

Interview with Norbert Schwaiger: the European Council's role in providing impetus and laying down general political guidelines (Brussels, 22 November 2006)

Source: Interview de Norbert Schwaiger / NORBERT SCHWAIGER, Raquel Valls.- Bruxelles: CVCE [Prod.], 22.11.2006. CVCE, Sanem. - VIDEO (00:07:08, Couleur, Son original).

Copyright: (c) Translation CVCE.EU by UNI.LU

All rights of reproduction, of public communication, of adaptation, of distribution or of dissemination via Internet, internal network or any other means are strictly reserved in all countries.

Consult the legal notice and the terms and conditions of use regarding this site.

URL:

http://www.cvce.eu/obj/interview_with_norbert_schwaiger_the_european_council_s_role_in_providing_impetus_and_laying_down_general_political_guidelines_brussels_22_november_2006-en-0448790f-d910-4e32-9113-b0f7013b5e.html



Last updated: 05/07/2016

Interview with Norbert Schwaiger: the European Council's role in providing impetus and laying down general political guidelines (Brussels, 22 November 2006)

[Raquel Valls] How do you see the extension of the European Council's role as a driving force and guiding influence? You have been present in practically all the European Councils during your career.

[Norbert Schwaiger] Yes, except for an important one that I missed, because I was away in the United States. But, yes, I have seen the institution develop. There, right at the beginning, I think it was already on the lips of Giscard d'Estaing, who had taken the initiative to transform the series of summits which were held after the one that produced an important opening in early December 1969, at The Hague, where the green light was given for the completion of the internal market and the other policies already in the Treaty of Rome, and who mentioned 'deepening'. The plan for monetary union had already been conceived at the time, but unfortunately it was hampered by the energy difficulties — the oil price — and also, up to a point, by problems due to the British membership — first the so-called renegotiation demanded by Prime Minister Callaghan, and then the arrival of Mrs Thatcher, who wanted her money back.

Right up to 1984, in Fontainebleau, these British issues — Community funding — continued to dominate the European Councils, even bringing into question the progress achieved. Fontainebleau removed the obstacles to the completion of the common market where, soon afterwards, three years later on, the Single Act was adopted. By changing one provision (Article 100, to which Article 100 A was added, deciding on qualified majority voting for most of the rules and directives concerning the internal market) this act opened the doors for further developments, including the possibility to take up the initiative for monetary union again. Establishing the Internal Market created a real movement, an opening.

I mention these examples, because the European Councils that produced that, did not limit themselves to laying down guidelines or giving guidance, but in fact played the role which had always been theirs, namely, to be the highest instance: either the court of appeal, or the court that in the last resort delivered judgments on the most intractable difficulties, those that could not be left to the specialised ministers. Certainly, the issue of British participation in the Community budget was one of these questions that, to some extent, blocked everything. That is why I mentioned it. Just as later on, before enlargement to include Spain and Portugal could be implemented, there was a problem with the Greeks who wanted to be certain that their traditional produce and economy would not be crushed by their new Mediterranean competitors.

So at that point it was the European Council which had to approve the integrated Mediterranean programmes. And there are further examples from more recent history where the Council has played this role as a decision-making body, as last resort, on important questions. I think that people continue to talk... Because it was nobler, the European Council does not join in the fray, it remains above it, on the areopagus. But one must be practical. It works well: once the road is clear, the European Council gives the guidance and the impetus. Once a programme has been established, as in Portugal, in Lisbon, to make the Community into the most competitive and best performing entity, whether industrially, commercially, or whatever, afterwards the European Council demanded an annual report so that it could say: 'This is good' or 'That is not enough, you must do better'.

Or the same thing... A similar programme was made for the JHA, in Tampere, in Finland, where all the subjects for the foreseeable future of the JHA were described, and where too there were new methods introduced at the same time — a sort of benchmarking, whereby progress in a certain area was to be examined at regular intervals, on the basis of reports by the Commission or the Presidency. So, there too, the European Council was the driving force, firstly to provide this type of programme, then to supervise it, to create new ways to facilitate this supervision and this driving force. There is always a bit of everything. Put simply, it is important for the public to be aware that the European Council is not something that hovers above the real world, but on the contrary, occasionally it joins the fray, and it is the Council that must decide and take things in hand.