


Interview with Hubert Ehring: the role played by the Secretariat of the Intergovernmental Conference on the Common Market and Euratom (Uccle, 25 October 2006)

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[Étienne Deschamps] In practical terms, what was the role played by the Secretariat amid all this activity and in support of the members of the Intergovernmental Conference? How did matters proceed?

[Hubert Ehring] For this conference, two committees were set up: the Common Market Committee and the Euratom Committee, alongside sub-committees — I only know those for the common market, for free movement of goods, free movement of workers, movement of services and the freedom of establishment, for transport, for customs, of course, for which Mr Dubois was the chairman — and the drafting group.

The role played by the Secretariat consisted essentially in writing the minutes and summaries of these meetings as well as, during the pauses, supplying translations into the three other languages — because they were originally written in French — and preparing for the next meeting. The delegates communicated with their domestic authorities in order to receive new instructions. As committees, we met twice a day, from 10.00 until 1.00 and from 4.00 until 7.00, on weekdays, naturally. The sub-committees reported to the Committee on their work. The Committee took care of the issues that the sub-committees had left open. However, their work produced did not give rise to much discussion within the committees. The members of the sub-committees were also members of the national delegations and thus worked in consort with their Heads, so that there remained no points on which protests might be feared from the Committee regarding the solutions proposed by the sub-committees.

[Étienne Deschamps] At the time did you work closely with the Committee of the Heads of delegation, which was more concerned with supplying the political impetus?

[Hubert Ehring] No. I cannot recall a single meeting, if [you are referring to] a joint meeting held between the Common Market and the Euratom Committees. No, the Euratom negotiations took place in the same building, but I cannot recall any contacts between the two, unless it was merely concerned with the customs provisions, on which they asked Mr Dubois and his staff for assistance. But otherwise, they did not maintain any relations.

[Étienne Deschamps] Things were compartmentalised?

[Hubert Ehring] Very few contacts between the two. I was responsible for the secretarial services of the sub-committee for free circulation of services and for the right of establishment, but, at the same time, I was also the chairman. I do not think that there were many other sub-committees where this honour was conferred on a member of the Secretariat. Usually, it was a member, a national delegate and no one else. In the Drafting Group, of course, I was in charge of the secretarial services such as writing summaries and so on, but I took part fully in the discussions.

[Étienne Deschamps] In which language did all this work and all these discussions take place among the various delegations and the members of the Legal Affairs Committee?

[Hubert Ehring] The working language in the committees was French. There. The new treaty was drafted in the sub-committees on the basis of the text of the ECSC Treaty. It was there that a division of subject domains could be seen which anticipated the division of the subject matter into the different chapters of the new Treaty. That determined the choice of language, since for the ECSC Treaty, as opposed to the EEC Treaty, only the French version was deemed authentic.