


Interview with Paul Collowald: the Joint Press and Information Service of the European Communities from 1958 onwards (Sanem, 27 and 28 June 2002)

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[Etienne Deschamps] In 1958, you joined the Joint Press and Information Service of the European Communities in Luxembourg. What did your job involve?

[Paul Collowald] Here you are referring to the second stage in my professional life, because I had been a journalist for a little over ten years and I was joining what was known as the European Civil Service. Why and in which circumstances? After the Treaty of Rome had been approved towards the end of 1957, in order to tackle the first year of the Treaty of Rome's implementation, the High Authority, which was the eldest of the European Communities, with, what was at the time, its relatively modest sectoral Information Service, had the idea of anticipating what was to happen. The new and the older communities were to work together; they were to work on public opinion, but henceforth with different aims and in an area that had been enlarged by the European Economic Community and at the same time made more specific by Euratom. There was coal and steel, together with the classic sources of energy, and then, on the other hand, the new nuclear energy. So there was a need to reflect on the form that information was to take in the future, and a competitive examination was organised; quite simply, I took it and I joined the European Civil Service, where I was told: It is true that this is an examination for the High Authority of the ECSC, but you will be dealing with neither coal nor steel. For the most part we have worked on the trade union sector as a sector, because this was normal with coal and steel; now we have to think about young people, the university world for which there will be an ever greater demand, because there will be legal problems, problems of competition; well, all that will grow and we shall need to think a little about what we are to do. We also have, here in Luxembourg, a European School, which is an educational experiment; and again we will have to consider whether this is a prototype or a special case. In short, there was a lot to think about.

It was the Director of the Information Service, Jacques Rabier, who explained to me how this work was to be done and we began with a series of very practical operations, commencing from the current situation: there was the student world, where we had to start by making contacts with what was in France called the UNEF, the National Union of French Students, that is to say, the kind of students union that existed elsewhere in other countries. First of all, I organised the first meeting in Rome of the six UNEFs, assembling students to find out what we could do together, then I organised some conferences with university academics. One practical problem that cropped up was the first European baccalaureate; because gradually, each year, students had gone from class to class until the day of the

European baccalaureate, and Jacques Rabier said to me: Look here, I have written to Europe numéro 1, and also to the top-ranking television programme, Cinq colonnes à la une, but I have had no replies. I replied: Well, I am used to journalists. To which he said: Right then. I am sending you to Paris for 24 hours. Sort it out; here is the file. Try to make contact with the right people. So I went to Europe numéro 1, where I told them that, with a title like European baccalaureate, they had to send a special correspondent to cover the story. As for Cinq colonnes à la une, the letter to Pierre Lazareff was not an utter waste of time, for it was his right hand man, if I may call her that Éliane Victor, the coordinator of the whole programme who was there to meet me. I explained it all to her and she said: But there has never been such a thing. Well, no, I said, There has not; it's a first. This is just the sort of thing we do at Cinq colonnes à la une informing the French of happenings, not just in France, but right round the world. My director's reaction was: Not bad. Carry on like that.

So I embarked on a whole series of initiatives like that, but there is a story to tell that we can come back to elsewhere: on one occasion he put me at the disposal of Jean Monnet for 48 hours and I went to Paris, to Jean Monnet's house, where he said: I have to go to Luxembourg in order to address the Independent Trade Union at their annual congress, not just on trade union matters and so forth, but on the importance of training in general, in secondary and further education, drawing comparisons between the United States, Japan, Europe and all that. Gradually we have to introduce the concept of Europe, discreetly, but above all to make improvements in education and teaching as a whole, and I want a very special study carried out on the subject. Then he called in Fourastier and Raymond Poignant from the Planning Commission, who arrived with very, very precise statistics. My task was to be the journalist who was just there to take note of what took place, make a summary that evening and then a first draft the following day. That is where I saw Jean Monnet's way of working. It has often been described: it was frugal, because we were brought a tray, he smoked a cigar afterwards, the table was cleared and then we got back to work. There would be three or four very, very competent people, with someone like me in the background with a pen. That is sometimes how a number of things get done.