

Interview with Henri Rieben (Lausanne, 11–13 September 2002)

Source: Interview du professeur Henri Rieben / HENRI RIEBEN, Étienne Deschamps, prise de vue : Alexandre Germain.- Lausanne: CVCE [Prod.], 11-13.09.2002. CVCE, Sanem. - (11:30, Couleur, Son original).

Copyright: (c) Translation CVCE.EU by UNI.LU

All rights of reproduction, of public communication, of adaptation, of distribution or of dissemination via Internet, internal network or any other means are strictly reserved in all countries.
Consult the legal notice and the terms and conditions of use regarding this site.

URL:

http://www.cvce.eu/obj/interview_with_henri_riebe_n_lausanne_11_13_september_2002-en-23e0342a-ffc1-49a2-aaab-d624ee99d9e2.html

Last updated: 05/07/2016



Interview with Henri Rieben (Lausanne, 11–13 September 2002)

[Étienne Deschamps] What memories do you have of the time you spent at the ECSC High Authority in Luxembourg? In particular, could you describe the state of mind of the first officials of Community Europe?

[Henri Rieben] I shall show you two photographs. This one is of a night session. The figure in the middle is Pierre Uri, of whom Paul Delouvrier rightly said: ‘the laser of his intelligence contributed to the fashioning of Europe.’ He indeed possessed a form of intelligence approaching genius. These are his colleagues during a night session, one of many, and you can see a plate of sandwiches on the table. Whilst on the subject, I should like to recount an anecdote that took place during the negotiation of the Rome treaties. This was shortly afterwards. The conference had started under the auspices and the leadership of Paul-Henri Spaak, who took things at a cracking pace and made people work likewise. After listening to the experts, Paul-Henri Spaak decided to change tack and turn all that had been said and heard to good account, so he gave Pierre Uri, Hans von der Groeben and Albert Hupperts, who was very close to him, the job of making a summary report in order to speed up the work. So at Easter 1956 these three men went away to the Grand Hotel Cap-Ferrat with three secretaries and an interpreter, and started to draft the summary report. Pierre Uri was ill when he arrived. He took a very strong Swiss remedy, slept 24 hours and got down to work. The two reports were dictated over twelve days and several of the following nights, then sent to Paul-Henri Spaak, who telephoned Uri at once telling him: ‘I was expecting a draft; you have given me a text in which I do not need to change a word or a comma.’ This report was forwarded as it stood to the Conference of Ministers, which was to meet a little later on in Venice. It was Christian Pineau who was chairing the Council at the time. He had just returned from a journey. Everyone was on tenterhooks on whether there was to be a discussion and what such a discussion would be about. Paul-Henri Spaak or Christian Pineau had the good idea of saying: ‘I will not go any further in presenting the text — you all received it some time ago — I shall start from the principle that you have all read it. I am opening the discussion: who wishes to speak first?’ And no one asked to speak. The result was that a conference which, I suppose, started at about eleven o’clock ended at around twelve-thirty, or thereabouts. The report was adopted as a basis for the negotiation that was to begin at ministerial level and continue by means of Heads of delegation conferences. Next, there was the spirit that I already felt in advance. When I made my first rounds of the offices, I found young people there. I had the following impression: the men who worked on the Treaty of Paris were men who had fought two wars, lived through two wars, and were determined to forge a future that would turn its back on that past. They had at their sides, in the services of the High Authority, younger men who were determined to get down to the same job. In the offices there was a mixture. For example, in the General Secretariat there was Kohnstamm, who was Dutch and had been in the Resistance, and opposite him, there was a German called Winrich Behr. Winrich Behr had been on the staff of Field Marshal Paulus during the battle of Stalingrad and had had the task of bringing to the Führer the news of the Stalingrad army’s surrender; he was also on Rommel’s staff in the Afrika Korps during the North African campaign. Those were the type of people. There was Michel Gaudet, the distinguished lawyer, trained in the school of that great lawyer, Maurice Lagrange, and next to him there was [Robert] Krawielicki. So there was a German, a Frenchman, Rollmann, who was a Luxembourger, there were Belgians, and so on. Thus there was a line-up of Europeans who made up a team, and because they lived in Luxembourg — which is a charming small town, but outside work it does not offer many opportunities to pursue the sort of lifestyle to which they were accustomed; it is a charming small town, and a country that I love and admire a great deal — these men, who did not know one another and had even served in opposing armies, came together and a friendship sprang up among them. That is what I felt, and as a Swiss, it made a great impression on me. My conclusion was that these men who had fought were now closer to one another than we, who remained or found ourselves outside. We were not in on it. They, however, were in on it; they became friends, linked by that friendship described by Jean Monnet as: ‘a powerful source of extra strength’. So there were the fathers, and what men they were! It is enough to look at their faces: the Adenauers, the de Gasperis, the Bechs, the Spaaks, the Beyens, the Schumans, the Monnets, and so forth. You just need to look at those faces to feel the determination shown by real statesmen, and around them there was the younger generation. I have shown you the photo of a night session with Uri; here is one with Monnet. He is preparing the first press conference to be given for the opening of the common market for steel. I was invited to take part in the commemoration of the 9 May Robert Schuman Declaration, made five years before at the Quai d’Orsay in Paris, which was held at eight o’clock in the Bundesrat, in a hall inside the Bundesrat in Bonn, by Adenauer. There, instead of finding an

atmosphere of celebration, at that time of strain I found an atmosphere of determination to build the future. That is what struck me deeply. I came from a country that was on the outside. In England and in Switzerland and elsewhere — in Scandinavia — we had fought hard to impose the idea of a large free-trade area which could have drowned the common market in what it would have constituted. We had celebrated; you could say that the bells had rung out when the EDC was defeated. Yet there I encountered a world that was determined and men that were determined to take up the challenge by putting forward an initiative which was in proportion to the enormous defeat that had just been suffered.