

## 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. - VIDEO (00:13:13, 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\\_lausanne\\_11\\_13\\_september\\_2002-en-efd70137-72fe-49e3-8b5d-7571286e35bc.html](http://www.cvce.eu/obj/interview_with_henri_riebe_lausanne_11_13_september_2002-en-efd70137-72fe-49e3-8b5d-7571286e35bc.html)



**Last updated:** 05/07/2016

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

[Étienne Deschamps] In May 1955, Jean Monnet told you that he wanted to set up an Action Committee for the United States of Europe. What did Monnet hope to achieve and what exactly did he set as the objectives of the Action Committee, of which you were the first Administrative Secretary?

[Henri Rieben] To start with I should clarify two points. I would say: ‘gave me to understand [that he wanted]’. The other point, which will make it easier to understand what follows: he set up an Action Committee, which I will talk to you about, and a Management Association for the Committee, which was basically the legal headquarters. The Action Committee was in Paris, at Monnet’s brother-in-law Alexandre de Bondini’s flat, at number 83 Avenue Foch. That was the political headquarters, and the legal headquarters was at my home in Lausanne. That was the difference. Your question is well phrased, because with Mr Monnet one must be very precise. By good fortune we have a copy of the mission he set for the Committee when he asked the political parties and trade unions to join. The members of the Committee were not individuals but political parties and trade unions. They covered the full spectrum of parties and unions in the Europe of Six, except the Gaullists and the Communists. Here are the significant extracts from the request Mr Monnet addressed to the party and union leaders:

‘It is my honour to ask you to take part in setting up the Action Committee for the United States of Europe. The public figures who take part in setting up the Committee will each ask their organisation to join. This is on the understanding that the political or trade union organisations joining the Committee will be represented on it by the delegate appointed for this purpose. The Committee will promote the unified action of member organisations in order to obtain, through concrete achievements, the United States of Europe. Its action will primarily consist, through its work and that of its member organisations, in conveying to governments, parliaments and public opinion its determination to make the Messina Resolution of 2 June [1955] a veritable milestone on the road to the United States of Europe. The resolution set out to explore ways of broadening the basis for economic growth in participating countries, in particular through the use of nuclear power, the gradual establishment of a European common market with the necessary safeguard measures, and harmonisation of social policies. To achieve these goals, vain solutions had to be discarded. Simple cooperation between governments would not be sufficient. It was essential that States should delegate some of their powers to federal European institutions with a mandate from all participating countries. At the same time the aim was to involve the United Kingdom closely in new projects. The Committee would take care to ensure that, in line with the proposals made by the Common Assembly on 14 May, the Coal and Steel Community received the necessary powers to extend the scope of its action to include social affairs.’

As an illustration of what I have just read, I shall take a document which became the articles of association of the Management Association of the Action Committee for the United States of Europe. The Committee was set up in Paris on 13 October 1955. I shall present the articles of association, page by page. They reflect what I have just said. Each page was countersigned by all the participants. This is the moral and political undertaking to which I drew attention when I read the request Monnet addressed to each of the parties, and here is the list of participants. This list contains, I repeat, all the political parties and trade unions, except the Gaullists and Communists. Its scope is the same as that of the European Coal and Steel Community. I recall two events in particular. The first one occurred in Lausanne. Jean Monnet made the application for the Association to be registered as a company, probably for the following reason: Monnet was a very rigorous person. Any organisation of this sort, once it has been registered as a company, comes under the supervision of the authorities. It is subject to discipline and rigour. I think that is what Monnet wanted so that everything related to the accounts and funding was perfectly above board, in strict observation of the laws and regulations and with full transparency. There was a rule, and this was the first mistake I made, involving a certain complicity with the trade registry. To go by the book all these people [participants] would have had to be present in Lausanne to sign the document before the notary. It soon became clear that this was impossible. So — I’ll skip ahead — when the time came for me to register the Association, I had a period in which I could consult the officials at the trade registry, who said: ‘That is the law, those are the rules.’ I had to say that it could not be done. So there was a delay. One day Monnet said to me: ‘Listen, it’s very simple. I think things are taking too long. So, if you can’t manage, I shall ask the Grand Duchess Charlotte of

Luxembourg, with whom I am on very good terms, to issue a decree and the Committee's Management Association will move to Luxembourg.' This proved a very good argument for me. The notary, who trusted me implicitly, enjoyed considerable influence in the Vaud canton. And so, the official at the trade registry, whose signature you can see here, proceeded on the assumption that I was the guarantor, in the eyes of the authorities and the law, of the authenticity of the signatures. The episode involving an appeal to the Grand Duchess of Luxembourg is both amusing and significant. That was the way things happened. At the same time the organisation found a home in Paris and the Committee was in fact set up, as I said, on 13 October 1955. But giving it a legal basis took a little longer, involving the consultation of specialists and legal advisers, with the signature finally coming on 15 March 1957. I have already mentioned the various people who were there. In answer to a question raised earlier, Monnet hoped to avoid a repeat of the failure of the EDC [European Defence Community] by setting up an organisation with sufficient support to win over public opinion, governments and parliaments. So the document was signed on 15 March 1957 and filed with the Lausanne trade registry, just 10 days before the signing of the Rome Treaties. André Philip, who supervised the whole process very closely and who, alongside Alexis Aron, had been one of France's two representatives — with the approval of General de Gaulle — at the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, to which I referred earlier, said very aptly, when the Committee was set up: 'Well, Europe once again has two legs, a free-market leg and a socialist leg. It can start moving forward again.'