

Interview with Jacques F. Poos: the duties of an MEP and the role of rapporteur (Sanem, 16 April 2004)

Source: Interview de Jacques F. Poos / JACQUES F. POOS, Étienne Deschamps, prise de vue : Alexandre Germain.- Sanem: CVCE [Prod.], 16.04.2004. CVCE, Sanem. - VIDEO (00:08:25, Couleur, Son original).

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Last updated: 05/07/2016

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[Étienne Deschamps] Can we spend a little time on the European Parliament, as an institution? You have been a Member of the European Parliament since 1999. Could you outline for us in practical terms the regular, daily duties of a Member of the European Parliament, rather than those of what is somewhat ambiguously called a ‘European member’?

[Jacques F. Poos] One can divide the MEPs into several categories. There are, unfortunately, a small number of them who are merely content to vote following the instructions of their political groups, but there are others who are prepared to get down to work and who hold an internal mandate such as Member of the Bureau, Quaestor, Rapporteur, Coordinator — that is to say, the negotiator between the groups that draft Resolutions or legal texts. The lion’s share of the work is, of course, done by the Rapporteurs, who are appointed by their groups — with the agreement of the other groups — while respecting a degree of proportional representation. Each group knows how many reports it will have to make and then it distributes them to the MPs in the group who have a particular competency in the field and who are members of the committee responsible for it. For example, there was a report on the opening up of the European railways to competition — a very controversial report. Naturally it was someone from the Committee on Transport who took responsibility for this report. There was European Union enlargement, which came under the Committee on Foreign Affairs. There were twelve Rapporteurs per State shared out among the groups, whose job — alongside the Committee, the Secretariat of the Parliament and that of the group — was to prepare these reports, set out the reasons and try to gather a maximum of votes for the text in the plenary session; all that often involves protracted negotiations. I had the luck to be rapporteur for Cyprus, a State that was never out of the limelight right up till the end of the term of office.

[Étienne Deschamps] Tell us in detail how matters progressed immediately you became aware of your responsibilities concerning the report on Cyprus? How did the negotiations proceed, day by day, since there was, as you have just said, one phase dedicated to drafting the texts and adopting a position, and then another very political phase of negotiations behind the scenes in order to prepare the text, to obtain a consensus and to ensure as far as possible that once the text was presented in plenary session, it would have a chance of being adopted? And, besides, is this always the case?

[Jacques F. Poos] It is an interesting case because enlargement is one of the cases where the European Parliament has real power: it must give its assent to the accession of a new Member State. It can say yes or no. So there was a vote on each of the Ten; very positive, as is well known, but it could have been negative. In such a case the matter would have been closed. The Rapporteurs for Cyprus, Romania, Estonia and all the other applicant countries worked closely together with the Committee, and every year they also presented a report on the follow-up to the negotiations, on the progress of negotiations with this or that country, and including political and economic information as well as information regarding the functioning of democracy within the country in question. This, of course, involved the Rapporteur’s travelling to engage in discussions with the political parties and governments in the applicant countries. In the case of Cyprus, there was also the problem — one that has still not yet been resolved — of the division of the island, the occupation of one part of the island by Turkish troops, the creation of a State within this occupied part which has been recognised by nobody except Turkey, and the long negotiations that have gone on for 30 years to overcome this division and to recreate a Republic of Cyprus which will be united and thus able to become a Member of the European Union. That was the aim, and it was not in our hands; it was in the hands of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. This has led, very recently, to the Annan plan on the creation of a new federal State called the United Cyprus Republic, on which Cypriots will be asked to vote, on 24 April, in two referendums, whose results we cannot yet know. In my opinion, it was the most interesting file of that whole packet because there was also the political problem attached to it regarding relations with Turkey; one that is inherent in the Cyprus issue since Turkey bears responsibility for one part of this territory. Now a solution exists and, this week, the Committee on Foreign Affairs passed a draft Resolution, which will in turn be passed in plenary session with a large majority — I hope — endorsing the Annan plan and inviting the Cypriot voters to seize this historic opportunity. That is just one report among thousands that have been discussed and voted by the European Parliament.

[Étienne Deschamps] And once the rapporteur has finished his work, does one always know in advance whether or not the text will be adopted in plenary session? Is it a foregone conclusion? When the text is submitted to the plenary session, can there still be surprises? Can this happen?

[Jacques F. Poos] Yes, it can happen. There have been cases where resolutions were upset in plenary session because, in the end, certain amendments were voted which displeased some, while other amendments displeased others. Some displeased those on the right, others displeased those on the left and, in the end, they all voted against. It can happen. It rarely happens for legal texts, but for Resolutions, on human rights and so forth, it can happen. However, for enlargement and the Cyprus report, the rapporteur can be certain that it will be accepted.