

Interview with Otto von Habsburg-Lothringen: the step-by-step policy (Pöcking, 5 and 6 February 2004)

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[Philippe Nicolet] You were saying just now, with regard to Jean Monnet, that you regretted that he was a technocrat. What is it, in your opinion, that makes one, or that made him, a technocrat?

[Otto von Habsburg] It was History that launched him in that direction. It is simply that the post fell to the person who was best able to exercise it.

[Philippe Nicolet] And the inspiration behind the ECSC? Jean Monnet is given credit for being the inspiration behind the ECSC. In your opinion, is this absolutely correct?

[Otto von Habsburg] The idea was indispensable. We had to take certain steps and he was practical, with a gift for organisation.

[Philippe Nicolet] But the idea of pooling coal and steel in order to avoid the possibility of further fratricidal wars in Europe, was this a good plan? Do you think that this type of initiative was well thought out?

[Otto von Habsburg] Yes, yes, there was no alternative. I know this because I discussed it at length with Robert Schuman; I was arguing that he should go even further. Thank goodness he did not listen to me and that, on the contrary, he accepted. Technocrats see the possibilities for practical implementation whereas visionaries perhaps see further than technocrats; however, technocrats are indispensable, just as visionaries are indispensable.

[Philippe Nicolet] So, in the end, it is the step-by-step approach that you think characterises technocrats: they move forward one step after the other.

[Otto von Habsburg] Yes, and it is quite reasonable, you know. Just as it is a mistake to take a second step before the first. There is no more fatal mistake you can make in politics than that. It is the difference between the ECSC and the Plevin Plan.