


Interview with Jacques F. Poos: the EU and European cooperation organisations (Sanem, 16 April 2004)

Source: Interview de Jacques F. Poos / JACQUES F. POOS, Étienne Deschamps, prise de vue : Alexandre Germain.- Sanem: CVCE [Prod.], 16.04.2004. CVCE, Sanem. - VIDEO (00:06:13, Couleur, Son original).

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URL:
http://www.cvce.eu/obj/interview_with_jacques_f_poos_the_eu_and_european_cooperation_organisations_sanem_16_april_2004-en-e8dbb798-54db-4e09-b971-3faeb56eab10.html

Last updated: 05/07/2016



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[Étienne Deschamps] Comparing it with the Western European Union (WEU) and also the Council of Europe, with which you are well acquainted as a former President of the Council, and as one who therefore knows the intergovernmental approach of these institutions, what, in your view, has been the benefit of the strictly Community method of the European Union? In practical terms what distinguishes the *modus operandi* of these institutions and what might explain the success or failures of either one?

[Jacques F. Poos] The Council of Europe was, in fact, the first joint European organisation founded following the Second World War, and it always had much wider and much vaguer objectives than the European Economic Community. It was very useful at the time and I think that it continues to be so today, because the Council of Europe includes countries like Russia, which I cannot see ever becoming a member of the European Union, whatever Mr Berlusconi says. I do not see it ever doing so and, besides, it would not wish to; since it has its own importance, a culture, a dynamic and an economic structure of its own. There is no place for it, but it is possible to have good relations and agreements with Russia. Concerning the Council of Europe, especially relations to do with the workings of democracy and compliance with human rights, the Council of Europe plays its role, just as it did, for example, during the war in Chechnya, putting Russia under strong pressure. These intergovernmental bodies still have their importance today. I should not like to see them disappear. It is a little less certain where the Western European Union is concerned. The WEU was conceived as a means to develop European cooperation in military matters; however, it was always said of it that it should not compete with the Atlantic Alliance. That was always its dilemma. 'What can we do? What will the dominant country in the Atlantic Alliance authorise us to do?' Today there is an attempt to create this military core within the European Union and the Franco-British initiative, which Germany, Benelux and Italy have also joined, should be seen in this light. Therefore I would sooner expect to see the WEU integrating the European Union at some point, but this would also imply that certain powers that are currently assigned to the Assembly of the Western European Union would revert to the European Parliament.

[Étienne Deschamps] And do you think that the Council of Europe could have been criticised, rightly or wrongly, for not always having achieved its aims? Do you think that the intergovernmental method is... or, rather, that right from the start the working method itself might have been one of the causes of deadlock or certain half-hearted positions, if I may so put it? Is it strictly due to the method by which decisions are taken, to the decision-making process, which is very different in the European Union?

[Jacques F. Poos] It is due to the objective, which is even vaguer, and there is no objective fixed that has to be realised by a certain deadline. It was the method laid down in the Treaty: to abolish customs duty by such and such a date, to establish a common currency by another, to achieve various objectives — this is not in the Treaty of the Council of Europe, but it is also due to the method, as you have pointed out. The Community method involves one instance, the Commission, which is a unique element of European integration (it exists in no other international body) and which is designed to represent the general interest, the European interest. Members of the Commission have to swear before the Court that they shall not receive directions from the governments and that they will act only with the European interest in mind. The Commission puts forward proposals to be discussed in Parliament and in the intergovernmental body, which is the Council. That is a method that should be developed and, as we said earlier, also extended to the second and third pillars.