

Interview with Georges Berthoin: the implementation of the common market for coal and steel (Paris, 22 July 2005)

Source: Interview de Georges Berthoin / GEORGES BERTHOIN, Étienne Deschamps, prise de vue : François Fabert.- Paris: CVCE [Prod.], 22.07.2005. CVCE, Sanem (Luxembourg). - VIDEO (00:03:46, Couleur, Son original).

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Last updated: 05/07/2016

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[Étienne Deschamps] What precisely do you recall from this period, when the common market for coal and steel was implemented?

[Georges Berthoin] Before the coal and steel market went ahead, there was an equally important event: it was the establishment of the first European tax. That was in December 1952. Monnet had not paid any attention to this, but someone told him that it was necessary to publish the texts of the Treaty of Paris allowing this tax to be levied. To this end, publicity was needed that was legally valid. Hence the Official Journal of the European Coal and Steel Community; the decision to publish it was taken on 23 December. As a result, we had to spend the Christmas holidays improvising an Official Journal. I was entrusted with that particular task. In the end, we printed it at the Bishop of Luxembourg's printing works. It was the only one that was open and able to cope with that job. That was the first moment when you felt that there had been a transfer of powers. The second important transfer of powers came on 10 February 1953, when Jean Monnet announced that, pursuant to the Treaty of Paris, henceforth the High Authority would exercise national powers where coal was concerned. The same thing took place in May for coal [*sic*]. So these three operations – and it is for this reason that they are important – took place, to our amazement, without incident, in a fashion that might be described as 'soft'. I recall that following the publication of this first Official Journal, and the texts on levying the first European tax, we waited anxiously to find out whether this tax would be paid. And when we saw that it had been paid, we said: 'That's it then, it's starting to work.' The optimism that was the result of the astonishing ease of the operation meant that, once we reached the stage of establishing, or opening, the common market for coal, we were already prepared for this type of pleasant surprise. From then on there were a whole series of personal events that ensured that various people hold fairly strong recollections about all that; however, after the creation of the common market for steel, we felt that the authority of the High Authority had been recognised and that, as a result - for this had been at the back of our minds from the start - when the moment arrived, it would be possible to go further. There you are: the method worked.