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[Étienne Deschamps] How did Robert Marjolin, who had been Secretary-General of the OEEC, conceive the role of the European Communities?

[Paul Collowald] I must say that to mention and draw attention to the fact that Marjolin was the first Secretary-General of the OEEC, is most important. Firstly, although this is something everybody has forgotten, it is very important because he brought with him all the experience that he had acquired there, through his excellent relationship with the United States — incidentally, his wife was American — for at the time when he had been in what was called Jean Monnet's team, and thus lived outside France. This afforded a wide experience of that world and at one particular moment, this was most important for the implementation of the Marshall Plan. The Marshall Plan provided some of the foundations for building a fairly robust European Community, together with the Planning Commission. Thus there was continuity… So Marjolin arrived in Brussels with this experience, but at the same time, he had come to know the political world very well in France — in his youth, he had been in the Private Office of Léon Blum, although things did not go too well between them, for Marjolin, who was shrewd when analysing political situations, felt that the type of Left-wing pacifism then current was not exactly the right path to follow where Hitler was concerned. This also demonstrates that Marjolin was not simply what is known as a 'top civil servant'; he also possessed a feeling for politics, and actually had aspirations in that direction at one point, but things did not go too well. He stood as candidate in the département of Allier, but it did not work out.

Then, in Brussels, he was a member of the first Commission team created by the Treaty of Rome and led by Walter Hallstein, where with Sicco Mansholt, the Dutchman, Marjolin, as a Frenchman, was a little… One should speak in appropriate terms of the other members of the Commission, but I think it was a 'shock trio', and very different. In this team, Marjolin, who was responsible for economic and monetary affairs and so on, did not confine himself to what is called his Commissioner's, or Minister's, portfolio and went on to play an important role in two circumstances: the first occurred when, at the end of the first period of the establishment — since practically nothing happened in 1958 — on 1 January 1959, there were the minor reductions in customs duties, and the famous Common Market, in inverted commas, had to go ahead, destroying barriers and inventing common policies as it went. That is where Marjolin played a most important role — one that came within his remit; but he was to play an equally important role when there was the crisis — when the Commission and the bold proposals advocated by Walter Hallstein clashed with General de Gaulle's conception of the European Community's development. To start with, I shall deal with the first point: the Treaty of Rome, from the point of view of common policies, for which the common agricultural policy needed to be invented and implemented; Mansholt, with all his energy, and so forth, found himself with a 'framework Treaty of Rome', as it was called. That was, to some extent, the soft underbelly. So the first step was simply to set up a monetary committee with a modest coordinating role; however, from the point of view of medium-term planning and budgeting, when it came to the substance of this economic activity, there was not much there. It was Marjolin who had to set that in motion. He also convened a first conference on regional policy, anticipating a sort of spatial planning, so that was something else he started.

He was therefore a pioneer in several areas that, later on, were to be continued in some ways by Raymond Barre, but let us not go too fast. Then — a very modest step at first — Robert Marjolin set up the Board of Governors of the central banks, so that they could meet and look at things together… But all that was very discreet at first, and did not have much influence on the way things went. He also set in motion what was called the 'medium-term policy'. Now this was very interesting, because here we find culture and words creating divisions even in a Community of Six, between the German and the French, to take these two examples. The word 'plan', in France implied, at least for General de Gaulle, an urgent obligation. Well. Yet it was not Soviet-style planning, after all — let us be serious about this. Whereas in Germany, and in particular for Erhard, planning meant Hitler's 'Planifikation'. So when Marjolin proposed a medium-term policy — for, nonetheless, one day this needed to be considered — in Bonn, Erhard was horrified to hear of it: 'Was die Franzosen…?', 'What are they up to? Planning?' So Marjolin said: 'Right then, to start with, we shall collect some statistics.' 'What, statistics? European statistics? What is that going to imply: statistics?'

These are all things that may seem banal or elementary today, but that is where Marjolin, patiently, step by step, had to go forwards, and he played a very important part in this.