

Transcription of the interview with Philippe de Schoutheete — Part 1 — 1956–1985 (Brussels, 4 March 2010)


Caption: Transcription of the interview with Philippe de Schoutheete, Belgian Permanent Representative to the European Union from 1987 to 1997, carried out by the Centre Virtuel de la Connaissance sur l'Europe (CVCE) on 4 March 2010 in the studios of the Council of the European Union in Brussels. The interview, conducted by Hervé Bribosia, Research Coordinator at the CVCE, particularly focuses on the following subjects: the beginnings of Philippe de Schoutheete's diplomatic career and cooperation between the Benelux countries, France's European policy from 1958 to 1961, various eminent Belgian figures in the 1950s, the 1966 Luxembourg Compromise, Pierre Harmel, NATO, WEU, the prospect of Spanish accession to the European Communities, the Tindemans Report, European affairs in the Belgian Foreign Ministry, the 1982 Belgian Presidency and the Stuttgart Declaration of June 1983.

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I. The beginnings of his diplomatic career and cooperation between the Benelux countries

[Hervé Bribosia] Ambassador, thank you very much for agreeing to deliver your first-hand account of the process of European integration to which you have devoted most of your diplomatic career — a career that culminated in your 10 years as Belgium’s Permanent Representative to the European Union. It was back in 1956, when you were 24 years old, that you entered the Department of Foreign Affairs. Did you begin your career with a special interest in European matters? How was this interest born, and how did it develop?

[Philippe de Schoutheete] I was the son of a diplomat. I received my primary schooling in Cairo and my secondary education in England; as a result, I probably had more interest in the international scene than other people. It goes without saying that the discussion of international politics was commonplace in our household. That probably influenced me. More generally, however, I think I was marked by the horrors of the war. I was 13 at the end of the war, and I certainly had this conviction that my generation, our generation, had to act differently from the previous generation whose actions had led to those horrors.

I had a very clear memory of Germany in 1945. My father was appointed Minister Plenipotentiary of Belgium in Copenhagen — we did not have an embassy at that time — in 1945. In the summer of 1945, I was in Brussels for the holidays, and we set off by car, because there was no other means of getting to Copenhagen in the summer of 1945. There were no trains, there were no planes, there were no ships, and so the only way was by car. It took three hours, and we crossed the Netherlands, then the north of Germany — Bremen and Hamburg — to reach the Danish border. The sight of cities such as Bremen and Hamburg in the summer of 1945 was extraordinary. I had experienced the war in England, the bombings in London in 1942, but to see on the ground the results of the Allied raids on major German cities was quite staggering. For a young teenager like me, it was quite striking to see these things and draw the conclusion that another way had to be found. That certainly influenced my desire to try to take part in the creation of something that differed from what the previous generation had made.

The other impression — a very strong one — came later, when I was at university. It was the impotence of the countries of Europe. I discuss it in a book I wrote at the end of my career. There was a prevailing sense at the start of the 1950s and in the late 1940s that all the states of Europe were totally impotent. Their economies were in a lamentable state and were struggling to recover after the war. Their social structures were seriously weakened. There were very strong Communist minorities in France and Italy. The very structure of society was threatened, and governments were powerless. They were finding it impossible to climb out of the morass, and it took international action, initially by the OEEC — the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation — then through the Benelux Union to some extent, and through the Coal and Steel Community, to set them on the road to recovery. And there was the Marshall Plan, of course. Hence the idea that cooperation was the way to overcome such impotence. I believe that these two elements, namely the memories of war and the desire to overcome powerlessness, were behind my decision to try to enter the diplomatic service, to try to engage in international affairs.

[Hervé Bribosia] So, in the Department of Foreign Affairs, you were initially assigned to the division responsible for Benelux affairs. What was the state of Benelux cooperation in those days? And how was the future of the Benelux seen in the light of the emerging common market of the European Economic Community?

[Philippe de Schoutheete] When I entered the Ministry, the Benelux was a very real and fairly effective cooperative structure. The first Benelux agreements date from the war, but the seminal event was the signing of a treaty in 1948. So I arrived on the scene eight years later, in 1956, by which time there was already a high level of cooperation, particularly in the economic sphere and most especially in the realm of trade. At the time, that seemed far more tangible than the Treaty of Rome, which was being finalised but was only a beginning, a ray of hope that was nevertheless clouded by a certain fear of non-ratification, since the failure of the proposed European Defence Community was still on everyone's mind.

My memory of that time is that I had asked to work in the economic and commercial field, in what was known as the DGB, the Directorate-General for External Trade, because I wanted to deal with those matters. And, indeed, I was entrusted with the task of looking after a body called the Permanent Committee, which dealt with commercial relations within the Benelux, focusing particularly on trying to reduce or abolish quantitative restrictions. It is difficult to imagine this today but in 1956, trade between the Netherlands and the other two countries, Belgium and Luxembourg, was subject to quotas. In particular, we had protectionism in the agricultural sector. We did not want to import milk and cheese at Dutch prices. We had internal protective tariffs, and the same applied to fruit and vegetables. And the Dutch, for their part, protected their industries. There were a number of our products, particularly cars assembled in Belgium and machine tools, that they would not import without applying duty. So in that committee, we tried to lift such trade barriers gradually, and I had the impression, as I said, of working on something practical, on what was essentially a cooperative venture. The fact that it might be incorporated in due course — and that it should be incorporated — into a six-member common market was vaguely in the air but was regarded at that stage as a fairly distant prospect.

II. France's European policy (1958–1961)

[Hervé Bribosia] You were posted to Paris, where you served as economic attaché from 1958 to 1961. Were you aware of a hardening of French positions on Europe after the return to power of General de Gaulle? In particular, what were the implications of the Fouchet Plans of 1961 and 1962?

[Philippe de Schoutheete] First of all, let me say that General de Gaulle's return to power was viewed with a certain degree of trepidation. The Treaty of Rome had entered into force on 1 January 1958. De Gaulle, if I am not mistaken, came to power a few weeks later. There was every reason to wonder what his attitude would be to the implementation of a treaty that he had campaigned against. During the ratification campaign, de Gaulle had called on his parliamentary followers to vote against the treaty. So there was this uneasiness. It was not entirely warranted, because de Gaulle believed that France could not go back on its word once it had been given. This was fully consistent with his view of the obligations of a state, which is entirely to his credit. He therefore allowed the application of the treaty to proceed in accordance with the prescribed timetable and in the prescribed forms.

It is true, however, that there had been some apprehension on this point, especially in Belgium. Was France about to scupper another European treaty? That did not happen. It is also important not to lose sight of a second aspect, namely the fact that it was something of a relief to see France being governed, and that the return of General de Gaulle, in so far as it seemed to herald a period of stability in France, of greater French political and economic strength, was a welcome development in Europe, because France had certainly been, to some extent, the sick man of Europe in the preceding years. In particular, I believe that one of General de Gaulle's great merits during that period of his life was his revival of the French economy. De Gaulle is generally regarded as a politician, but he had a powerful impact on the re-establishment of order in the French economy, on the reinvigoration of the French National Planning Board and on the reform of economic structures under the Rueff Plan. In this way, he laid the foundations for economic prosperity in the 1960s, a decade that the French refer to as the Glorious Sixties, and he certainly takes much of the credit for that.

[Hervé Bribosia] On a more specific point, do you recall how the French diplomats reacted in August 1961 to the first British application for accession to the European Economic Community?

[Philippe de Schoutheete] Just a word, first of all, on your previous question that I have not yet answered, regarding the Fouchet Plan. The Fouchet Plan clearly presented an intergovernmental vision of Europe and was the first major confrontation between an intergovernmental vision and the supranational vision that had driven European integration, on the initiative of Jean Monnet, since 1950, with the Coal and Steel Community and the Defence Community. It was the first landmark debate. De Gaulle's vision had been rejected by his five partners — rightly so, in my opinion — although Paul-Henri Spaak, towards the end of his life, had started to question his own position on this matter. I personally believe that this rejection was warranted, otherwise we would have had an entirely intergovernmental Europe. The debate, however, is still with us, although it has, in my personal view, become practically devoid of substance and significance. But the main characteristic of the Fouchet Plan was that it triggered this debate between the proponents of the intergovernmental Europe that it envisaged and those of the more supranational Europe envisaged by Monnet.

