of the town were covered in posters — no doubt you will have one in your archives — posters with a circle of six happy little girls whose skirts are in the colours of the national flags of the six countries. I have kept one and still have it at home.

It was a really joyful occasion, for the Roman authorities had done things well.

I suppose that there are not many of us left, those of us who were present at the signing, through force of circumstances. Yet it is true that this was probably one of the great moments of my career. Later I witnessed many more signings — accession treaties and so forth — but it was really this one... This was the basis for European integration.