

# The Secretariat of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and European Economic Integration:

## The First Ten Years

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### THREE DEFINITIONS AND ONE HYPOTHESIS

BEFORE entering into the substance of our subject it would be useful to define three terms which appear in this article and which bear differing connotations in the writings of political scientists working in the field of international organization. These are: *integration*, *international secretariat*, and *executive action*.

Though it may be surprising that we have chosen to study the action of the Secretariat of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) in terms of its contribution to the integration of a regional system as heterogeneous as that of Europe taken as a whole, we have for the purposes of this article defined the term integration in a manner making it operationally applicable to diametrically opposed systemic and institutional situations. With the exception of some references in the works of Ernst Haas,<sup>1</sup> integration has been considered since the Schuman declaration of 1950 to be the objective as well as the

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<sup>1</sup> See, in particular, his article "International Integration: The European and the Universal Process," *International Organization*, Summer 1961 (Vol. 15, No. 3), pp. 366-392, and his forthcoming volume *Beyond the Nation-State: Functionalism and International Organization* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1965), 485 pp.

process dominant in the relations among the countries which are members of the European Community's institutions. In the same vein, some timid attempts have been made to use this term in respect to the patterns of relations among members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and it has been proposed by some optimists as an objective for the Atlantic Alliance. To those who have gradually accepted the idea that there is a causal relationship between this process and the Western European subsystem it will be surprising indeed to see this same term used to describe a process which, potentially at least, *occurs within the framework of any and all international systems and subsystems.*

For the purposes of a comparative study of international institutions we would suggest then the following definition: *Integration occurs when consensus formation tends to become the dominant characteristic of relations among actors in a system.*<sup>2</sup>

The term international secretariat became part of the vocabulary in the field of international relations during and immediately after the period of the League of Nations and particularly after it was used by Egon Ranshoffen-Wertheimer writing on the League Secretariat.<sup>3</sup> Without going into details we should simply note that the development of contemporary forms of international organization has been accompanied by a correlative development of *international bodies which have a distinct existence within a given system of multilateral diplomacy and which exercise administrative and/or executive functions, implicitly recognized or explicitly entrusted to them by the actors of the international system.* The composition of these bodies may be national, multinational, or international, but their functions are always international in character.

Such secretariats may assume an infinite variety of tasks but we limit our present discussion to those which may be included under the general heading of executive action. The term "executive" as used in this context describes the *functions of an international body acting independently within certain legislative limits and participating in the processes leading to the adoption of decisions or assuming itself the decision-making function.*

Finally, we would like to add that one of the hypotheses underlying this

<sup>2</sup> This definition is based on the following description of the integrative process which appears in an unpublished document recently prepared for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace:

In considering a possible conceptual framework one is inevitably led to the work of Karl Deutsch and Ernst Haas on the integrative process either through a conscious effort at community building or through the unplanned growth of coincidence of interest. The integrative process as we use the term here might roughly be defined as that in which consensus formation tends to become the dominant characteristic of relations among actors in a system. This process finds institutional expression, according to the well-known thesis of Haas, when the dominant method of settling disputes among the members of an organization is by upgrading the common interest.

<sup>3</sup> For a general discussion of the problems related to an international secretariat, see Jean Siotis, *Essai sur le secrétariat international* (Publications de l'Institut Universitaire de Hautes Etudes Internationales) (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1963), 273 pp.

brief presentation is that the primary function of any international institution<sup>4</sup> and more specifically of those bodies which we classify under the heading of international secretariats is to contribute to the process of integration of the international system.<sup>5</sup> It follows, however, that the corollary of this hypothesis is that institutions may become dysfunctional and thus act as a disintegrating factor within the system. It should also be added that, in the last analysis, integration may occur at very different levels and it is the intensity of the process and the quantitative impact of the objectives attained that may bring about a "spillover," the crossing of the threshold from one level to another. Such quantitative measurements must naturally be considered in relation to the other variables which determine the nature and the activities of international institutions and, in particular, to the state of the system. The measurement of the relative contribution of an international secretariat to the integrative process must then take into consideration the state of the system and particularly the degree of its cohesion.

#### THE SYSTEMIC SETTING

The remarks which follow cover essentially the practice of the Secretariat of ECE during the first ten years of its existence (1947-1957) though many of the conclusions we will draw from this practice are still perfectly valid. The reasons for concentrating on this initial period are numerous, but they can be well summarized in a quotation from Ernst Haas' forthcoming volume on functionalism and international organization:

Certain kinds of organization experience acquire the importance of key determinants of maintenance, expansion and value infusion: *the ability to use a crisis in the relationship between organization and environment as an opportunity for self-assessment and self-redefinition*, to profit from critical experience, to have the elite undergo growth in its character and understanding. To be sure, a "critical" decision cannot always be differentiated from a "routine" one until the outcome is known. The leadership may not consciously know that it is making a critical decision. A functional theory of international organization is the more useful, then, in calling attention to the unintended integrative consequences. The decision will nevertheless be "critical" if it engenders a new affirmation of organizational

<sup>4</sup> The term "function" as used in this context should be distinguished from the intended purpose of an institution as expressed in its constitution or in subsequent resolutions. The functions and the intended purposes *may*, but do not necessarily, *coincide*.

<sup>5</sup> The definition of this term which we proposed earlier should be qualified at this stage by indicating our view that the range of particular sectors of interstate relations which are affected by the integrative processes occurring in the international system is proportionate to the degree of homogeneity of the system. The high degree of homogeneity is not only conducive to an intensive process of integration but also to the horizontal extension of the range of sectors of interstate relations where these processes occur, while in a heterogeneous system the integrative processes occur, with varying intensity, in certain limited sectors of interstate relations. Finally, we consider that the processes of integration and disintegration always occur simultaneously and that they are simply the two dialectical opposites of interactor relations in all international systems.

objectives under challenge from hostile or cross-cutting environmental pressures, if it thereby strengthens the sense of purpose of the organization's staff at the expense of environmental ties. But it is crucial to recall that unless the leadership is willing to examine useless old objectives and strike out in new directions with a revalued body of aims, it will merely reaffirm the stale old pattern, it will remain mired in routine.<sup>6</sup>

In our view the first ten years of the ECE experience represent a fertile field of inquiry because of the permanent crisis of the European system which was characteristic of that period and of the quality of Secretariat leadership which made it possible for the organization to use the crisis as "an opportunity for self-assessment and self-redefinition." It is the combination of these two elements, the systemic setting and the quality of leadership, which makes this period particularly interesting for those working in the field of international organization.

This initial period was characterized by a series of profound changes in the state of the European system, and it is most revealing to study the reaction of an international secretariat to these systemic changes as well as its performance as an actor in a limited sector of the system. The evolution of the European regional system during that period placed a tremendous strain on the solidity and threatened the very existence of institutions such as ECE, whose primary function was the reconstruction and progressive integration of a region torn by political, ideological, and economic strife and which on more than one occasion found itself on the verge of violent armed conflicts. These strains were felt by the United Nations as a whole, but it was Europe which became the scene of the sharpest oppositions between the two camps during the earlier part of the Cold War, and it is only natural that a European regional body, such as ECE, felt the strains of disintegration and conflict in a particularly acute manner.

