

Interview with Norbert Schwaiger: the role of the General Secretariat in the organisation of the Council's work (Brussels, 22 November 2006)

Source: Interview de Norbert Schwaiger / NORBERT SCHWAIGER, Raquel Valls.- Bruxelles: CVCE [Prod.], 22.11.2006. CVCE, Sanem. - VIDEO (00:05:33, 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_norbert_schwaiger_the_role_of_the_general_secretariat_in_the_organisation_of_the_council_s_work_brussels_22_november_2006-en-92474af9-e57a-4433-9ce1-700e09db8706.html



Last updated: 05/07/2016

Interview with Norbert Schwaiger: the role of the General Secretariat in the organisation of the Council's work (Brussels, 22 November 2006)

[Norbert Schwaiger] Here we are at the heart of the role played by the Secretariat, as a service providing permanent assistance to the Council at all levels, but, above all, that of assisting and providing the infrastructure supporting the Presidency. Every Presidency holds meetings with the Secretariat before starting work. Practical issues regarding the organisation of work are discussed as well as, even at this early stage, the possibilities of finding solutions, possible compromises and guidelines to submit to the other parties. This obviously becomes increasingly important as the number of Member States increases, because earlier, when we were six, it was easy to consult everyone by just going round the table. Nowadays, in order to save time, we try more and more to learn where problems may lie in order to focus discussion on them. That is where the Secretariat is clearly most useful: helping the Presidency identify these issues and also putting them in writing, because it is the Secretariat that takes the minutes of all the meetings. It makes the summaries and files the conclusions. It also writes the reports that are used from one meeting to the next or which are used when dossiers are passed on from working party level to the Coreper. So these documents are clearly most important. They are of course drawn up... in permanent contact with the Presidency, but as a rule they are documents that are the province of the Secretariat, which thus has a certain autonomous responsibility for them. In general, the services of the Secretariat take pride in drawing up good reports because they know how important these are if work is to make progress.

The role played by the Secretariat of course covers a wider field than this. There is a Legal Service, which is very important too, especially when it is a matter of projects of a legislative nature. This is because it is very important during discussions, and particularly in the final result, to avoid any future legal difficulties that could give rise to lawsuits being brought before the Court of Justice. They have also been assigned the task — since we have mentioned transparency — of ensuring that texts are readable and comprehensible. Often compromises lead to monstrosities of expression, because of the attempt to include pros, cons and conditions in sentences. We try to disentangle these formulations, which are the result of substantive compromise, and to say the same thing in sufficiently clear and comprehensible language.

In addition, the Secretariat looks after the building, assigns rooms, organises the interpreting, ensures above all that documents are available in the necessary languages; incidentally, one could say that a large part of the Council Secretariat comprises services concerned with reproduction in various languages — be it documents, translators, or interpreters. These are not internal services; it is a joint service with the Commission, the Joint Interpreting and Conference Service, a pool in which the Council has its contingent. But it is very important — and especially so with the new States, where knowledge of languages, above all in their capital cities, cannot be assumed — work well and quickly done is essential. At the same time it is one of the greatest difficulties facing us. For one can deliver good translations quickly in several languages, but to do so in all the languages... Thus there is certainly a selection process for what is destined for the Council; it clearly has to be in all the languages, but if it is for lower levels, they have to put up with working documents that cannot satisfy all the language requirements. It is a delicate matter, but an answer cannot only be acceptable that varies according to the linguistic competence of individuals who are actors in the working parties or in the committees.