As for the problems involved in accommodating the United Kingdom, it is clear that the French,

especially French diplomats and primarily, no doubt, the Quai d'Orsay, were utterly opposed for various reasons, only some of which could be openly acknowledged. The valid reasons were that Britain was truly far more sharply focused on the Commonwealth, on the Anglo-American world, in other words its special relationship with the United States, than on relations with Europe. In that sense, what de Gaulle referred to as the pull of distant oceans very clearly dominated British minds and mentalities — and, by the way, maybe still does. That, then, was a perfectly valid argument.

There were other arguments that could not be acknowledged so openly, such as the fear that Britain's admission into the select company of the Six would diminish what was, to tell the truth, the very strong influence of France. The strength of this influence stemmed from the fact that the initiative had come from Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman as well as from the fact that Germany, the other great European power, was still practising a degree of self-restraint in the aftermath of the war.

[Hervé Bribosia] How did the French authorities perceive the independence of the Congo and the Congolese crisis that followed on its heels?

[Philippe de Schoutheete] I was in Paris at that time, it is true. What I noticed — but I was only a young embassy attaché — was tremendous solidarity. To an extent, this solidarity was due, in the first instance, to the brutality of the crisis, born no doubt of a colonial sense of community, if one can call it that, of the fear that something similar could happen in France's African possessions, and so I was very keenly aware of it. Many Belgian refugees arrived in France at that time on aircraft coming from Ouagadougou or from the borders of the Congo. They were generally very well received, and I have distinct memories of gestures of sympathy. In those circumstances, I had to stand in for the Ambassador at one or two events outside the capital which he could not attend, because he had to be in Paris, of course, and I also sensed a great deal of solidarity outside Paris among both the authorities and the general public. That is certainly how things were.

Since you mentioned the Congo, let me say a word or two on relations between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry for the Colonies immediately beforehand and afterwards. I have to say that the two ministries never spoke to each other; moreover, it may be said that they had never spoken since the reign of Leopold II. They were two completely separate administrations.

I have a great deal of regard for the administration of the Ministry for the Colonies, which had run that huge country in a generally satisfactory manner with few staff. Whatever people may say or think about colonialism, the state of the Belgian colony when it attained its independence from what I would call a technical point of view, that is to say in terms of roads, communications, the level of primary schooling, security and so on, was perfect. But that administration was totally impervious to what was happening in the outside world. It did not know, nor, in truth, did it want to know. The few diplomats who, in the very last years — from 1958, I believe — were sent to Léopoldville to aid and advise the Governor-General of the Congo were put into what I would call a ghetto. They had practically no access. The colonial administration took the view that it was a rather ill-advised intrusion by people who knew nothing about the colony, and that, I think, is why the authors of Belgium's colonial policy suffered from this ignorance of external pressures, which goes some way to explaining the speed and the brutality with which events unfolded. It was because the process had not been prepared, because the administration, which surely ought to have been gradually paving the way for independence, did not see the way in which the world was moving. And I believe that a great deal could be said about people who were thoroughly competent and capable on both sides but

who did not talk to each other.

III. On some leading Belgian figures of the 1950s

[Hervé Bribosia] What do you remember about Jean-Charles Snoy et d'Oppuers, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Economic Affairs from the end of the War until 1959, in which capacity he was one of the Belgian signatories of the Treaty of Rome? Was he your direct hierarchical superior? What were relations like between his Ministry and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with regard to European matters?

[Philippe de Schoutheete] Snoy was a giant of the post-war Belgian administration — an absolutely pre-eminent authority on the national economy and on external economic relations, be it in the framework of the OEEC, of the Benelux or, I need hardly add, of the Coal and Steel Community or, subsequently, of the embryonic European Community. Not only was he a signatory of the Treaty of Rome; he was also our first Permanent Representative. For a few weeks, he tried to combine his duties as Secretary-General of the Ministry of Economic Affairs with the post of Permanent Representative. He soon came to realise that this was not possible, and so he appointed Joseph Van Der Meulen — or rather, he asked the Belgian Government to appoint Van Der Meulen, who was one of his closest colleagues. In short, he was an absolutely pre-eminent figure, an endearing man who conducted himself impeccably during the war, who effectively masterminded Belgium's economic recovery after the war and who skilfully conducted Belgium's negotiations in the OEEC, the Benelux, the Coal and Steel Community and then the European Community. Universally respected in the world of politics, he was what I would almost call a model administrator; he was certainly a model for me as well as being an extremely courteous and likeable man.

I was, indeed, under his direct command in so far as he had arranged for some embassies — six of them, I believe — to have an economic attaché, which is what I was in Paris; they worked, of course, for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs but were under his direct authority, in other words he could give them instructions and ask them to write memos for him. That is what I did in Paris. What interested him particularly was French economic and financial legislation. Whenever there was a parliamentary bill in Belgium, he wanted to have details about it. He was extremely interested in the workings of the French National Planning Board and that whole dimension of economic affairs, known at the time as concerted economic action, a fashionable approach in the post-war years which essentially reflected the doctrines of John Maynard Keynes and entailed fairly active government intervention. All of this gripped his interest. He would make phone calls or send telexes to request reports within 48 hours. And I greatly enjoyed working for him.

He gathered us together every three months, I think, at the Ministry of Economic Affairs, at a meeting which he chaired, and I certainly got on well with him. To some extent, I always regarded him not only as a boss but also as a source of very good advice, and I had occasion to pick his brains when I had some doubt about the course of my career. So he is a man for whom I have the utmost respect and, basically, a great deal of affection.

[Hervé Bribosia] Did you meet some of the other leading Belgian diplomats of the day, such as Hervé de Gruben, Louis Scheyven and Jules Guillaume?

[Philippe de Schoutheete] All of these figures belonged to my father's generation, and so I did meet them. I saw them either because they were my father's friends or because they were still in office when I joined the diplomatic service. I recall that I entered the service in December 1956, whereas my father had retired in April 1956.

So our paths crossed, and many of the senior staff of that time were his friends. Hervé de Gruben, Secretary-General of the Ministry, was something of a figure from another century, if I may put it that way — extremely distinguished and extremely rigorous in his parsimonious and thrifty management of the Ministry.

I shall tell you an anecdote, because that sort of thing must be placed on record too. My father was Minister Plenipotentiary in Copenhagen just after the war, and it was his custom to play golf on the course nearest to Copenhagen, which happened to be at Malmö in Sweden, just on the other side of the strait. When he was on the course there in 1947, he met Count Folke Bernadotte, who was then the United Nations' envoy in Palestine and was assassinated by an Israeli terrorist in 1948. My father played a round with him, because they knew each other, and he learned a number of interesting things about the situation in the Middle East and about Bernadotte's thoughts and hopes. He reported to the department on this conversation, which he had found interesting, and received an extremely complimentary reply from Gruben, saying, 'What interesting things you have told us! I note, however, that you must have left your post, since you went to Malmö in Sweden to play golf with Count Bernadotte. I am therefore deducting one day's allowance for leaving your post without giving us prior notice.' My father was furious and did not speak to Hervé de Gruben for more than a year, I believe. But this story testifies to a ministry where these things were handled with what I might call rather old-fashioned rigour. Gruben was a man of that calibre and was, incidentally, highly intelligent too.

Of the others you mentioned, I knew Louis Scheyven quite well. He was Secretary-General when I joined the department, Gruben having been posted to Bonn in the meantime. He was a friend of my father, whom he had succeeded in Cairo in 1942. He took me under his wing, and he was likewise imbued with rather old-world courtesy. In particular, he did one thing which is by no means customary today and is even fairly difficult to imagine: in his capacity as Secretary-General of the Ministry, he quite regularly gave dinners for diplomats in post in Brussels, which was a good idea. He invited different groups of foreign diplomats in turn; there were not so many of them in Brussels at that time, since Brussels was less important then, and he also invited some of the Ministry staff to those dinners as well as systematically inviting new trainees in turn. This is how I came to dine at the home of the Secretary-General with the Ambassador of the United States and others, whose identities I cannot recall, which was both interesting and somewhat surprising for a young man of 24 or 25, as I was then. At the same time, it was a practical lesson. It was a means of communicating a particular way of conducting diplomacy through personal relations, through acquaintance with individuals, and there was a perceptible sense that he wanted to hand down a tradition. He invited trainees, not because he needed trainees or because the ambassadors found the trainees interesting but to pass on to them a certain way of acting, a certain form of diplomacy. That might also be difficult to do nowadays.