On the eve of the establishment of ECE the state of the European regional system could be roughly described as follows:<sup>7</sup> 1) The field of the regional system had remained unchanged, and its boundaries were not affected by the war. However, the degree of subordination of the system to the universal international system had greatly increased. In relation to the 1930's it was obvious that Europe had lost its dominant position within the international system and that it had become, momentarily at least, a secondary, highly subordinate regional system. 2) With regard to the actors in the system, the temporary disappearance of Germany as a major actor, the return to the forefront of the Soviet Union, and the newly assumed role of the United States as

<sup>6</sup> Haas, *Beyond the Nation-State*, Chapter 4.

<sup>7</sup> For the purposes of this article it may be useful to indicate that we consider that the state of an international system is determined by the following dependent variables: 1) the field of the system; 2) the identity of the actors in the system; 3) the hierarchy which determines interactor relations; 4) the means and content of interactor communications; and 5) the degree of homogeneity of the system.

one of the two most important actors in Europe brought about some drastic changes in the systemic environment. In addition, the revolutionary trends within the national boundaries of a great number of European states created a new and potentially revolutionary situation within the system taken as a whole. 3) The nature of the Second World War and the "great leap forward" in military technology which was its immediate consequence gave birth to new power relations which in turn modified the hierarchy of interactor relations. The loose equilibrium of the prewar period was replaced by an increasingly bipolarized system, with both poles assuming worldwide responsibilities while, however, one of them was a geographically extra-European power. 4) After an initial stage of emergency reconstruction, the means of peacetime communications returned to their pre-1939 state and began very soon to develop at an impressive pace. Parallel to this development, however, the content of interactor communications reflected progressively and to a very high degree the process of disintegration which characterized the system from 1946 to 1953-1954. 5) As a result of these changes in the other systemic variables the degree of the region's cohesion fell to a dangerously low point during that period, and its high heterogeneity by the end of the 1940's seemingly justified those who pressed for the recognition that the European system had come to an end and that henceforth the existence of two distinct and mutually hostile subsystems had to be accepted as a permanent factor in European politics.

It would then be a euphemism to state that the Economic Commission for Europe was established under conditions which were not particularly favorable to the attainment of the objectives set forth in its Terms of Reference.<sup>8</sup> In the context of the resolutions concerning ECE adopted by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Europe was considered as a region and ECE was established as a body committed to cooperation among its members and ultimately to the progressive integration of the system at the level of interactor economic relations.<sup>9</sup> Given the blatant contradiction between systemic condi-

<sup>8</sup> UN Document E/ECE/291, Appendix A. ECE was established under Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Resolution 36 (IV) of March 28, 1947.

<sup>9</sup> Although the term "integration" was not used in the Commission's Terms of Reference, the various interpretations of the Terms by the Executive Secretary contain sufficient indications that in fact the ultimate aim of ECE was to promote integration as we defined it earlier in this article. As an example we can cite Gunnar Myrdal's statement on August 3, 1954, when, during the 825th meeting of ECOSOC's eighteenth session, he told delegates:

Our Inland Transport Committee is proud of the fact that it has been the centre for practically all the real work of European integration in the transport field accomplished since the war.

Similar statements were made by the Executive Secretary on many occasions, particularly in regard to the activities of the Coal Committee and the various initiatives of the Secretariat in the field of intra-European trade. In his Hobhouse Lecture Myrdal spoke in fact of integration when he told his audience:

If national propaganda, plus some sort of research and, more generally, the contacts made possible on different levels between government officials which serve as a clearing system for ideas and information represent the minimum level of national policy interests of the individual governments in upholding international organizations, the maximum level is naturally the reaching of

tions and institutional functions, it would have been perfectly normal if under the circumstances the Commission had turned out to be a stillborn body or one condemned to the role of a passive observer of the region's disintegration. This did not happen, however, and the Commission was able during the "difficult years" to carry out at least some of its functions and to set such precedents as to make it, in many respects, the prototype on which were subsequently based the other ECOSOC regional commissions as well as many of the institutional practices which characterize contemporary international organization.

The reasons for this remarkable achievement are to be found in the original impetus given to the Commission by its Secretariat working under the direction of Gunnar Myrdal. The "leadership" role assumed by the first Executive Secretary and its impact on the "style" and the content of the Commission's activities have been in the past and are still the object of controversy within the United Nations as well as in the academic circles interested in these matters. To be sure, many of Myrdal's initiatives have become the object of harsh criticism, but it would be very difficult to question the assertion that ECE survived its initial period largely as a result of these initiatives. This criticism is the price the Secretariat has had to pay for the relevance of its action. Nevertheless, it is of little importance for this short study whether or not Europe and the United Nations benefited from this executive action; we should simply note the fact of this survival as well as some of its consequences on the development of European cooperation and, in some respects, on the integrative processes which reappeared in the European system during the second half of the first ten-year period.

#### SOME PRINCIPLES GUIDING THE SECRETARIAT'S ACTION

The ECE Secretariat was able to give a constantly renewed impetus to the work of the Commission basically because it remained firmly attached to the following four closely interrelated sets of principles:

Firstly, Europe is a region and ECE is an organ of the United Nations whose function is to serve and to contribute to the integration of the *entire* region. "This Commission is an all-European body," Myrdal told delegates to the fourth session of the Commission before warning them against the consequences of it being transformed into an all-Western body.<sup>10</sup> Three years later, when drawing the conclusions from the seventh session, the Executive Secretary repeated:

agreements on concerted action. . . . Reaching this higher level of international co-operation assumes a political process where in the end the individual governments choose to agree on something of material interest.

(*Realities and Illusions in Regard to Inter-Governmental Organizations* [L. T. Hobhouse Memorial Trust Lecture, No. 24] [London: Oxford University Press, 1955], p. 7.)

<sup>10</sup> Opening statement of the Executive Secretary on May 9, 1949, to the fourth session of ECE, p. 14.



