

Interview with Jean-Pierre Gouzy: the atmosphere prevailing at the Congress of Europe in The Hague (Paris, 19 October 2007)

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[Jean-Pierre Gouzy] The atmosphere surrounding the Hague Congress was — and this is what has stayed with me the most — quite extraordinary. Extraordinary in what way? First of all, the place. It was held in the small Netherlands Parliament, the *Ridderzaal*, itself located in what's known as the Binnenhof — the Netherlands government buildings all have something special about them ... The *Ridderzaal* itself, by the way, with its Gothic architecture, is reminiscent of a time immemorial — even though it was built or re-built not all that long ago, I believe. So, this was the backdrop. The weather — for it had a part to play, too — was absolutely glorious. A feeling permeated the atmosphere that something new was going to happen. We didn't know quite what, there was the obvious attraction of the presence of Winston Churchill, and there was this backdrop, and this glorious weather. The sovereign rulers of the Netherlands were there, well, the Queen, Princess Juliana and Prince Bernhard. All of those present were eminent people. In fact, they were tremendously eminent and represented a wide range of nationalities. All of these factors helped create an atmosphere that was wholly conducive to debate. The general atmosphere was one of warmth, although things did get quite agitated at times — perhaps we'll come back to that later.

The perception of a 'united Europe', in inverted commas, was, naturally, not the same for all of the delegates meeting in The Hague. The atmosphere was fairly heated, at all events, very sustained, very intense, and it all took place against a backdrop that was ideally suited to the holding of such an event. There you have it! Therefore, I believe that everything contributed to the creation of this atmosphere in The Hague. There are other aspects that we could talk about later. We spoke of the Cold War and its implications, and what had happened in Prague the previous February was most certainly present on everyone's mind. Nor should we forget that, in the March, France, Great Britain and the Benelux countries had signed the Brussels Treaty, which was the first treaty whose purpose was defence and which led us to predict what was subsequently to become of the perception of the Atlantic Alliance, so there was a sense that we were living in a time when everything was changing, when everything was moving, when everything was being challenged, when things could go badly wrong, as though we still could have the power to get things back on an even keel, all of which helped create this unique ambience.