

Interview with André Dubois: the establishment of Coreper (Brussels, 8 December 2006)

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[André Dubois] In fact, it was the first Council meeting that set up the Committee of Permanent Representatives, which was inspired by the Luxembourg Coordination Committee, and which had the role of preparing Council meetings and seeing to their implementation. It formed the connecting link with the national administrations and was, of course, assisted by working groups.

Most of the first permanent representatives were ambassadors who had been very closely involved in the negotiations. As far as I remember, the first Belgian representative was Baron Snoy. The German one was Ambassador Ophüls. I cannot quite remember who the Italian was ... Oh, yes, it was Ambassador Cattani. Mr Schaus represented Luxembourg. It was only the French who appointed a diplomat who had not been involved in the negotiations, Mr de Carbonnel, as their first permanent representative. That was not really a problem for our secretariat, which was obviously used to that kind of structure, which gradually strengthened.

I must say that the Commission initially had some reservations about the establishment of Coreper. You see, it was not very happy with this kind of intermediate structure between itself and the Council, feeling it accentuated the intergovernmental manner in which the Communities worked. In fact, it quite quickly overcame those reservations, and it is clear that Coreper — i.e. the Committee of Permanent Representatives — turned out to be a vital structure, defending the interests of the governments in Brussels, while at the same time defending the Communities' interests in the respective capitals. And, I believe, as that absolutely vital structure it was later institutionalised by the Merger Treaty.