In the course of your Session, I rather bluntly stated as a fact that our Committees are gradually being transformed into purely Western bodies—perhaps I should more adequately say non-Eastern European bodies. This situation is, to say the least, awkward for all of you, and it is not tenable.<sup>11</sup>

A year later, the Executive Secretary addressed an even stronger warning to participating governments:

But permit me to stress that the Commission cannot be preserved merely as an empty structure with the sole purpose and function that it constitutes a reserve for the future. The Commission can exist only as long as active committees and working parties provide the indispensable under-structure. I am addressing this warning primarily to the East but also to the West. The Commission is a technical instrument which the United Nations, at considerable costs, have placed at the disposal of the governments in this region. It is an instrument for intergovernmental co-operation; and only on the condition that this instrument is usefully employed for its purposes by the governments in the region can the United Nations decision to create and maintain the Commission, and defray its costs, be justified.<sup>12</sup>

Such statements, accompanied by untiring pressure on governments, and the practice based on the principle that no meeting is better than a bad or insufficiently prepared meeting indicate clearly that the ECE Secretariat viewed the European scene during the period of acute Cold War as being an “abnormal” phenomenon which had to be counteracted by the relentless efforts and the well-prepared initiatives of the Secretariat. Today, such a view may appear as perfectly logical and in accordance with the realities of the European system. In the early fifties, however, the whole structure of the UN—and this included to a large extent the Secretariat—was undergoing deep modifications with the more or less avowed aim of turning the Organization into a weapon to be used by the majority in the struggle opposing it to the small pro-Soviet minority. At the same time most European governments had gladly or grudgingly accepted the new situation and were planning their future economic relations in terms of a permanent division of Europe.

Gunnar Myrdal's positions were thus sharply divergent from the general tendencies which characterized the years 1948–1953; and it is our view that it was precisely his stubborn refusal to accept what he considered to be a temporary aberration in intra-European relations as the new systemic setting on which the regional institutions should be founded that contributed largely to the survival of ECE. This refusal at times led to a distorted attitude toward the subsystemic institutions which were established in the early fifties. The ECE Secretariat often adopted a critical, if not hostile, approach to these new institutions because it held the firm belief that Europe objectively represented

<sup>11</sup> UN Document E/ECE/148, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> UN Document E/ECE/159, p. 5.

an economic region and that it was the Commission's duty to resist the "artificial" barriers which were being erected as a result of essentially political motivations. Nevertheless, no matter how controversial it appeared at the time, it was this attitude which constituted the major driving force for the attainment of the objectives laid down in the Commission's Terms of Reference.

Secondly, the Secretariat always insisted that the

Economic Commission is not primarily a forum for economic discussion. As its Terms of Reference show, it was intended to become an operational instrument for the reconstruction and development of the European economy, and, under very difficult circumstances, its technical Committees and their sub-Committees and working parties, have endeavoured to function as such within their limited fields.<sup>13</sup>

These operational tasks were to be carried out by bodies composed of government delegates and national experts, but when they are unable to function or when they reach deadlocks, it becomes the duty of the Secretariat to assume the initiative either on procedural or on substantive matters. The Secretariat's initiatives can be negative—by deciding to postpone or to cancel meetings of multilateral bodies—or positive—by proposing alternative solutions based on the principle of "upgrading the common interests" or by tackling collateral problems which seem more likely to find a successful solution.

The view of the Commission's role held by the Secretariat was such that under no circumstances could it become the passive observer of the multilateral bodies' inaction; and if we consider that the Commission had primarily operational functions, this implied a commitment to executive action undertaken by the Secretariat whenever the multilateral bodies were unable to act. This dynamic view of its functions enabled the Secretariat to move forward during the "lean years" and contribute to the progressive integration of some limited sectors of the European economy.

Thirdly,

it is indicative of the nature of inter-governmental organizations that on more substantive issues voting has no . . . significance. No important political and economic problems can be solved in an inter-governmental organization by a majority vote. A vote, if it is taken, must remain a demonstration. The demonstration may occasionally have an importance as an immediate political pressure upon the minority group of state governments to conform; more often a resolution voted has only a propaganda importance with its possible political effects much weaker and located in a more distant future.<sup>14</sup>

This minimization of voting procedures for the solution of substantive problems is a corollary to the views held by the Secretariat of its functions and the

<sup>13</sup> Opening statement of the Executive Secretary on May 9, 1949, to the fourth session of ECE, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Myrdal, *Realities and Illusions in Regard to Inter-Governmental Organizations*, p. 6.



systemic environment of the Commission. Considering the heterogeneity of the system and the type of functions entrusted to the Commission, voting on substantive issues would inevitably have become a meaningless exercise which would have simply exacerbated the already existing opposition.

Such a stand, taken repeatedly by the head of one of the units of the UN Secretariat at a time when the majority within the Organization was attempting to turn the multilateral organs into "voting machines," was indeed a striking expression of Myrdal's adherence to a set of principles which were borne out by the day-to-day practice of ECE. One may question the first Executive Secretary's positions on the nature and desirable development of the European system and its economy as well as his interpretation of the Commission's Terms of Reference. If these are accepted, however, it only follows that the adoption and implementation of decisions by the competent Commission bodies cannot possibly be the result of majority votes whose only real value lies in the realm of propaganda.

Finally, the enumeration of the principles on which the action of the ECE Secretariat rested during the first ten years would be incomplete if we did not consider the principle of its independence as understood and implemented by Gunnar Myrdal. The theory and practice of an independent international secretariat, as understood by the first Executive Secretary, did not have any of the quixotic and totally unrealistic qualities which characterize so much of the literature devoted to this subject since 1960. Quite to the contrary, they were founded on a realistic appraisal of the potential of contemporary international organization and certainly found their justification in the daily experience of ECE.

The general principle that the international organizations are nothing more than an instrument, created by agreement between governments, for their national policies . . . is not invalidated by the fact that certain functions and, therefore, certain powers are collectively delegated. In every organization which is not entirely futile the secretariat is awarded such functions and powers. There are, of course, great differences in the degree of delegation—differences that are, as a matter of fact, not closely related to constitutional rules but more to practices as they develop and gradually acquire the character of common law. Favourable factors for the development of a wide area of delegation of functions in the secretariat are the presence in the particular case of a certain workable minimum of interest convergence between the governments in some well-defined issues and also naturally the degree of confidence the secretariat has secured among the governments.<sup>15</sup>

This quotation expresses quite clearly Myrdal's views on the exact position of an international secretariat within the framework of contemporary international organization. For our present purposes we shall note particularly

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21–22.

the statement that the delegation of powers is dependent on "the degree of confidence the secretariat has secured among the governments." Within the limits of this article we are in no position to discuss at any length the means used by the first Executive Secretary in order to secure and to maintain the confidence of member governments. We would nevertheless like to underline the fact that all of the Secretariat's activities were and still are based on the assumption that without such confidence it would become completely ineffective although this never meant a subordination of these activities to the whimsies or even to well-orchestrated political pressures by member governments. The degree of independence, both with regard to its functions and to its structure, which the ECE Secretariat has allowed itself has varied considerably from time to time and from one field of activity to another. As we shall see later, the Research and Planning Division because of the very nature of its work was allowed considerable freedom in the implementation of its tasks as well as in its composition, while the office of the Executive Secretary, which has been more directly involved in the diplomatic and policy-making activities of the Commission, has always been composed on the basis of the principle of geographic distribution and its action has always heeded its founder's warning that "the basis of courage must be caution" and that it should "watch its steps carefully so that it does not wander off outside the field where it can safely count on backing by the governments."<sup>16</sup>

Underlying this thesis is the conviction often expressed that the Secretariat is the collective servant of certain common interests,<sup>17</sup> and the means used by an international secretariat to serve them are dependent on the extent and the intensity of these interests. It follows then that caution on the part of the Secretariat must be proportionate to the importance of these common interests in the conduct of the multilateral relations between member governments of a given international body. This principle has general validity for international secretariats but its successful implementation is a particular characteristic of the Economic Commission for Europe.

