

Interview with Norbert Schwaiger: the development of the role of the Council Secretariat (Brussels, 22 November 2006)

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[Raquel Valls] How has the entry into force of the 1993 Treaty on European Union and the development of two sectors of intergovernmental cooperation — the common foreign and security policy and justice and home affairs — changed the role played by the General Secretariat?

[Norbert Schwaiger] Once again, we have already briefly touched upon this, because it was clear that in the Community model the role had been developing since the 1950s and was running quite smoothly. With the arrival of the new sectors of the Common Foreign and Security Policy — and now they have added defence, at any rate as an objective — where the sector ‘Justice and Home Affairs’ came from outside, there had already been some developments, but these developments had been intergovernmental. So at first it was simply a matter of putting them together, forming a type of juxtaposition.

One can see — and I have already mentioned this — that gradually the combined work of the Community and the CFSP, for instance, become apparent because the Commission, or the Community with the Commission as its intermediary, handles its own budget, and they play a role in many foreign policy actions: development aid, emergency aid, or other types of support. These can only be given by means of the Community budget, which follows certain rules that involve the European Parliament as well. So certain conclusions have already been drawn. I think that there will certainly be future developments to cover or to add, and again there are various things lying dormant in the Constitution; if they are put into practice in their current form, which is for the moment blocked, or in a form that is yet to be found, this will make an impact. But it is no use speculating; I must just mention that the current picture should not be taken to be the last word in this area.

I could also quote some examples: again in the ‘Justice and Home Affairs’ sector, as I said before, certain prerogatives have been transferred to the Community, and developments are also possible there. We must not forget that in this area there are also specialised agencies that have been created, or that could still be created, or inter-state networks with implications for the Community. So many developments are possible there too. But for the moment, the role of the Secretariat is that, anyway, whether it is the Community, the inter-state or the inter-governmental model, they always need secretarial services — they need documents, they need summaries, they need the finishing touches to be put to documents before their formal adoption. It is clear that the Secretariat has had to adapt: there have been new services, and structures that already existed under different names outside and developed according to the intergovernmental model have in part been integrated.

But the Secretariat’s role is not very different. One can perhaps even say that in the CFSP sector, the fact that no body exists that possesses an exclusive right of initiative means that the Secretariat has to assist the the Presidency all the more when drawing up proposals. A clear illustration of this requirement, and not merely its preparation but also its implementation, was the establishment of the post of Secretary-General/High Representative for the CFSP, which has already taken over part of the Presidency’s tasks in everyday management. There is the presence of the Secretary-General/High Representative in a large number of conflicts, or in situations where finding solutions to conflicts are being sought — in the Balkans, in the Middle East or in other world crisis areas where the Secretary-General acts in person or through personal representatives acting as intermediaries — and sometimes there is a need to set up an infrastructure on the spot.

This of course has repercussions within the organisation of the General Secretariat. I must stress that with the arrival of the High Representative for the CFSP, Mr Solana, a new attribution arrived at the Secretariat, which also led to a doubling of functions administratively. The classic role of the Secretary-General has now largely been taken over by the Deputy Secretary-General so that the High Representative can concentrate on essentially political issues and on his role working with the Presidency and being ready for the preparation and the enforcement of Council decisions.