

Interview with Otto von Habsburg: Jean Monnet (Pöcking, 5 and 6 February 2004)

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[Philippe Nicolet] Perhaps we might talk about one individual who played a role in European integration, one in particular that I am thinking of: Jean Monnet.

I should like you to give us your opinion of the historic role that he played since, obviously, there were various figures apart from Jean Monnet who contributed to the creation of this European Union.

[Otto von Habsburg] Of course. You say that ‘various figures’ contributed to this process. Jean Monnet played a role, an important role, but he certainly was not the only one to do so. You are well aware that the relationship between Monnet and Coudenhove was far from intimate. It was one in which there were very real tensions; I was on Coudenhove’s side throughout because I shared his vision more... Perhaps one might describe it as a case of the Frenchman on one side and the central-European on the other.

[Philippe Nicolet] If you were to analyse the essential differences between the two men — or rather between their two positions — how would you do so?

[Otto von Habsburg] Ah! Jean Monnet was more of a technocrat, whilst Coudenhove was a prophet and a visionary. That was the greatest difference, in my opinion.

[Philippe Nicolet] And regarding his ‘vision’, what is it that distinguishes him when you use the word ‘visionary’?

[Otto von Habsburg] Monnet had been much more influenced by the realities of France and Western Europe than Coudenhove, who came from Central Europe and whose country had disappeared. The disappearance of his country created his vision, which required that the ideas that had formed his country be transferred to Europe. That was why Coudenhove felt that he was a prophet. He did not express it quite like that, but, deep down, that was it. I think Jean Monnet was more of a technocrat, one who saw which things needed to be done in a more down-to-earth way.

[Philippe Nicolet] So then, in a nutshell, without Jean Monnet, would an integrated Europe have come about nonetheless?

[Otto von Habsburg] I think so, but this would also have been the case without a lot of other people too. Today, who are the people that worked towards the integration of Europe? There would have been others in their place.

[Philippe Nicolet] Do you feel the same way in this respect as for the inventions when they say that even without Daguerre, even without Niepce, there would still have been photography; without Edison or without the Lumière brothers there would still have been the cinema, because these inventions were in the air at the time; do you feel that European integration was something that was in the air at the time?

[Otto von Habsburg] Yes, quite so. For you see, the two wars that laid waste Europe compelled us to go ahead. Other people would have done the same thing. At any rate, that is what I think. I do not know now whether I am right, but I should say that no one person deserves responsibility exclusively for this extraordinary success that we have achieved. There were so many working on quite different plans.