Before ending this section we would like to add some remarks relating these principles to the overall picture of the UN Secretariat. The Executive Secretary of ECE has always insisted that his staff is but a unit within the UN Secretariat's Department of Economic and Social Affairs. In doing this he has simply repeated the relevant provisions of the Terms of Reference and the numerous administrative rules which have been formulated by the competent Secretariat authorities. It would, however, be misleading to consider that the style of work as well as the general orientation of the ECE staff when carrying out executive activities have consistently reflected the general ten-

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>17</sup> In his opening statement on May 9, 1949, to the fourth session of ECE the Executive Secretary told delegates: "I can only speak as the servant of you all and as a technical representative of your common interests."

dencies characteristic of the UN Secretariat at Headquarters. Distance, the nature of the tasks with which it has been entrusted, and the personality of the first Executive Secretary have decisively influenced the style and content of the work of the ECE unit. This "particularism" of ECE has often been the source of misunderstandings and even of serious administrative difficulties, but it has also enabled its Secretariat to maintain a remarkably high level of cohesion, competence, efficiency, and political effectiveness, and the measure of its success should be seriously considered by those who study the problems of decentralization in international organization. In this respect it should also be remembered that the ECE staff was one of the rare units of the UN Secretariat which was effectively "shielded" when the McCarthyite inquisition was given a well-nigh free hand at Headquarters.

This relative autonomy is one of the principal reasons for the high level of loyalty which has been developed within the ECE Secretariat and which has stood up—alongside the principle of independence—against repeated attacks from member governments desirous of exerting an unjustifiedly high degree of influence through pressure on the Executive Secretary with regard to matters of personnel. On the whole, we can safely state that the ECE practice reflects a happy balance between caution and confidence on the one hand and loyalty and independence on the other.

#### SOME EXAMPLES OF EXECUTIVE ACTION

Earlier in this article we defined the term "executive action" by relating it to the process of reaching decisions within a given system of multilateral diplomacy.<sup>18</sup> This brief and preliminary survey does not permit us to discuss in any detail the role of the ECE Secretariat in the decision-making processes which occur in the Commission and its subsidiary organs. In the next few pages we shall simply mention the principal fields of ECE activities where such executive action has been carried out in the past and where the Secretariat has built up a "tradition" which should be taken very seriously into consideration when we discuss the role of international secretariats in relation to integration.

#### *The Secretariat and the Subsidiary Multilateral Bodies*

One of the principal duties of any international administration naturally is to prepare and service the meetings of intergovernmental bodies. Under certain systemic and institutional conditions, however, international secretariats generally extend their action into fields which are reserved to the sole competence of the intergovernmental bodies themselves. In some cases this practice

<sup>18</sup> See above, p. 178. We have chosen to concentrate on the Secretariat's participation in decision making because this aspect of its executive action is the most controversial. In the case of ECE the implementation by the Secretariat of decisions adopted by the multilateral bodies has never become the object of great controversy.

has been codified in the constitutional documents of such bodies or in subsequent resolutions, adding to the traditional administrative functions of international secretariats' executive functions which enable them at times to assume the role of actors in the international system. In the absence of such explicit texts, the practice of contemporary international organization offers numerous examples in which the secretariats' executive functions have been developed on the basis of one or more permissive texts and their implicit acceptance by member governments.

In the particular case of ECE its Terms of Reference as well as those of its committees are not very explicit concerning the role of the Secretariat; and Article 19 of the Rules of Procedure simply empowers the Executive Secretary to take part in all discussions in the Commission and the subsidiary organs. The evolution of the European regional system in the early postwar years and the particular views on their role held by Myrdal and many of the senior members of his staff made it necessary for them in their day-to-day activities to go beyond the bounds of these texts and assume an increasing amount of responsibility in the settlement of substantive problems which came before the Commission and the subsidiary organs. The tasks which were thus developed in practice fall under three main categories:

1) *The preparation of the multilateral meetings from a substantive point of view.* With some very rare exceptions no meeting has ever been held under the auspices of the Commission without thorough preparation, technical as well as political, in which the Secretariat has always assumed the principal role. Very often, the preparation of the more formal meetings of ECE committees or subcommittees takes place with the assistance of working parties or individual experts brought together at the invitation of the Executive Secretary, but the leading role has in fact always been assumed by the staff which "sets the tone" for the work of such groups. The preparation of these meetings involves a certain number of purely administrative tasks which are handled by the general conference services of the European Office of the United Nations, and the work of the ECE unit is essentially devoted to research on the questions which are under discussion and to exploratory diplomatic contacts enabling the Executive Secretary to formulate a valid opinion on the positions of member governments. These contacts also enable the Secretariat to clarify the issues under discussion before the meetings convene.

The formal contribution of the Secretariat to this preparation usually takes the form of the submission of studies, reports, or working papers which serve as the basis for the multilateral discussions. It has been the constant practice of the Secretariat to offer member governments its services by preparing such documents, but it has often refused to draft reports if it did not receive reasonable assurance that they would be discussed by the competent intergovern-

mental bodies. As an example of this attitude we can cite the statement by Gunnar Myrdal at the fourth session of the Industry and Materials Committee in 1950 when he told delegates that the Secretariat was not willing to prepare reports which were never discussed by the Committee.

The diplomatic techniques used by the Secretariat in the course of preparation of meetings have varied greatly. The presence of permanent delegations in Geneva renders such contacts relatively easy, but on many occasions the Executive Secretary came to believe that contacts at a higher level were necessary or that it was important to reach the competent technical ministries directly without necessarily availing himself of the normal diplomatic channels. In such cases the Secretariat has never hesitated to send one or more of its senior members on special missions or to correspond directly with the national administrations in the respective capitals.<sup>19</sup> This practice, it goes without saying, has not always met with the approval of foreign ministries and on many occasions the first Executive Secretary was very strongly criticized for ignoring the permanent missions accredited to the UN's European Office.<sup>20</sup>

The active participation of the Secretariat in the preparation of meetings of the Commission and subsidiary organs makes it possible for the staff to exert at times a decisive influence during the early stages of the process leading to the adoption of decisions. With the exception of the annual plenary session of the Commission, meetings held under its auspices are usually of very short duration and, as a result, it is only natural that most of the decisions adopted conform generally to the suggestions put forth in the working papers.

