

Interview with Jacques-René Rabier (Luxembourg, 8 February 2002)

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We were all special advisers, as had been the case, more or less, at the Planning Commission. It was only in 1954 that Monnet began to think about leaving the High Authority — things were going well, and he wanted to do something else, especially after the failure of the EDC — he wanted to launch an Action Committee for the United States of Europe, an inter-party Political Committee, so he wanted to regain his freedom. It was then that we began to work on a structure for the organisation. But, in the beginning, everyone was a special adviser. There were directors who ran their services under the supervision of the High Authority, but their duties were often rather vaguely defined.

Apart from the directors, no other titles existed, such as Head of Division, etc. When I needed to recruit a member of staff to help me draw up monthly reports and the general report, thus freeing me to get on with my task of providing information, they would just say: 'Find someone and then bring him to us.' There, too, it was quite empirical. An administration that was in its early days, as that one was, especially when led by a man like Monnet, cannot be compared with an old-established administration, with a Ministry whose like may be found in any of our countries.

The Secretary played a very important role — he was not called Secretary-General then. He was Dutch — I know him very well; he has remained a friend, and his name was Max Kohnstamm — a person who played a very important role next to Jean Monnet. Being Dutch, he headed a useful cultural network of civil servants with his mastery of Dutch, German, French and English, and he was utterly devoted to Jean Monnet. What is more, as Secretary of the High Authority, he actually possessed a moral, if not hierarchical, authority over the services as a whole. I worked with him a great deal because, right at the start, it was he who was responsible for overseeing anything to do with information, and so I worked with him — but he allowed me the greatest freedom of action. And, little by little, especially after Monnet left, I was explicitly made responsible, under the direct supervision of the High Authority — I was also present at the Wednesday meetings — I was made responsible for this small information service which was to expand later on, especially after 1958.