Jules Guillaume was my boss, though not for long. When I was appointed to Paris, he was still the Ambassador there. I served under him for a few weeks — I cannot recall exactly how many — and I was able to witness the kind of send-off he received. Guillaume had been our Ambassador to Paris

for 14 years. He was a prominent figure in Parisian life — not only in political and economic life but in high society and in artistic life. He knew absolutely everyone. He was extremely influential. He was a fairly corpulent man with a great deal of charm, who was probably — no, certainly — one of the great Belgian bilateral diplomats of his age and is referred to by Paul-Henri Spaak in his memoirs and by Charles de Gaulle in his memoirs. He was an impressive personality in every respect. I cannot say that I truly knew him, but he was, indeed, as you say, one of the rather legendary figures in the diplomatic world of that time.

IV. Three years in Cairo

[Hervé Bribosia] From 1962 to 1965, you were in post in Cairo. Was this a hiatus in your European career? What are your memories of that period?

[Philippe de Schoutheete] Now then, a diplomatic career is not necessarily European or African from the outset; it takes shape gradually. I was, in fact, posted to the Swiss Embassy in Cairo. The Egyptians had set fire to our embassy at the time of the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, and we had severed diplomatic relations, which is fairly standard practice when people set fire to your embassy. We had asked the Swiss to look after our affairs in Egypt, where we had substantial interests. It tends to be forgotten that Belgium was a very significant economic force in Egypt at that time, probably the main economic force in Egypt after Britain and France. We controlled the Cairo tramway system and the large hotels. We had oil research, the Heliopolis Company for Housing and Development, numerous investments and Belgian colonies. All of that had been confiscated by the Egyptians, and the Swiss had some difficulty in sorting it out with the Egyptians or at least in making the necessary representations to the Egyptians. They had some difficulty in understanding the sensitivities of financial groups. There was the Empain group, there was the Générale de Belgique, and relations between them all weren't always smooth.

They therefore asked for a Belgian diplomat to be sent to them to deal with these matters, and I was appointed to do that. It was, if you like, a hiatus, but it was a pleasant one. There were, as I said, no bilateral relations between Belgium and Egypt at that time. Accordingly, I had a regular flow of work at the Swiss Embassy, but I was not overworked. That enabled me to get to know Egypt quite well. I already had a pretty avid interest in Egyptology; it was also one of the rare periods in my existence when I owned a horse, and I rode every day. Personally speaking, then, I was quite happy out there. From a professional point of view, it was very interesting for a young diplomat to see the workings of another country's embassy from the inside. The problems are obviously the same, but the solutions are not always identical. It was interesting for me to see from the inside how the Swiss Embassy worked. It was undoubtedly a learning process for me.

In principle, the Swiss asked that I should deal only with matters concerning confiscated Belgian property. When I was leaving Brussels, the Secretary-General of the Ministry, Jean Van Den Bossche, a great connoisseur of Egypt who had been in post there and whose father had been a judge there, had said to me, 'Listen, if you have an opportunity, do try to negotiate a resumption of diplomatic relations or to find someone with whom we can negotiate.' I was all on my own out there and was quite tickled by the prospect, and I did actually try for several months, probably for a whole year, through various channels to find someone with whom it would be possible to negotiate, but it was far from easy. And then, all of a sudden, I received some good advice from a Belgian friend who had been living out there and who, as it happened, owned some of the confiscated

property that I was dealing with. He put me in touch with a personal friend of President Nasser, Mohammed Hassanein Heykal, Editor-in-Chief of the newspaper *Ah-Ahram*, who was about 45 years old at the time, who saw Nasser every day and who had nothing but contempt for the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with which I had been unable to make any headway at all. I met him through that Belgian friend, and he said to me, 'I'll see to that.' And, in fact, we did meet several times. It was not easy. Belgium was demanding an apology, but Egypt was unwilling to apologise. We were asking for compensation, although we said that the amount was open to negotiation, and so on. At last, we obtained something that was beginning to look like an agreement. And, at that point, the Ministry took the perfectly logical decision that I could not finalise the agreement because that would infuriate the Swiss. The Swiss knew nothing of these contacts, for I was corresponding through a third country's embassy, thanks to a friend of mine. So the Swiss were totally oblivious to the fact that I was four fifths of the way to negotiating an agreement to restore diplomatic relations, and if I managed to conclude it and they found out, they would have every reason to be concerned or to make a formal protest. The Ministry therefore decided to send Davignon, who was Paul-Henri Spaak's Private Secretary.

[Hervé Bribosia] Étienne Davignon?

[Philippe de Schoutheete] Étienne Davignon, who was to wrap up the matter. To say that I was happy about that would be an exaggeration. I had put a lot of time into that agreement and had overcome many hurdles, and the idea that this young colleague, whom I did not know very well — our paths had crossed in the corridors, and we were at the same university more or less simultaneously, but we did not know each other well; we would shake hands when we met, but we were not well acquainted — that this colleague would put the finishing touches to the agreement and would go back to Brussels and say 'All is well — I sorted out the problems' rather irritated me. But that, after all, is life, and I fully understood the reasons. Davignon arrived there. Within 48 hours, the task had essentially been completed. He had come with his wife to make it look like a holiday trip and not a business assignment. He actually went to Luxor and Aswan. He did a little sightseeing, and I did some with him. We got to know each other, and I was somewhat reassured by the time he left. In fact, he handled the whole business impeccably. He went back and said, 'I had a very good trip. Schoutheete had seen to everything. I had only to confirm that you, Minister, were in agreement with the arrangements.' That did wonders for my reputation in the Ministry and made us very good friends, which we still are today, almost 50 years later.

So that hiatus went well, and diplomatic relations were resumed. I was appointed chargé d'affaires, in which capacity I attended a spectacle that I shall never forget, namely the official opening of the Aswan Dam. The Aswan Dam had been built by the Russians. The inauguration of the dam happened to coincide with my term as chargé d'affaires. I was invited to attend the ceremony with the entire diplomatic corps. The plan was to blast a final rock barrier which would make the Nile flow into a new channel to reach the dam. Needless to say, when the dynamite blew that rock face apart and a river the size of the Nile changed course, the noise and the spectacle were something that no one would ever be likely to forget.

There was a second aspect of the spectacle, namely the fact that it happened in the month of May. The temperature in Aswan in May is 40 degrees in the shade. We were in a tented enclosure, and television arc lights were illuminating the scene. The whole inauguration ceremony lasted four hours and was conducted in Arabic and Russian with no translation. Speeches were delivered by Khrushchev, Nasser, Ben Bella and a series of more or less anti-Western dignitaries while the television cameras rolled. Opposite me, I had a Marshal of the Soviet Union in full dress uniform

who was clearly about to take ill at any moment until, exercising his authority, he stood up and gave a signal with his marshal's baton to have all the spotlights turned off, because all of us, and he in particular, would otherwise have collapsed. These, then, are two quite amusing memories of that period.

V. The 1966 Luxembourg Compromise

[Hervé Bribosia] So then, in 1965–1966, you returned to Brussels, where you remained until 1968 as Head of the Press Service and spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Do you recall the initiative taken by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Paul-Henri Spaak, to find a way out of the empty chair crisis provoked by France? And were you personally involved, in January 1966, in the framing of the celebrated Luxembourg Compromise?

[Philippe de Schoutheete] The Belgian Delegation travelled by train, which no longer happens very often today, and at that time, the trains to Luxembourg took several hours — three or four, I would say. We were in a compartment — trains had compartments in those days — and this compartment contained the whole Belgian delegation. I was the youngest, and I was in the same compartment as Spaak along with Ambassador Joseph Van Der Meulen, Permanent Representative to the European Communities, Étienne Davignon, Spaak's Private Secretary, and I cannot remember who else was there — someone from the administration, and I think Jean-Charles Snoy was there too, but I am not completely sure. Anyway, that was the Belgian delegation — eight of us. Today there are sometimes 20 in a delegation.

My job, then, was to deal with the press. There was no press room. Press conferences were held in the lounge of the Cravat Hotel, which still exists today; since the French delegation was in the same hotel, after the Council meeting, I had to hold my press conference in one corner of the lounge with some journalists while my counterpart Ambassador Lebel, spokesman for the Quai d'Orsay and, as it happens, my friend and relative, was giving his press conference 15 metres away in the company of other journalists. And some other journalists were moving between the two; one of these said to me, 'Yes, but your opposite number has just been saying something rather different.' It is self-evident that Maurice Couve de Murville and Paul-Henri Spaak would not necessarily have taken the same view of the Luxembourg Compromise. It was amusing, but, basically, compared with what goes on today in the large Council press rooms such as this one here, it was sheer improvisation.