2) *The active role of the Secretariat on procedural matters.* As we have already seen,<sup>21</sup> the ECE staff and, in particular, the first Executive Secretary held some very definite views concerning the relative value of procedural and, more specifically, parliamentary techniques when they were used to further the aims of intergovernmental agencies. In practice the most competent use of procedural techniques by the Secretariat has been an added factor which we must take into consideration when we discuss its executive action in relation to the subsidiary multilateral bodies. The extent of the Secretariat's influence in these matters has been such that, with the exception of the plenary sessions, all questions pertaining to procedure have come within the purview of its competence and are handled as purely "technical" problems.

It is, for instance, the responsibility of the Secretariat to decide whether a meeting of a subsidiary organ is to be convened. Naturally, before deciding to act in such a case, the Secretariat consults member governments individ-

<sup>19</sup> The permanent missions in Geneva or the foreign ministries directly are naturally kept informed of such initiatives, and copies of correspondence addressed to national administrations are always sent to them.

<sup>20</sup> The United Kingdom has probably been the one Western country most reluctant to accept these practices.

<sup>21</sup> See above, pp. 182-187.



ually or at the annual sessions but the final decision rests with the Executive Secretary, who has often taken the initiative to postpone temporarily or indefinitely such meetings if he felt that they could serve no useful purpose.<sup>22</sup> We can cite as examples the Committee on the Development of Trade which did not meet between 1949 and 1954, the Manpower Committee which only met once in 1948, and the Industry and Materials Committee which has not met since 1950. In implementing this important function, the Secretariat has always been careful to weigh its decisions and to take into consideration the desires of governments, but it has rarely hesitated to state its views on these matters even if they were not accepted by all member governments. Objections to a procedural decision taken by the Secretariat have been raised time and again by many important governments but, in the last analysis, it is the Executive Secretary who assumes the final responsibility in this field. The absence of any rules of procedure for the subsidiary bodies clearly indicates that this practice meets with the consensus as it has developed since 1947.

The unwritten rule of "no voting" on substantive issues in the subsidiary organs gives an added weight to the role of the Secretariat because it is its duty to draw the conclusions from these meetings. The informal character of the process of consensus formation in the committees, subcommittees, and working parties makes it necessary for the Secretariat to formulate its own conclusions which are most often the only written record of the decisions adopted and which in turn become the instructions for the staff during the intervals between meetings. The importance of this function becomes even more apparent when we take into consideration the element of permanence which characterizes the Secretariat's participation in the work of the multi-lateral bodies. Because of this continuity the members of the staff are in a position to draw their conclusions in such a manner as to pursue a policy aiming at the attainment of certain objectives formulated by the Secretariat. On many occasions<sup>23</sup> the policy pursued by the Secretariat through its participation in the work of the technical committees has met with very serious objections on the part of member governments which have resented the "slanted" approaches adopted by the Secretariat in its studies as well as in the implementation of committee decisions. The interpretation of committee decisions has been the object of controversy but, for our purposes, we would simply note the fact that the "no voting" rule gives the Executive Secretary certain discretionary powers which have been often used as tools with which to further the aims of the Secretariat acting in an executive capacity.

<sup>22</sup> The Executive Secretary has from time to time taken the responsibility for calling off scheduled meetings, or postponing them, when it was felt that they could not have yielded results important enough to warrant the costs and work involved. The governments have always afforded the Secretariat full backing in carrying out this responsibility.

(UN Document E/ECE/291, Chapter 1, p. 6.)

<sup>23</sup> Particularly in the cases of the Committee on the Development of Trade and of the Industry and Materials Committee in 1949-1950.



3) *The Secretariat's participation in substantive discussions.* Lastly, we should mention the right of the Secretariat under Article 19 of the Rules of Procedure to take part in all discussions which take place in the intergovernmental organs. This is a practice common to the United Nations as a whole, but the nature of the topics which fall under the Commission's Terms of Reference offers numerous possibilities to the members of the staff to intervene in the debates and through such interventions to influence their general course as well as their outcome. At times it also becomes most useful to have the Secretariat make specific proposals which can be withdrawn without any loss of prestige if they meet with serious opposition. This technique has been used successfully on many occasions and it represents an added means at the disposal of the Secretariat for taking part in the decision-making process.

Before concluding this section it would seem appropriate to underline the importance of the work of the Secretariat in relation to the subsidiary bodies by drawing attention to the fact that since 1947 their meetings have brought together many thousands of delegates and experts. Over the past sixteen years the committees, subcommittees, and working groups held a minimum of 40 and a maximum of 160 meetings annually. Each meeting lasts several days and the total number of delegates and experts who come to Geneva from both Western and Eastern European countries varies from year to year, from a minimum of 1,200 to a maximum of 4,000.<sup>24</sup> The exchange of information, the development of personal and official contacts, and the concerted action that result from these meetings all bear the imprint of the particular "Geneva atmosphere" which is largely the atmosphere created and maintained by the Secretariat.

### *Research, Planning, and the Executive Action of the Secretariat*

The work of the Research and Planning Division of the ECE Secretariat has been repeatedly presented as the major justification for the existence of the Commission during the "lean years" of the Cold War. Myrdal himself often stated that the research work of the Secretariat was a sufficient *raison d'être* of the Commission though he always qualified such statements by adding that research cannot remain divorced from operational realities for any length of time without becoming sterile and meaningless. As a consequence, this relationship between research and operational activities which was so important in Myrdal's view does not proceed from the same premises as academic research, and it should be noted that the very title of the Secretariat division primarily responsible for research also includes the term "planning."

In scientific inquiry governments cannot be granted the monopoly of truth. This implies, among other things, that official statistics and assertions by governments

<sup>24</sup> These figures were given to us by competent ECE officers in June 1964.

about facts and causal relations, particularly as regards the international aspects of questions, cannot be accepted on their face value, but have to be scrutinized in a scholarly manner. This has also a most important corollary that it is not permissible to eschew controversial issues. One of the easiest opportunistic adjustments of economic research, which is not permissible according to the traditional standards of scientific enquiry, is the escape into insignificance by steering clear of problems where political interests are powerful and by avoiding analytical inferences when these are awkward. Naturally, a research organization like the ECE Secretariat when it functions in that role . . . has a clearly practical purpose . . . to serve the general aim of increasing rationality in the national and international policies of member countries—and it will not for any length of time be supported if it is not reasonably effective in furthering this specific purpose. . . . Scientific activity in terms of *l'art pour l'art*—which should have its existence firmly guaranteed in a university operating within the scientific tradition—has no place in this type of research organization, whose work must always be “practical” and directly “useful.”<sup>25</sup>

This long excerpt from the comprehensive report on the first ten years of ECE activity presents very clearly Gunnar Myrdal's ideas on the function of research carried out by the staff, and the practice of the Secretariat in this field has been largely in conformity with the principles laid down by the first Executive Secretary. Such research has been considered as a function of the Secretariat acting *independently* and as a contribution to the formulation of rational international and national *policies*. Its work in the field of research can then be qualified as executive or quasi-executive action because it *acts independently within certain legislative limits—the Terms of Reference and subsequent resolutions—and it participates in the processes leading to the adoption of decisions*, at the national and international levels.

