

Interview with Jacques F. Poos: the Quaestors, the Bureau and the Conference of Presidents (Sanem, 16 April 2004)

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[Étienne Deschamps] You have told us about your duties as Quaestor in the European Parliament; could you explain what precisely the College of Quaestors is, and what the powers of a Quaestor are?

[Jacques F. Poos] The College of Quaestors is composed of five persons elected by the plenary, but each one on a proposal from their group, again by the famous system of proportional representation, which is in fact determined by the voter. According to the Rules of Procedure, the Quaestors are responsible for administrative matters that concern the MPs: everything regarding the financial *modus operandi*, allowances, travel expenses, as well as things to do with the activities of the European Parliament concerning visitors, publicity and the internal organisation, the allocation of offices among the groups, the organisation of exhibitions, events and so forth, which take place within the European Parliament. It is work that is not considered as a political activity, but it is clearly necessary since Quaestors have to take decisions on individual cases regarding disputes between MPs and the administration. This happens from time to time. For example, they are currently playing a role preparing for the establishment of the new enlarged Parliament. Preparatory work is obviously needed in order that when our new colleagues arrive in early July, things are in order, they have their offices and everything is in place. But perhaps the most interesting prerogative of the Quaestors is that they are members of the Bureau of the European Parliament and thus participate in the meetings of the Bureau, where all the policy regarding staff and buildings and so on is discussed. It was important for Luxembourg to have somebody inside this restricted circle.

[Étienne Deschamps] So the appointment of a Quaestor also has national implications, because it is a question of prestige for a country for one of its MPs to be a Quaestor responsible for matters of a strategic nature?

[Jacques F. Poos] Yes, yes. The Bureau has 19 Members, 14 Presidents and Vice-Presidents and five Quaestors. It is therefore quite a restricted circle and there are countries that are not represented. For instance, Greece has no Members at the moment. The Netherlands, in the present group, has no Members. Which is...

[Étienne Deschamps] And from one term to another? I presume that there are rotating...

[Jacques F. Poos] Yes, it can change. It is certain that when we are 25, not everyone will be represented in the Bureau.

[Étienne Deschamps] Has it not been conceived that some additional posts as Quaestor might be created, or that the Bureau might be enlarged so that everyone could find a place?

[Jacques F. Poos] This has not been decided; it will remain a Bureau of 19. But alongside the Bureau, there is of course the Conference of Presidents, which is not perhaps so well known, but it is called the Working Committee in various national parliaments. It is the committee that brings together the chairmen — the leaders of the political groups — but it is also chaired by the President of the European Parliament: at the moment, Mr Cox. It brings together the leaders of the political groups, and policy decisions of a non-administrative and non-financial nature are taken here. For example, it draws up the draft agenda of a plenary — whether or not a question is included in the agenda — that is decided by the Conference of Presidents. Each President has as many votes as he represents MPs in plenary. So there too there are alliances among the various groups. It is not always the strongest group that imposes its point of view. So there is this division between the political aspect and the administrative aspect in the European Parliament.