In the train compartment on the way to Luxembourg, Spaak spoke about the impending meeting, referring particularly to the fact that Couve de Murville had asked to see him before the meeting. This, I believe, was one of the important aspects of that meeting. My interpretation, my judgement, of that meeting in Luxembourg is that it was determined by that preliminary contact between Couve and Spaak. Couve de Murville was a detached figure, brilliant in some respects, austere as French Huguenots can be, totally conversant with the details of issues and not in any way a Europhile. It was clear, however, that he was under instructions from de Gaulle to find a solution. France had been boycotting Council meetings for six months, thinking that its partners would capitulate, but they had not capitulated. I think de Gaulle had said to him, 'Now you must find a solution.' And I think Couve de Murville had decided that Spaak was the man to find that solution.

Spaak wanted a solution too. He did not want to prolong the crisis that was seriously damaging

Europe. The last thing that Spaak wanted was to move towards a European Community without France, and so I think that the combination of these two factors played a major role in the final compromise. Spaak was a man of compromise, and I know that it took a lot of persuasion on his part to have the Dutch accept the final text, which they considered to be flawed. This view was plainly justified, because the text was indeed flawed, but Spaak was convinced that it was a document which would serve to break the deadlock and bring France back into the fold and that the flawed nature of the text itself was incidental.

[Hervé Bribosia] Flawed because it was ambiguous?

[Philippe de Schoutheete] Flawed because it was actually an agreement to disagree, inasmuch as France's five partners said that, when discussions had taken place and no solution had been reached, the Council should be able to take a vote if voting was permissible. According to the French position, once a Member State considered that its primary or vital interests were at stake, the discussion had to be continued until agreement was reached. This was, therefore, an agreement to disagree. Spaak thought that it would not obstruct the pursuit of European integration, which was, after all, his baby to some extent. Less than 10 years had passed since the Messina Conference, and the main thing was to keep the process moving. There was certainly room for differing interpretations.

Perhaps I should say a word on Spaak in this context. We shall no doubt come back to him in due course. There was something else about him that struck me at that moment, which was quite an important moment. I had not been back home for long; I knew Spaak, but this was one of the first major meetings at which I had worked with him in such a small circle. I was greatly struck after that meeting by his wish to educate. Coming out of the meeting, Spaak gave us explanations — only he and the Ambassador had been at the meeting, if I remember rightly, and he gave explanations to those who had not been in the room with him, particularly Davignon and myself, and he clearly wanted to explain how he had gone about things and why. This was of interest to me in my role as spokesman, but that was not the main point. You sensed his desire to explain to young people — practically everyone there was younger than he — how things are done. And it is important, I think, to emphasise this aspect of Spaak, because it is an aspect that explains the quite strange and curious phenomenon of the longevity of Spaak's political philosophy, which remained intact even after his death. That is due in part, I believe, to the fact that he had explained how he saw things and how he did things to a generation of younger officials — often, but not exclusively, to officials from the Foreign Ministry — and no doubt to younger politicians too.

[Hervé Bribosia] Did you meet Paul-Henri Spaak on other occasions?

[Philippe de Schoutheete] Spaak knew my father well, and I saw him once or twice in that connection. I met him briefly before leaving for Cairo, but I did not actually know him well. I knew that he had treated my father well during the war. I should explain that my father, who was in post in Cairo in 1940, where he remained until 1942, was having a great deal of trouble in Cairo, especially with the Belgian colony, which had split on 28 May 1940 into Leopoldists and anti-Leopoldists. My father, by dint of family tradition and personal conviction, was a Leopoldist, which caused him difficulties. And Spaak, who was Foreign Minister, treated him very fairly, both before and after the war. I therefore had this goodwill towards him, because I was familiar with the details of that episode, but I did not know the man himself terribly well. I did get to know him during that later period, as I continued to work with him on European affairs until he left the Foreign Ministry

at the end of 1966, or rather in the second half of 1966. So I had not known him well before then, but I subsequently knew him quite well.

[Hervé Bribosia] Returning to the Luxembourg Compromise, what impact did that compromise have on the Council's decision-making process in practice, especially in the 10 years when you represented Belgium on Coreper?

[Philippe de Schoutheete] The Luxembourg Compromise was like the atom bomb, that is to say its existence could not be denied, yet it was very difficult to use. In the first few years, it certainly did block qualified majority voting, except on budgetary matters. There was almost always a vote on the budget, but until the 1970s — 1975 — little else was put to the vote. Indeed, there was no voting at all, in principle, on anything but the budget. And so that rather inhibited the normal functioning of the European Community.

[Hervé Bribosia] There was a deterrent effect, was there not?

[Philippe de Schoutheete] There was a deterrent effect, that is to say it did spur the Council on to superhuman efforts to try to reach a consensus. But the deterrent effect was unhealthy, in the sense that, if I may return to the image of the nuclear bomb, the problem is not just the fact that one possesses it; the problem is that it must be credible, in other words people must be convinced that, if necessary, if the worst came to the worst, you would use it. That is what determines the credibility of nuclear deterrence, and it was, to some extent, what determined the credibility of the Luxembourg Compromise. It lost its credibility in the course of time, particularly because at least one issue was put to the vote. I believe that it was under the Belgian Presidency in 1973 that Britain invoked the Luxembourg Compromise in deliberations on agricultural prices, and France voted, even though the French had said that they would always be in agreement if anyone invoked the Luxembourg Compromise. France voted on the grounds that Britain had wrongly invoked the Luxembourg Compromise in a bid to block the adoption of the agricultural price schedule in order to secure an advantage in another area, namely the British budget rebate. It was an abusive and unauthorised invocation of the Luxembourg Compromise, according to the French representative, which is why he voted. The fact that agricultural prices were involved played a part. But the incident clearly destabilised the system.

That said, even in the years when I was Belgium's Permanent Representative, the Luxembourg Compromise was still a factor. I can cite a specific case, to which I may return later but which is interesting in this context, concerning the Uruguay Round. In the Uruguay Round, there was a major conflict between France and the other Member States regarding the approval or non-approval of a compromise that the Commission had negotiated with the United States, known as the Blair House Agreement. Belgium held the Presidency when this truly complex issue arose; at quite an early stage, France, represented by Alain Juppé, said in the Council that very important interests, and in private that vital interests, of France were at stake. What was amusing and intriguing was that Germany and the United Kingdom, on hearing this, said that ratification of the agreement was in their vital interests.

That amused me a great deal, because its effect was to nullify and emasculate the Luxembourg Compromise by showing that it could be used to support and oppose the same position and that it was not the right solution. The fact of the matter is that, with the passage of time, its effect has

become far less potent, and I would also say that enlargement has played its part, for the Luxembourg Compromise becomes all the more dangerous with the increasing number of Member States that could invoke it when they find themselves isolated. I would therefore say that, while it has not ceased to exist, it has lost some of its teeth, primarily by virtue of the increasingly widespread perception that it is extremely difficult to use and also, I have to say, because of this culture of compromise which is one of the characteristics of the European Community and which ensures that the Member States do actually make sustained efforts to use majority voting.

VI. Pierre Harmel, NATO and WEU

[Hervé Bribosia] In December 1967, Pierre Harmel, who took over from Spaak at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, submitted his report on, and I quote, ‘The Future Tasks of the Alliance’ to NATO. Did you contribute to that report, and what was its impact?

[Philippe de Schoutheete] No, I did not contribute directly to the report. Obviously, I followed the matter, since it was an important part of Belgian foreign policy. I was still Deputy Head of the Press Service, which means that I was dealing with European affairs rather than with the political and military affairs the report was concerned with. The main architects of the Harmel exercise, the Harmel report, were Étienne Davignon and André de Staercke (André de Staercke was Belgium’s Permanent Representative, and he really was permanent, to NATO — he stayed in that post for over 20 years), and, of course, Harmel himself, who was very convinced by the fundamentals of that exercise. I was only associated with it very indirectly. For some reason that I now forget, it was I who accompanied Harmel to Paris for the presentation and formal approval of the report by a NATO Ministerial Council. And so it was at that Council that the report was adopted, and next day I remember going into Harmel’s office carrying *The New York Times*, *The Times* and *Le Monde*. And I said to my Minister: ‘Look, you’re on the front page of these three papers. Look carefully, because it will probably never happen to you again!’ Belgian Foreign Ministers very rarely hit the front page of three such major papers.

