

## Interview with Charles Rutten: the Political Committee and European Political Cooperation (The Hague, 29 November 2006)

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[Étienne Deschamps] You were telling us about the Committee ... about European Political Cooperation and the Étienne Davignon plan. How would you define that European Political Cooperation at the beginning of the 1970s? What did it involve and how did it function?

[Charles Rutten] Well, I found the meetings of the Political Committee, so that was the meeting of these six or seven or eight or ten Directors-General, extremely important, not because of the decisions that were taken, but above all because it was a clearing house for information, for the exchange of information that was extremely valuable. You would hear things there that normally you would not hear through the embassies, because we knew each other very well, practically all of us were friends. And that was, especially for me in any case, the most valuable element.

Then of course it was also a place where the most topical issues were discussed. The Middle East problem was one of the most critical elements. What position should be taken with regard to Israel, with regard to the Arab states, well the eternal problem of the Middle East. And there we still managed to try to harmonise as far as possible, not completely, but as far as possible the positions of the eight or nine ... And I must say that my cooperation with Davignon was one of the most positive memories I have from my career, because cooperating with him and discussing with him, was a real pleasure.

[Étienne Deschamps] But at that time, those discussions took place mainly at the intergovernmental level?

[Charles Rutten] Intergovernmental. Yes, the Commission was represented by one of its representatives. Well, Mr Wellenstein, whom we were talking about the other day, was the one who represented the Commission for a number of years within the Political Committee.

[Étienne Deschamps] And how did European political leaders gradually come to accept the idea that it was possible to codify somewhat, in a treaty, the Single Act, those measures that, up till then, these cooperation measures, had been very intergovernmental?

[Charles Rutten] We were opposed to the idea that was put forward in Milan, at the Milan Conference. We were opposed because we said, 'Look, we will have to conclude a treaty in order to amend the Treaty of Rome, but political cooperation is purely intergovernmental. We must not introduce purely intergovernmental elements into a treaty that is totally different in nature.' A decision on principle about this issue was taken in Milan, by the way. If you look at the conclusions of the Milan Conference, there is a separate agreement there on political cooperation.

During the negotiations, it was the Commission and particularly Émile Noël who spoke, and very eloquently defended the view that it was very important to include political cooperation in the treaty, which was then named the *Single Act* because it included both elements precisely as a forerunner of integration and political cooperation within the economic union and in order not to leave it as a separate activity. And he prevailed. So in fact we agreed to have a separate chapter in the final act of the Single Act Treaty that more or less codified what already existed. It did not introduce anything new, but it codified existing practices.