The causal relationship between this research and decisions adopted by the Commission's multilateral bodies as well as by other institutions both inside and outside the United Nations family becomes apparent when one analyzes the practices of such bodies. The controversial nature of some of the studies produced by the Secretariat should not obscure the fact that from the very beginning intergovernmental agencies of all types have regularly taken into consideration the results of such studies before making decisions on problems which have been the object of research by the ECE staff. In the limited context of this paper we shall simply mention some characteristic examples in which the research of the Secretariat was one of the factors which determined the content of decisions adopted by intergovernmental bodies.

1) The first two annual *Economic Surveys of Europe* were the scientific starting points from which proceeded the initial work of the Organization for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC) in elaborating plans for the recon-

<sup>25</sup> UN Document E/ECE/291, Chapter 14, p. 1.

struction and development of the national economies of member states. The analyses and recommendations included in these reports—and particularly those pertaining to the trade and payments problems—served as the bases for many of the negotiations which led to the formulation by the competent OEEC organs of the first “country plans.” The importance of these studies in the work of the economic policy makers is borne out by the fact that immediately after their publication both were reproduced as supplements to the *U.S. Congressional Record* because the Marshall Plan authorities were eager to have them become available as widely and as rapidly as possible.

2) A little-known aspect of ECE activity is the work carried out at the request of the French government by the Steel Division of the Secretariat in 1948–1949 that served as the basis for much of the thinking which eventually took the form of the Monnet-Schuman Plan for the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). The principle underlying the acceptance by the Executive Secretary of the French government’s request is “that the Secretariat is at the disposal of any member country or group of member countries that wants assistance.”<sup>26</sup> Naturally, the Secretariat steered clear of the political issues raised by the establishment of the Community, but it should be remembered that the final decisions concerning ECSC were contingent upon the previous solution of a number of very thorny economic, institutional, and technical problems.

3) The Timber and Coal Committees of ECE, which have attempted and sometimes succeeded in carrying out operational tasks in their respective fields, have been largely dependent on Secretariat guidance in the determination of trends, prospects, and specific recommendations to member countries or groups of countries. The research work of both the operational divisions and the Research and Planning Division has enabled the Commission staff to formulate proposals which have served as the basis for the decisions adopted by the Committees. In the case of the Coal Committee the value of the Secretariat’s contribution to the formulation of its policy was recognized when it was given the specific task of modifying the agreed coal allocations in the intervals between the Committee’s meetings.<sup>27</sup>

To these could be added numerous other examples of the causal relationship between research and policy decisions. A careful and systematic study of this relationship would certainly enable us to understand more fully the relevance of an international secretariat’s action in the decision-making processes which occur within the framework of intergovernmental bodies.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>27</sup> The assumption was that, on the basis of its intimate knowledge of the developments in the coal market as well as the attitudes of the governments, the secretariat would make a decision closely corresponding to the agreements the governments would have reached had they met for this purpose.

(Myrdal, *Realities and Illusions in Regard to Inter-Governmental Organizations*, p. 23.)

At times such research has also had a direct bearing on the formulation of national policies. It has often been said that the real yardstick for measuring the political effectiveness of international institutions is the extent of their impact on the national decision-making processes, and the very rare studies devoted to this question have yielded interesting enough results to warrant further research.<sup>28</sup> The impact of studies produced by the ECE Secretariat on the formulation of national economic policies has not been negligible although, as a general rule, national administrations are reluctant to recognize the "international" origin or inspiration of decisions which they prefer to present as the results of "brainstorms" or of careful elaboration on their own part. In addition to the "quiet assimilation" of the results of such research in the normal national decision-making processes, governments, administrations, or simply political pressure groups and parties have occasionally chosen to "use" these results for their own purposes. We know of at least one smaller European country where the studies produced by the Secretariat have been "used" by one ministry as weapons in a major policy controversy with another government department. Even more so, however, in this same country the press and, in particular, some of the more serious economic journals have regularly referred to these studies when criticizing the government's policies.

One of the most pertinent examples of the impact of this research on national policies is the study on southern Europe which was part of the annual *Economic Survey of Europe in 1953*. The realistic and thoroughly scientific approach adopted by the staff in preparing this study at first provoked the harsh criticism of a most heterogeneous constellation of governments. Nevertheless, it soon became apparent that the motivations of the Secretariat in drafting this report did not proceed from any bias other than the ideological and theoretical positions of its members, and at least two of the governments whose policies were analyzed in the report revised, to a more or less large extent, their immediate as well as their long-term policy objectives to meet some of the ECE recommendations. In this respect it should also be added that subsequent OEEC recommendations to member countries in the southern European area were largely inspired by the findings of the ECE study.

Before concluding this section on the research activities of the ECE staff and after having indicated that in carrying out these tasks the Secretariat pursues a set of operationally oriented policy objectives, we are led to ask the following question: *How* and by *whom* are these objectives determined?<sup>29</sup>

The answer to the second part of this question is to be found in many statements in which the first Executive Secretary insisted that the final decisions

<sup>28</sup> We are thinking here in particular of the better volumes in the Carnegie Endowment series on member states and the United Nations and of Max Beloff's work on the impact of international institutions on British government and administration.

<sup>29</sup> Because most of the information we have at our disposal covers the period up to 1959-1960, the answer to this question is based essentially on the first ten years of the ECE experience.

concerning the content and the general orientation of research are within the sole competence of the Secretariat. The Executive Secretary and his staff are always ready to serve member governments by preparing studies at their request, but he alone is responsible for the content of such studies and for the final decision to publish them. During the first ten years of the Commission's existence, attempts were made to take this initiative away from the Secretariat, but they failed because the Secretariat was able to demonstrate conclusively that it was to the interest of all to allow an independent group of international officials to carry out research under its own responsibility. This "victory" of the Secretariat was possible essentially because of two factors: the quality of its leadership and its surprising cohesion in the face of outside attacks. The leadership assumed by Gunnar Myrdal was not only an element of strength in relations with member governments, but it also represented the most important single factor in the development of staff loyalty. Such loyalty would, however, have been precarious had it not been for the relative ideological cohesion of the staff taken as a whole and of the Research and Planning Division in particular. Because of this cohesion Myrdal was often criticized for limiting membership on the staff to those economists who agreed basically with the general orientation of his own thinking. There is no doubt that the "antiliberal" trends were and still are dominant within the Secretariat, but it should be said in all fairness that the scientific integrity of its members has enabled them to maintain such high standards of scientific inquiry as to avoid the pitfalls of dogmatism.<sup>30</sup>

Considering the policy orientation of this research and the obligation placed upon the staff to present its studies as if their conclusions were unanimously reached, an understanding of the methods of consensus formation in relation to research projects becomes an essential part of any attempt to study the functioning of the Secretariat. At the risk of oversimplifying a very complex process we could describe it by saying that it is based on the application of the principles of dialectic confrontation at the various echelons of the decision-making scale. In cases of persistent disagreement among members of the staff the opinion of the officer particularly responsible for the specific project is regarded as having special weight. If, however, all means of dialectic confrontation are exhausted without reaching agreement, then the findings which remain controversial are presented "in a subdued way." It should also be added

<sup>30</sup> David Wightman has written that

there is one important factor making for cohesion, namely a measure of homogeneity in political outlook on current economic problems. As each member of the Division has already rejected or embraced certain broad approaches no time is lost in wrangling over fundamental questions of principle, such as the merits or demerits of free trade. In this sense, and in this sense alone, appointments to the Division are partly political in character.