So I was not involved in that exercise, which is obviously important and enduring, and which turned Harmel into a major international political figure, of whom I went on hearing for years afterwards. Oddly enough, it was the Soviets and the Soviet world in particular that regarded him as a very major figure in international politics. Years later, in Moscow, people still spoke of Harmel with some emotion, as the first person who had understood, who had opened the door and paved the way to détente.

[Hervé Bribosia] Nearly a year later, in 1969, Harmel also put forward a proposal to revive European integration through Western European Union in a number of areas not already covered by the Communities. Do you remember that proposal? Did you contribute in this case?

[Philippe de Schoutheete] Yes, in this case, I did contribute. In fact, it was an initiative that came later, on which I did a lot of work with Davignon and Harmel. It was based on what seemed perfectly logical reasoning. It was impossible, it seemed, to get France to agree to the United Kingdom’s joining the European Community. The negotiations were dragging on, there seemed to be a deadlock. We felt it was necessary to discuss foreign and security policy. And, oddly enough, this was rather like an extension of the Harmel report. One of the things that had struck Harmel

when he drafted his report was the imbalance between Europe and the USA and the fact that the European states were divided, were speaking separately, while the USA was clearly speaking with one voice. That is why it seemed advisable for the European states to cooperate more closely on foreign and defence policy and, in the view of Belgium, it was impossible to achieve that without the United Kingdom. Somewhere I once wrote that the traditional position of democracy, not just that of Belgium but of the three Benelux countries, of the entire Benelux region, and not just recently but since the Middle Ages, has been to try to keep relations between the three big neighbours stable, in other words between France, Germany and Britain, so that none of the three would threaten or oppress us. So it was quite clear to us that we had to have Britain in it.

So it seemed fairly logical to turn to WEU, which had existed since 1948, which was made up of the Six plus the United Kingdom, which was in a kind of state of hibernation and which could be renovated. So this idea seemed, I would say, crystal clear in terms of logic. I seem to remember that there was also the desire to make use of the enormous reputation that Harmel had acquired thanks to the exercise that he had launched. You must not forget — and that is very well explained in Vincent Dujardin's biography of Pierre Harmel — that the NATO machinery, starting with its Secretary General, Manlio Brosio, had never believed in the Harmel exercise up until the end, and that, consequently, that project had been led by Harmel, in close cooperation with de Staercke, with the whole network that Harmel and de Staercke had set up in the Atlantic world, but against the wishes, or at least without the decisive support of the General Secretariat of NATO, so that he personally was given much of the credit for its success, which earned him a good reputation. So the idea of using that reputation to try to relaunch Europe seemed only logical. As you know, it didn't work. It worked for a while — there were initial studies, but in the end it failed because of French intransigence.

[Hervé Bribosia] How do you remember Pierre Harmel as a person?

[Philippe de Schoutheete] Harmel was a very great minister and a very great statesman. The first characteristic that I think struck all those who met him was his very great kindness, a kind of old world courtesy, I might say, in any case dating back to another century, which embraced everyone, including his youngest colleagues, including the office ushers. He was very kind and very friendly to everyone. That is certainly how I remember him.

The second, and best known, is his great rectitude. He was a lawyer, a professor — with a strong sense of what the state meant, great respect for the monarchy, very good relations with King Baudouin — relations that were, I would say, not paternal but those of a great-uncle towards this King whom he had met when he was very young, who had great confidence in him. There certainly was a very clear relationship between them.

I would say that one of the first signs that I myself saw of this sense of state is the fact, which is actually quite curious, that he took on his predecessor's Private Secretary. We all know that, in Belgian politics in general, the private secretaries of a socialist minister do not stay on as private secretaries of a Christian social minister.

[Hervé Bribosia] Paul-Henri Spaak, the socialist ...

[Philippe de Schoutheete] Davignon had been Paul-Henri Spaak's Private Secretary. The Government fell, Paul-Henri Spaak was replaced by Pierre Harmel and, after a period of hesitation that I will tell you a bit about, Pierre Harmel took Davignon on as Private Secretary. That can only be explained by his sense of state; he had to impose this on a party, a party apparatus, that clearly did not see things the same way. Private offices are opportunities to give people jobs, and you do not take on someone who was recruited by the opposing party. The fact that Davignon was probably not much of a socialist did not matter. But Harmel, after a certain time during which I imagine he must have had contacts with his party to persuade them to accept this, made that gesture. And that gesture reflects his resolve to act as a statesman, in other words not to try to give jobs to his creatures wherever he could but to use the services of a man whom Spaak had certainly told him, and of which Harmel may have been personally aware, was of the highest quality.

I have a rather curious memory of those few intervening weeks; it was probably a fortnight or so. I must say that the way the private office worked under Spaak was as follows: towards six o'clock, all the people who needed directives, including the Deputy Head of the Press Service, in other words myself, would go up to Davignon's office. Six or seven of us would meet there: there was the Director of Policy, sometimes the Secretary-General, one or other member of the private office and one or other member of the administration. During that time, Davignon would sign and then everyone would ask questions and get replies. For me, that was extremely useful because I learned about everything that was happening in the Ministry through the questions put by others. Obviously, that was useful for the Press Service. In addition, I needed to ask him: 'So-and-so is asking for an interview, will the Minister agree to do it?' 'I've been asked such-and-such about the Middle East, what should I reply?' So that is how things went, between about six and seven o'clock, in an atmosphere that was part salon and part a meeting of friends, all more or less the same age. Sometimes the Secretary-General, who was a bit older, came. You clearly felt you were at the heart of the Ministry. And Davignon, who always had the ability to do several things at the same time, would answer the phone, sign his mail and reply to our questions and tell jokes. So it was rather a good atmosphere.

The day Spaak left, I went up to the eighth floor of the Ministry to see Davignon, and I was alone. That taught me a few things about human nature, which I had, in fact, realised earlier. But I went on going up there every day, while people who needed the Minister's opinion stopped coming, since Davignon no longer had a minister. Spaak had physically left, Davignon stayed because a private secretary has to stay on until a new one has been appointed. Harmel had taken office but hadn't yet decided who would be his private secretary. So that office was empty, and that meant that I had what I might call especially friendly relations with Davignon, because he realised, not that I would not abandon him — I don't think the others abandoned him — but that I had understood that it was, after all, rather sad to see how the external signs of power could disappear overnight in such an obvious, physical way. His office was empty. Nor did anyone from the administration go up there any more; in accordance, in fact, with the rules of the Ministry, everything is blocked at secretary-general level when the acting minister has left and the new minister has not yet taken office. Nothing goes to the private office any more, that's the rule. So he had no papers and no colleagues. Those few days — it was probably no more than a fortnight — turned us into close friends and, as I said earlier, that friendship still survives. I wanted to share that little memory with you.

Now, the third aspect, I must say, in relation to Harmel, aside from his kindness and that kind of rectitude, sense of state, was that, underlying that, Harmel was also a clever political manoeuvrer. You must not think that his courtesy concealed any great indulgence. He did not show much of that when he spoke of others, when you spoke to him. You must not believe that, underlying that rectitude and sense of state, he had any hesitation in using a rather special kind of manoeuvre to

obtain a result. I have seen my Minister lie. That is not something that he was incapable of doing. So, underlying that extremely courteous man, that apparently great intellectual teacher, there was also a clever politician. In any case, I do not think that you can become prime minister, as he was, in Belgian politics without having that kind of quality. But I want to emphasise this because many people who did not know him so well saw only his great courtesy and rectitude and intelligence. There was more to it than that.

VII. The prospect of Spanish accession to the European Communities

[Hervé Bribosia] Let us move on, if you will, to your Spanish experience, if I may call it that. You were Adviser at the Madrid Embassy from 1969 to 1972, just when a trade agreement was being negotiated between Spain — Franco's Spain — and the European Economic Community, an agreement that was to be signed in Luxembourg on 29 June 1970. Did you feel that the Spanish leaders and people wanted to join the European Communities?

[Philippe de Schoutheete] No. Spain in those days, Franco's Spain, lived in an extraordinary diplomatic isolation, since it had been ostracised for too long, and then diplomatic relations were resumed in 1955 when Spain joined the UN; but Franco was not, after all, someone whom you visited much. Not a single Belgian minister, on the political side, came to Spain between 1936 and Franco's death, in other words for 40 years. And what was true of Belgium was also true of quite a few others, although not all of them.

