

Interview with Georges Berthoin: his nomination as Head of Jean Monnet's Private Office (Paris, 22 July 2005)

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[Étienne Deschamps] What were the circumstances of your appointment in 1952 as Head of Private Office to Jean Monnet, President of the ECSC High Authority in Luxembourg?

[Georges Berthoin] I had a sort of European vocation, which was born during the years of the Resistance in France. It was confirmed by my discovery of America in 1947, when I saw Germans, Poles, French and Italians who were able to live in harmony within the United States of America. What I had studied in an intellectual, bookish fashion about the United States of Europe appeared to me feasible, since I could see it as a living reality in America. I was seeking to serve the cause of Europe, and my professional activities happened to lead me to Lorraine where I made the acquaintance of Robert Schuman at the very time that he made his appeal on 9 May 1950. My ambition was to be able to serve in the new Coal and Steel Community because, like many of my contemporaries, I felt that this new European Community would be a great deal more serious than all the international organisations that had attempted, more or less effectively, to unite Europe.

So, I went to see Jean Monnet in rue de Martignac at the Planning Commission and I told him: 'I should like to work with you.' The interview was extremely ... 'Do you think so?' 'Yes.' 'Good. All right then.' It was no more complicated than that. However, I know that he had done his research, and that he had asked Pierre Dreyfus, the former President of the Lorraine coalmines, about me. As President of the Lorraine coalmines, Mr Dreyfus had seen me at work and I believe — I learnt this much later — he gave a favourable reference to Monnet, who had after all done his homework. Robert Schuman played no part in this although we were extremely close and I had done a great deal of work for him. But Robert Schuman never intervened personally. For anybody. It was therefore on the basis of this very short conversation that Monnet decided to take me on. It took some weeks because I could not leave the prefectural administration where I was working in just a few days, so I arrived in Luxembourg on the first or second of December 1952 amid the creative chaos that was the beginning of the High Authority.