(*Economic Co-operation in Europe. A Study of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe* [London: Stevens & Sons Limited, 1956], pp. 69-70.)



that on some occasions the Executive Secretary has decided to permit two different divisions to present opposing views on the same issue.<sup>31</sup>

### *The Ad Hoc Diplomatic Activities of the Secretariat*

The last category of executive activities that should be mentioned includes all those initiatives undertaken by the Secretariat independently of any specific provisions of the Terms of Reference or the Rules of Procedure and as a result of which it becomes temporarily and in a limited sector a "partner" of member governments in the conduct of their diplomatic relations. On the basis of the Commission's general objectives laid down in the Terms of Reference and in subsequent resolutions the first Executive Secretary believed that every time governments were willing to let the Secretariat act, it was his duty to take initiatives in this field and to do so within the limits implicitly or explicitly set by them. Under this general category we can distinguish three types of initiatives:

1) On several occasions the Secretariat has attempted and often succeeded in breaking a diplomatic deadlock by offering member governments the possibility of resuming negotiations within an *ad hoc* procedural framework under the formal cover of consultations pursued by the Executive Secretary. These consultation techniques were developed in the years 1950–1954 in relation to the Secretariat's efforts aiming at the resumption and development of East-West trade. In taking such initiatives the Secretariat went beyond the limits of its functions of preparing, convening, and participating in ordinary meetings of multilateral bodies because it attempted to act as the "honest broker" whose action was to bring about the resumption of negotiations which were interrupted as a result of serious political difficulties.

In November 1950 and in August 1951 the Executive Secretary held two such consultations, the first one on the availability of grains and the second on grains and timber as well as on counterpart products. The first resolution calling on the Executive Secretary to pursue his efforts in this field was adopted during the Commission's seventh session in the spring of 1952.<sup>32</sup> In the meantime, however, the general pattern of these consultations had been established and the Commission simply expressed its satisfaction and approval of the Executive Secretary's action. We consider this action to be diplomatic in character because the Secretariat went beyond the jurisdiction of the Commission's subsidiary bodies by proposing to member governments certain *ad hoc* procedures through which, it was felt, the deadlock in the Committee on the Development of Trade would eventually be broken. In doing this, the Secre-

<sup>31</sup> Such opposing views were presented in 1949 by the Steel and the Research and Planning Divisions. For a brief discussion of these methods of consensus formation, see UN Document E/ECE/291, Chapter 14, pp. 8–9.

<sup>32</sup> Economic and Social Council *Official Records* (14th session), Supplement No. 5, p. 21.



tariat was pursuing its policy objectives in the field of trade by inviting qualified representatives of European governments—and this included several non-members—to meet under its auspices in an attempt to break this deadlock.

The diplomatic techniques developed in relation to these meetings can be briefly described as follows: (a) The Executive Secretary invited governments to send qualified experts to consult with him on problems related to the development of trade. At the first meeting the experts simply “exchanged information” in a “businesslike manner.” At a second stage, nine months later, the experts were encouraged to consider the possibility of opening bilateral discussions on “concrete trading proposals.” As a result of the August 1951 consultation, however, Myrdal did not feel sufficiently encouraged to convene a full-fledged meeting of trade experts. Realizing that governments had started showing a real interest in the resumed dialogue on trade, the Executive Secretary preferred to let them take the initiative. It was only after the Commission during its seventh session had passed the resolution requesting him to convene such a meeting that Myrdal assumed the initiative once again. In respect to this resolution and to the subsequent report of ECE to ECOSOC<sup>33</sup> it is important to note that they spelled out the conditions which he considered indispensable if such a meeting was to have any reasonable chances of success. Subsequently, two large-scale consultations were held in the spring of 1953 and in the spring of 1954, and these in turn opened the way for the resumption of the meetings of the Committee on the Development of Trade in the fall of 1954. (b) These consultations are not, from a formal point of view, intergovernmental meetings. In spite of the fact that on many occasions the national experts were in fact diplomats, the Executive Secretary treated them as if they were experts “placed at his disposal” by governments and he always insisted that it was his sole responsibility to determine the agenda as well as to settle all procedural problems. No resolutions were adopted and at the end of the meetings it was his responsibility to report to governments. (c) After a general discussion of intra-European trade the experts were invited to begin bilateral exploratory talks or trade negotiations if they were prepared to do so. As a matter of fact, the greater part of these consultations was devoted to such bilateral discussions. Although no official records were kept, members of the Secretariat were often present in their capacity of “honest brokers” attempting to break the deadlocks by sometimes proposing alternative solutions.

There is no doubt that these consultations contributed largely to the resumption and development of trade relations between countries of Eastern and Western Europe. It is naturally very difficult to measure the exact impact of such a contribution because these deliberations coincided chronologically with the first “thaw” in the East-West struggle. At this stage we would simply

<sup>33</sup> Economic and Social Council *Official Records* (14th session), Supplement No. 5.

underline that they represent a set of diplomatic techniques enabling an international secretariat to act at a time when political and procedural deadlocks paralyze the organization.

2) Within the general context of these consultations the Secretariat at times went a step further by actually suggesting the content and the form of bilateral agreements. In some cases the Executive Secretary and his staff went beyond their role of "honest brokers" by proposing specific solutions to problems which arose essentially as a result of the absence of diplomatic relations between certain countries. An interesting example of such initiatives may be found in the resumption of trade relations between Greece and at least two Eastern European countries, Poland and Hungary. The absence of diplomatic relations did not altogether exclude the possibility of establishing informal contacts within the framework of the consultations, but once these talks made it clear that there was a mutual desire to resume trade relations, the form that such an agreement could take became the major obstacle to its conclusion. When we consider the traditional lack of imagination of foreign ministries, it becomes obvious that if these negotiations had been handled in a manner which the ministries considered appropriate, the resumption of trade between Greece and the Eastern European countries would certainly not have taken place as early as it did. Fortunately, however, a number of favorable factors made it possible to overcome the obstacles which resulted from the absence of diplomatic relations. The personal qualities of the negotiators and the imaginative work of his staff enabled the Executive Secretary to come up with some suggestions which led to the conclusion of the first agreements. The solution finally adopted was that of the signature of agreements between the Chamber of Commerce of Athens and the Chambers of Foreign Trade of the two socialist countries. These texts were accompanied by exchanges of letters between the central banks which established the framework for the flow of payments.