So, they were living in a kind of intellectual ghetto, which has certain consequences. Spain is a country with a good administrative tradition, and the Spanish diplomatic corps is of high quality. But they had no multilateral experience. They were bilateralists. The most talented Spaniards were concerned with Gibraltar. Gibraltar was Spain's main external political problem. You had extremely talented people who spent their entire diplomatic career writing notes about Gibraltar. At that time, there were two, perhaps three people in foreign affairs who knew what the European Communities were. And in the rest of Spain, just about nobody. There was a kind of aspiration to get out of this situation, but no more than that.

[Hervé Bribosia] In 1981, you returned to Madrid, this time as Ambassador. You stayed there until 1985. Had Spain changed much in the meantime? What was the atmosphere in this country that was soon to become a full member of the European Community?

[Philippe de Schoutheete] Spain had changed completely in the meantime. There was what is called the *movida* in Spain. Intellectual life, political life, economic life had all become far more dynamic again, to some extent for economic affairs during Franco's final years, but very much so in the post-Franco years.

I arrived in Madrid a few months after the failed Tejero coup d'état and found a Spain that was very different from the one that I had left a few years earlier. There was a new interest in the outside world and a profound desire to become part of the European structures. Not so much for the structures themselves, but in order to show that Spain was no longer ostracised, that it formed part of the group, that it was a country that you could associate with, that was like the others. So it was a

very different country.

I want to say a few words about the King of Spain, whom I got to know, oddly enough, when I was Adviser, because, at that moment — while I was there — he had just returned from exile in Barcelona where he was with his father, not in Barcelona but in Lisbon, where he had been with his father. At Franco's request, he returned to Spain. He was a man of more or less the same age as me, who was used to going to diplomatic cocktail parties, whom one sometimes saw at dinner parties, with whom one would chat. And I had quite a few conversations with him, especially in a specific situation when King Baudouin had invited him to a hunt in Ciergnon and he had to take a morning plane from Madrid Airport. Since the Ambassador was not there, I had to accompany him. It was foggy in Brussels, which meant that the plane was three hours late, and I spent three hours tête-à-tête with the Prince of Spain, as he was called at the time. And, for three hours, he questioned me about all kinds of things, how the Ministry's Press Service worked, about the internal organisation of the palace in Brussels, about the King's attitude to the press. How does one give interviews? Does one not give interviews? How does one react to attacks? In fact, I was subjected to a real interrogation. I left thinking: 'Well, this man got everything he wanted to know out of me and said nothing about what he himself thinks.'

At that time — it must have been in 1969 — I reported to Brussels that this Prince, whom people regarded as a kind of ghost whom Franco had brought back to life, and who would obviously pursue the policy of the right, who certainly did not have a mind of his own, etc., well I said that was not the case. I said this man obviously had astonishing self-control, was not the kind of joker, or chaser of pretty girls, that he might have appeared to be at cocktail parties, but was actually a wise politician who would have an impact on his country.

I am very glad I wrote that at the time, because there were very few people who said it at that point. So I met him again when I arrived in Madrid, and obviously it was quite an advantage to have had earlier contacts with the Head of State, which I would say were not friendly but at least meant that we knew each other pretty well. King Juan Carlos also had enormous respect for King Baudouin and liked him very much, which became clear in various ways, especially from their frequent phone calls.

[Hervé Bribosia] You mentioned the coup d'état of 23 February 1981, at the moment when Calvo Sotelo's Government was endorsed in the Chamber of Deputies. Did that event have much impact on people in Spain?

[Philippe de Schoutheete] Yes, certainly, people talked about nothing else, because the coup d'état really had been very well organised, from what you might call a technical point of view, meaning that Tejero had managed to imprison the whole of Parliament and the whole of the Government in Parliament, which, if you want to carry out a coup d'état, is certainly a masterstroke to start with. The only people who remained outside his control were the state secretaries who, in Spain, are not politicians but usually senior officials, and the King. Moreover, he was in connivance with several military regions, perhaps all of them. And there were tanks in the streets of Valencia, and in the north, and, I think, in Barcelona. So, people did not quite know how to deal with this, and it was really the King who sorted things out, who got Spain out of this business, by personally phoning the officers in all the garrisons, by refusing to see certain generals whom he suspected of being involved in the coup, by speaking to his officers as he did, that is by addressing them in familiar terms. The King of Spain addresses his generals and his ambassadors in familiar terms. He had been

through the military academy, so he knew them — he knew them by their first names. He began by asking them for news about their children and then said to them: ‘You know, I’m not like my grandfather. I won’t leave. So you will have to shoot me. And remember that you have sworn allegiance to me.’

After a dozen phone calls of this kind, of which I heard something from those who received them — not in those terms; I don’t think I really knew the plotters — but I knew generals who were not in on the plot but who were among those whom the King called. And I also spoke at length with some of his people. In the space of half a day, he managed to block the military uprising, after which he made a speech on television at two o’clock in the morning, which is one of those speeches that should be taught to teachers of rhetoric. It was a speech that lasted two and a half minutes, less I think, in which he referred to himself in the third person, saying that the Crown — he referred to himself as the Crown — the Crown would not accept this. And the coup d’état was deflated. Tejero retrenched his troops.

It was an extraordinary performance from a political point of view. It confirmed my judgement of him some years earlier. It made this monarch, who was being discussed because he was Franco’s heir, had not been imposed but had certainly been designated by Franco; it made him into a very popular man.

I remember speaking to a man who was incidentally fairly disreputable, namely Santiago Carrillo, who was the Chairman of the Communist Party, who had several hundreds if not thousands of deaths on his conscience in the civil war, but who was Chairman of the Communist Group in the Spanish Parliament at the time of the coup d’état, who, like the others, was put on a chair against a wall with a civil guard behind him, pistol drawn. And he said to me: ‘You know, I said to myself that we would not get away with it, that those guys were very good. We were all there, and, as for the King, obviously either he was in the coup or he was going to go along with them. So, in the end, I would prefer it if this guy fired, because I don’t want to go back into exile,’ — he had gone into exile in 1938 — ‘I am old, now I would prefer him to shoot me in the head rather than either go to prison or ...’ And then, the business was over and he got out of it and he said to me: ‘You do realise that I have become, not a monarchist — you cannot ask that of me, but I am for Juan Carlos.’ And that meant even the left and the far left, and even the revolutionary Communist left born of the civil war, supported this King. So the support was unanimous, and from that moment on the Spanish monarchy became more solid and was greatly strengthened.

[Hervé Bribosia] And did you meet Calvo Sotelo?

[Philippe de Schoutheete] Calvo Sotelo was Prime Minister when I arrived, so I did meet him. He was a man of quality, he expressed himself in very moderate terms, which is not necessarily a Spanish quality, and reflected deeply before giving his views. I remember a meal with him and Martens, which was very cordial. There was also a kind of Christian-democratic connivance, for Calvo Sotelo is fundamentally a Christian democrat by family tradition. And he was also man who — like all those post-Franco prime ministers — Suarez, himself, and then Gonzalez, did much to consolidate Spanish democracy, in the sense that they showed that the Government could be effective. What the Republic of the 1930s was reproached with was that it had been totally ineffective during the crisis, which also partly explains Franco’s success some years later. It also explains the beginnings of a social system in Spain — not, I would say, comparable to ours, but of the same type, which did not exist before. He is a man who did a service to Spain and I was really

sad when he died two years ago.

VIII. The Tindemans Report (1975)

[Hervé Bribosia] To go back a bit: when you left your first posting in Madrid in 1972, it was to move to the Belgian Embassy in Bonn, where you were to stay until 1976. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Leo Tindemans called on your services to draft a report requested by the Heads of State and Government at the December 1974 Paris Summit. The purpose of that report was, and I quote, to define ‘an overall concept of European Union’. Can you put that initiative in context, describe how the Tindemans Report on European Union was drawn up and what its key proposals were?

[Philippe de Schoutheete] Right, this was not the European Council yet, but the Heads of Government had asked Tindemans to draft a report on the concept of European Union. The concept of European Union was first used in a 1974 declaration by the Heads of Government in Paris. And we did not actually know what those words meant. And when journalists asked that question, they finally said: ‘We will have to draw up a report on it.’ It was not just a question of terminology but of a report on ‘Where are we going?’ After all, Europe was rather running out of steam. What was to be done? That was the starting point. Tindemans spent virtually the entire year of 1975, or at least the entire first half of the year, visiting the various capitals to discuss this. He was assisted by his Private Office staff, by Van Der Meulen, the Permanent Representative, and by Davignon, who at that time was Director-General of Policy.

