

Interview with André Dubois: the establishment of the Secretariat of the Councils of the European Communities (Brussels, 8 December 2006)

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[Étienne Deschamps] It was after the signing of the Treaties of Rome, which set the seal, as it were, on the new beginning, that you left Luxembourg to become a permanent member of the Council, of the Secretariat that became a joint body of the Councils of the three Communities in Brussels. Can you tell me how things were set up there in concrete terms? How was it achieved — I mean joining the existing structures together? And I am also thinking, for example, of Coreper. How did things gradually fall into place?

[André Dubois] At the start, once the Treaty had entered into force on 1 January 1958, the first question to arise was that of the seat of the new institutions. Three cities were in the running — Paris, Brussels and Luxembourg — and it will come as no surprise to learn that an agreement could not be reached. And so a compromise was found — on the initiative of Maurice Faure, in fact. It was an odd compromise, whereby during the first presidency, which, on the basis of the alphabetical rotation system, fell to Belgium, the new institutions — essentially the Council and the Commission — would not meet in Brussels but at Val Duchesse, to avoid prejudging any subsequent decision to locate the seat in Brussels. And so the first meetings of the Commission, in which I performed the secretariat role along with Ernst Albrecht, because they had no officials, were held under the presidency of Walter Hallstein at Val Duchesse, which, I believe, was also the venue for the first two meetings of the Council. Well, it soon became apparent, of course, that this was not a practicable solution, and the institutions therefore sought to establish themselves in Brussels, which they did. I have to say that locating the Secretariat in Brussels did not pose many problems for the simple reason that we already had a team which had remained in place for the Interim Committee constituted for the period between the time of signature and the entry into force.

[Étienne Deschamps] Did you not take part in the work of the Interim Committee?

[André Dubois] I certainly did take part in the work of the Interim Committee, but my main involvement at that time — and we shall probably have the opportunity to come back to this shortly — was in the negotiations taking place in Paris on the large free-trade area. Well, some of our colleagues moved on to the Commission. Others stayed where they were. I myself had an offer of a post with Euratom, but in the end I turned it down. And the staffing establishment of the Secretariat was steadily increased. Fairly soon we were housed in the rue Ravenstein in the Mont des Arts district, a place that still evokes quite a bit of nostalgia in most of us, because the setting was pleasant and, of course, we had the meeting rooms we needed at the *Palais des Congrès*.