And towards September, he arrived in Bonn, and I knew, because I was in touch with Davignon, that one of the problems was that nothing had been drafted. There were notes about a series of talks, and those talks were not just with politicians but with trade unionists, with business people, with high-flying journalists. There was a quantity of raw material, but there was not even the start of the beginning of a draft. Well, it was now late September, and the document had to be ready by December.

So someone, I imagine it was Davignon, or it may have been Van Der Meulen, whispered to Tindemans, when he was in Bonn, that he should ask me whether I wanted to do that. I had had a phone call from Davignon beforehand, indicating that this might happen. I did not know Tindemans. So Tindemans had replied to the effect: ‘Okay, I’d certainly like to see him.’ And so he spoke to me, we spoke, and he said: ‘Are you interested?’ And I said: ‘Yes.’

From that moment on, I went to Brussels on quite a regular basis. At first, and especially at the end, the pace was quite intense in the sense that I was doing my embassy work five days a week, then I left for Brussels where I spent Saturdays and Sundays working with him or the others on the report. I had pretty full weeks, and my memory of that time is of very hard work. But it was quite a problem drafting it. Everyone knows that, because it has been written about several times. In reality, there were two ways of doing things: either one drew up a theoretical report and explained how a federal Europe should work, or instead, knowing that this probably was not much use, one tried to draw up a practical report, proposing a number of things, without entering into the federal, national, supranational or intergovernmental debate. And, quite clearly, his colleagues were in favour of the federal aspect, a federal vision: ‘Mr Tindemans is a European federalist; if he draws up a report, it can only be a federalist report.’

I would say that the diplomats, certainly Davignon and I, felt that was a complete waste of time and was more a way of discrediting the Minister. We managed to overcome that obstacle, what I might dare call that double vision, during the first weeks. I drafted some notes along the broad lines of what was to become the Tindemans Report. And then came the moment when a decision really had to be taken. We had a rather stormy meeting lasting a whole weekend in Stuyvenberg, at which Tindemans must have decided, not at the meeting itself but straight after it, must have realised that he had to make a choice. I said to him quite clearly: 'Either I draw up a report in the way I believe it should be done or you ask somebody else to draft a different report.' Politicians do not like having to make choices of that kind, especially when the choice involves their immediate Private Office staff. So it was quite difficult, but in the end, he did it. And, from that moment on, which must have been around November, we really worked very intensively, that is to say we gradually drafted the whole report.

I may say that I wrote it entirely myself, although obviously the ideas were not all mine. The ideas were the fruit of discussion among ourselves, and many of them came from Van Der Meulen, many from Davignon. I think the key ideas were ... as you know, the report was never formally approved by the European Council. Having said that, it contains the seeds, and more than the seeds, really practical proposals, of many of the things that were done later. On European citizenship, on the currency, on defence, on the fact that we needed what is called a single decision-making centre, that is to say a place where the Foreign Ministers could discuss both Community questions and questions of political cooperation. That was not the case at the time. It became the case starting from Maastricht. These are all things that were based on the fact that the principle motivation for European integration from that time on was not so much peace any more, which had been established, but external relations, in other words the need to give Europe a place in the world. And that is still the case today.

In my opinion, the seeds of all those things are there. I think they have been taken up, without, of course, attributing that to the Tindemans Report, because that is not how politics works, but if you read it again today, which I did not so long ago, I think that Tindemans can be quite proud of his report, of the report he submitted. And, as its draftsman, I in any case am very satisfied with it.

IX. European affairs at the Foreign Ministry (1976–1981)

[Hervé Bribosia] After Bonn, you returned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and became Director of the department known as P11, which is responsible for coordinating European issues within the Belgian Government. You were to remain in this post for nearly four years, until 1980. What do you remember of that position, which I believe you held mainly under the aegis of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Henri Simonet?

[Philippe de Schoutheete] Perhaps I could begin by saying a word or two about Henri Simonet, as I did about Harmel a little earlier on. He was a highly intelligent man, with whom I got on extremely well; he was exceptionally quick to grasp something, to understand it. He was a man to whom one could give a note 10 minutes before he was due to speak, who would go on to speak 10 minutes later as if what he was saying was the product of a week of reflection, at which he had arrived after long nights of cogitation. This is the sign of a very good minister, one who succeeds in incorporating and reformulating arguments as if he had thought of them himself.

He was a very cultured man, and culture is not always very widespread in the Belgian political milieu. In particular, we shared a great love of Proust, and we quite often discussed Proust in free moments. One day, Simonet confided that he loved to quote Proust in the Belgian Council of Ministers, because he enjoyed seeing the vacant gaze of his colleagues who did not know who Proust was. I think he may have exaggerated a little, but he did possess that kind of intellectual arrogance that damaged him. He made many enemies by behaving in this way. But he was a man for whom I had both admiration and respect.

I'll tell you an anecdote. Quite soon after he began his term, there was a terrible accident on a campsite in Barcelona, where a gas tanker exploded and caused a number of deaths, including some Belgians. I forget the name of the Belgian Consul General in Barcelona, and I'm not going to mention it — it happened at a weekend, and he wasn't there. I don't know where he was, but, in short, there was very little sign of him. He arrived too late, after the journalists. He didn't do much; in short, he didn't behave in the way that the press at least considered that the Consul General *should* behave. The Minister recalled him for consultation and, at the same time, he was questioned in the Chamber. And in the Chamber, the Minister was extremely harsh in his treatment of this diplomat, whom he didn't know, hadn't seen, and hadn't heard speak on the subject. At that time, I was President of the *Amicale*, the diplomats' association. I wouldn't call it a trade union — at that time, most diplomats were not unionised, but they had an association which protected their collective interests in relation to the government. I was its President, and felt obliged to seek an audience with the Minister.

I was with Mr Schoumacher, the Director-General of Policy, who tried to calm me down, as he was afraid that I would go over the top. I told the Minister, in terms I considered very moderate, that he could do whatever he wanted with his diplomats in terms of disciplining them, but that he could not, at one and the same time, recall them for consultation and then condemn them in Parliament without having spoken to them, that this constituted inconsistent behaviour, and that everyone had the right to be defended; I said I was not making myself responsible for defending my colleague, but that I believed that, before he was publicly condemned by the Minister in the Chamber, the man was entitled to be heard. To my great surprise, and to the great surprise of Ambassador Schoumacher, who was with me and who was afraid that I'd gone a bit too far, the Minister looked at me and said to me, 'Essentially, you are right. I still have to learn my trade.' I was extremely surprised and a bit flattered. And, from that time onwards, we were on very friendly terms. So nevertheless, despite this form of arrogance and his mistrust of others, and, of course, the pleasure he took in exercising his authority — he was quite hard on more than a few ambassadors — this man had another side, where he accepted reasoning that he believed to be well founded.

As for my position, yes, during those years, I was Director of 'P11', in other words I was responsible for coordinating Belgium's European policy. The memory I retain is, firstly, that I learned to chair meetings, an important skill for diplomats in general and for my further career in particular. I chaired weekly meetings for four years, involving all the Belgian departments concerned with European affairs. The system worked quite well — generally speaking, all of Belgium's departments tend to hold pro-European views, and we generally succeeded in agreeing on a position, sometimes with difficulty, sometimes after some considerable time. That also enabled me to acquire a detailed knowledge of European issues, because anything could come up there. It's the Belgian Government's centre of coordination. Okay, with agriculture one might try but would not necessarily succeed, and finance sometimes raised its head, but, ultimately, practically all European issues came up there. One gets to know them.

There were no major events, as it was also a period of European stagnation. Between 1975 and 1985, when Delors came on the scene, ultimately Europe was not on top form. And as a result, I don't remember any grand designs. There were reports, including one by the Three Wise Men, but nothing much came of them.

Seeing as, from time to time, you allow me to tell an anecdote, I'm going to tell you one that is quite strange. One thing that was done during those years was to think out directives on freedom of establishment for the medical professions: doctors, vets, dentists, nurses, midwives. All of that formed the subject of a directive designed to allow people with a German or Danish qualification to settle in Belgium or France, if they so wished, and vice versa. This was all extremely difficult, as there was corporatist pressure against this whole opening-up of the market to the independent professions, and that pressure was very strong, coming not so much from governments, but really from the professions themselves. When it came to dentists, this strange story arose whereby Belgium had approved the draft directive submitted by the Commission internally, and it had been passed to Coreper, before going to the Council. Just before the Council met, Simonet's dentist rang him, apparently instructed to do so by the dentists' association, to tell the Minister that he hoped he wasn't going to vote in favour of this directive the next day. And Simonet told me that he could hear the noise of a drill in the background. I thought that was extraordinary. Obviously, Simonet did vote in favour of the directive, and naturally he also changed his dentist. But I found this level of fear extraordinary, because, after all, there must have been enormous fear within the profession.

A few years later, we were to see the reality of the situation. Doctors had told us that there would be an avalanche of Danish doctors coming to settle in Belgium, and the profession would be completely overrun. But this wasn't what happened at all. Belgian dentists approaching retirement went to live on the Côte d'Azur, where they continued to work in a small way, enabling them to supplement their income, but neither in Belgium nor, incidentally, anywhere else was there an invading horde.

So there was pressure whose intensity we can hardly imagine, to the extent that the Minister's dentist was instructed to threaten him with subsequent tooth decay ... But this proves both the difficulties and the type of vast corporatism and reservations that have to be overcome in order to build Europe.

[Hervé Bribosia] Between May 1980 and September 1981, you were Private Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Charles-Ferdinand Nothomb. What do you remember of this post, which I believe you held for nearly 18 months? Do you remember having to deal with European issues during this period?

[Philippe de Schoutheete] Perhaps I can start by saying a few words about Nothomb, as I did with Henri Simonet and Pierre Harmel. Charles-Ferdinand Nothomb took over as Foreign Minister following a fairly long and varied career, which had included serving as President of the Chamber and leader of the PSC (Christian Social Party), and several other ministerial posts. He had very little international experience. He had not really prepared himself for this post, which I don't believe he had expected to be given. And it has to be said that, if a Minister for Foreign Affairs has absolutely no background in or experience of European or Atlantic issues, of bilateral relations, the Minister's first few weeks and those of his Private Secretary are quite wearing both for them and for those working with them. So it's true that I remember his first few weeks as being a somewhat turbulent

time. I didn't know the new Minister very well. I'd been recommended to him by friends, and he offered me the job quite quickly. I didn't think this was a job that one could turn down, even though I'd been nominated as a potential Ambassador in Madrid, a post that it was my ambition to hold. So I accepted, asking that the term of the post should be limited to one year. In fact, it was limited to a year and a half, and I am very happy to have done this job, which is a position where one learns a great deal, including about the mechanisms of Belgian politics, because the private secretaries come together, and they see among themselves how things are done in reality.

Nothomb did not have time to make his mark on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or on Belgium's foreign policy. In the end, he didn't stay very long. He found European affairs very difficult, and incidentally, he said this in a book he wrote, because he found Council meetings interminable, which they are, and horribly technocratic, which is also true. But unfortunately, that is how Europe is built. He had a more romantic vision of Europe, if I can put it like that, more political. And he was happy to host ministerial dinners, where the talk was of political orientation and foreign policy. But he did not enjoy night sessions on agricultural policy.

Unfortunately, that is how Europe moves forward. And since, in addition, Charles-Ferdinand Nothomb came from the Ardennes and was accustomed to an outdoor life, for him, the fact of being shut in the offices in the Charlemagne Building for 24 hours — for that is where these meetings were held — was a genuine ordeal. This was something for which I had plenty of understanding.

He made a good transition to Belgian foreign policy following in the steps of Simonet, who had left his mark, and I think that, despite everything, his memories of this period are quite positive.

The major issue for the post at that time was obviously missiles. I seem to remember that I wasn't greatly involved in European policy at that particular point, but I was very much engaged with the issue of deployment of missiles. Moreover, when he asked me to be his Private Secretary, the only question I asked him, apart from the fact that I asked to be permitted to choose one or two members of the office as colleagues, was 'On the subject of missiles, I assume we're going to see how we go about deploying them, and not how we're going to explain that we shall not be deploying them.' These were the two options that had divided the previous government, and which very obviously divided the government of which Nothomb was part. And he replied, 'Yes, I agree', and we proceeded on that basis.

It was a horribly difficult issue, which divided the Government. We had entered into what I would not call commitments, but semi-commitments, to NATO. Had they or hadn't they been covered by the previous government? This was under discussion. Prime Minister Wilfried Martens was quite divided. It was common knowledge that the trade-union group in the CVP, and Jean-Luc Dehaene in particular, was opposed. The SP, chaired at the time by Van Miert, was radically opposed. I wouldn't say that Willy Claes, who was in the Government, felt as strongly — I don't think so. But it was a problem that sometimes caused divisions within parties and certainly divided the parties among themselves. In my view, it was also the biggest foreign-policy problem since the war.

It's strange, for we were at a turning point. It was a question of deploying cruise missiles, medium-range missiles, in continental Europe. Not in France, as France did not form part of NATO's 'integrated' zones, but in Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium. The Germans had said that they would not act alone, and the Dutch had said that they would not act without Belgium. Ultimately,

the question of knowing whether or not the countries would deploy depended on the Belgian Government's capacity to reach agreement on such deployment. And this was no small matter, for there was huge pressure from the Americans — excessive pressure, in my view — and Nothomb resisted it very well, saying 'Listen, we'll do it, but don't send your Ambassador to see me once a week to put pressure on me.' And in this respect, he acted calmly and with authority.

I had many contacts. As you know, it was not until years later that this business was sorted out. Nevertheless, we did manage to make progress. At the point when I left, the question was no longer one of knowing *whether* we would deploy, but *when*. And that took another three or four years to decide. But I believe it was essential from the point of view of Belgium's international credibility, from the point of view of our reputation in Washington and within NATO, and from the point of view of having a sound defence policy, and I would even go so far as to say indirectly from the point of view of our reputation in Moscow. Because Moscow did everything it could, including, I believe, by means of corruption or, let's say, by means of services, to urge Belgium on and prevent it from deploying its missiles. And it seems to me that the fact that it did not succeed very considerably increased our prestige in Moscow's eyes. They talked to me about it again years later, when I was Director of Policy. And I had the feeling that they were amazed that, when they were at the height of their powers, with plenty of cash and a stockpile of arms, they did not succeed in frightening, in *really* frightening, a country the size of Belgium. For them, that was a setback and, up to a point, a revelation.

X. The 1982 Belgian Presidency and the Stuttgart Declaration of June 1983

[Hervé Bribosia] When you were subsequently Belgium's Ambassador to Spain from 1980 to 1985, that did not stop you following European affairs, particularly during the Belgian Presidency of 1982, under Tindemans, when discussions were held on the Genscher-Colombo proposals which led to the 1983 Stuttgart Declaration.

[Philippe de Schoutheete] Yes, that's true, I was still on good terms with Tindemans for the obvious reason that we'd worked closely together for those few months. He phoned me quite often in Madrid to ask my opinion on people or political questions. And during the preparations for the Belgian Presidency in the first half of 1982, he said to me, 'We are setting up a working group to discuss the Genscher-Colombo proposals. There's a lot to be done in the department, might it be possible for you to come to Brussels to chair it?' I said 'Why not!', and so I travelled to Brussels once a month throughout the Presidency, and also during the following Presidency, until the end of the year, if my memory serves me right. The Genscher-Colombo proposals were the first to come jointly from Germany and Italy. It was quite a novelty in European affairs. The proposals were quite ambitious, and the Stuttgart Declaration, which was agreed in 1983, was less so. Nevertheless, I believe that it was not without significance on two points.

It was the first agreed outline of the functions of the European Council. As you know, the European Council had been established by a decision of the Heads of Government in 1974, under pressure from Giscard d'Estaing among others, and nobody had ever said what it should do. The Stuttgart Declaration provided an outline (I know it was quite basic, but it was the first one to be agreed) of the European Council's functions, which ultimately led to the appointment of a President of the European Council a few months ago. It was not without importance.

The second element was an attempt to bring together the structures of political cooperation and those of the Community, in other words those of foreign policy and Community policy, in such a way that they would work. Up until then, they had essentially operated completely separately, at the request of France, by the way, but, as French opposition had lessened somewhat, an attempt was being made to bring the two closer together, and the Stuttgart Declaration was the instrument of this. Tindemans didn't say a word about it in his memoirs, which I regret; on the contrary, he said that nothing happened at the Stuttgart European Council. Nonetheless, I believe that this declaration was important and constituted part of the development of European Political Cooperation.