Such a solution was not to the liking of all foreign ministries concerned and there were some legal experts who warned that the agreements had no value whatsoever under international law and that they were not enforceable, either under international or under municipal law. In fact, they were scrupulously observed and they have subsequently served as precedents for the signature of trade agreements between states which have no diplomatic relations or which do not recognize each other.

3) The last type of *ad hoc* diplomatic activities of the Secretariat which we would like to mention includes those initiatives where it has been involved in a sustained diplomatic action in pursuance of the Commission's long-term objectives of European integration. As we have already seen, the research of the Secretariat inevitably leads to certain policy-oriented conclusions which are presented in the published studies or in private recommendations to gov-

ernments. The work of the staff becomes diplomatic in character when, as a result of such research, the Executive Secretary decides on a course of action involving bilateral and multilateral contacts or negotiations with governments in pursuance of these objectives.

One of the most interesting examples of such action is the leading role assumed by the Secretariat in the "Yougelexport" negotiations which lasted from 1950 to 1957. The starting point of these initiatives was the studies, prepared soon after the Commission came into existence, on the general subject of a more rational exploitation of Europe's electric power resources.<sup>34</sup> The conclusions drawn from these studies reinforced the Executive Secretary's conviction that it was the duty of ECE to promote intergovernmental cooperation in the field of joint or coordinated exploitation of natural resources. When the delegate of the United States to the seventh session of the Electric Power Committee proposed then the consideration of a previous Secretariat suggestion concerning the export of the Yugoslav power surplus and the Committee decided to undertake the study of this question, the Executive Secretary asked his staff to pursue actively the preparation of a study which was already under way on the transfer of electric power across European borders. At the same time he decided to convene in the summer of 1951 a meeting between Yugoslav and Italian experts in order to examine the possibilities of such transfers between the two countries. Before, during, and after this meeting the intergovernmental contacts were initiated and presided over by a representative of the Secretariat who took a very active part in the negotiations. In March and in June 1952 the Commission and its Electric Power Committee decided that this project was to be considered as one of top priority and they invited all interested governments to take part in the discussions pursued under the auspices of the Secretariat. In December of the same year the Secretariat convened an unofficial meeting of representatives of four interested governments (Yugoslavia, Austria, Italy, and West Germany) during which it was decided to establish a group of experts to which would be submitted the studies prepared by the Secretariat before they were transmitted to the Committee. After that stage the Secretariat's participation in the negotiations became less important because the governments made it clear that they were interested in this project and that they wanted their experts to play the leading role.

<sup>34</sup> One of the first such studies to be presented was devoted to the possibilities of exchanging electric power resources between West Germany, Austria, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. It was submitted to the Electric Power Committee at its seventh session in September 1950, but the East-West tension which resulted from the Korean War made it impossible for the Committee to consider such a project. Similarly, in the early fifties, the Secretariat took the initiative in the preparation of the plans and in the negotiations which led in May 1954 to the conclusion of the agreement between Austria and Yugoslavia on the coordinated exploitation of the resources of the Drava River. We have chosen however to discuss the Yougelexport project because of the complexity of the problems that were raised and of the impetus given to the negotiations, at least during their first phase, as a result of the Secretariat's active participation.

The Yougelexport program as it was originally elaborated by the staff and the national experts never did come to a successful conclusion because of a number of new developments in the political relations of the four countries concerned and in the Yugoslav economy itself. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the diplomatic action of the Secretariat during the initial phases was one of the driving forces for the successful outcome of the preliminary contacts which led to the establishment of the intergovernmental bodies. These efforts finally failed as a result of the subsequent evolution of the regional system, but the initiatives undertaken by the Secretariat deserve our attention because they are a characteristic example of *ad hoc* diplomatic action by an international secretariat.

### SOME PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

In our introductory remarks we stated briefly that we consider the integration of a regional system or of the universal international system as the primary function of international institutions. This hypothesis is particularly relevant to any study of international secretariats because the acceptance on the part of governments of the existence of such bodies and of their right, if not their duty, to carry out executive activities with reasonable chances of success is a sure indication of the occurrence of the integrative process either through a conscious effort at community building or through the unplanned growth of the coincidence of interest.<sup>35</sup> It would not be difficult to find examples of the ECE Secretariat's conscious efforts at community building, but the participation of most of the other actors in the European system in this process takes the form of an unplanned growth of coincidence of interest.

In some very limited sectors of the European economy, consensus formation has in fact become the "dominant characteristic of interactor relations" although at no time has there been a quantitative "spillover" enabling the European economy taken as a whole to cross the critical threshold beyond which this characteristic becomes dominant in the sectors which are of vital importance to the various national economies. It would, however, be erroneous to regard the results already obtained in respect to European integration as negligible. In appreciating these results we must consider essentially two closely related variables: the quantitative and qualitative impact of integration on the patterns and content of intra-European economic relations and the effects of the integrative process on the individual national economies.

To be sure, if one looks at the European economy during the past fifteen years, the integrative effects of activities carried out within the framework of the Commission only appear in some limited sectors, such as transport and trade, but in these sectors the patterns of intra-European relations have been

<sup>35</sup> See above, pp. 177-178.

decisively affected by the existence of the Commission. The standardization of technical conditions and of legal prescriptions in the field of inland transport, the general acceptance by governments of a commercial arbitration convention, and the standardization of sales conditions in certain basic industrial branches, as well as the introduction of uniform statistical methods and techniques, undoubtedly represent consequences of the slow process of limited integration for which ECE has been primarily responsible.

Similarly, this integrative process has affected a number of important national economic sectors. One of the factors which has been most helpful in carrying the effects of integration into the realm of day-to-day economic activities is the participation of nongovernmental organizations in the work of practically all the subsidiary organs where the decisions are elaborated and adopted. The participation of professional organizations in the work of these bodies gives an added value to their decisions and recommendations and offers certain guarantees for their implementation by the economic "policy makers" at the national level. There is a tendency among many political scientists to take an ironic view of such limited accomplishments of international institutions as the introduction of the International Road Transport (TIR) regulations by most European governments. As for those who benefit directly from the development of uniform road transport regulations, they hardly ever realize that they are the consequence of initiatives undertaken by the "bureaucrats" of the Palais des Nations and that they are part of the general pattern of European integration which has been the major objective pursued by the ECE Secretariat since 1947.

Although most disputes which have arisen within ECE have been settled by methods other than that of "upgrading the common interests" of member states, the Secretariat has consistently attempted to obtain from member governments the acceptance of this guiding principle, at least for the settlement of disputes on matters which are not of vital interest to them. The international Secretariat was committed to a set of methods for settling disputes which are characteristic of the integrative process, but systemic conditions did not permit their implementation.<sup>36</sup>

Finally, in spite of its many limitations, we would like to underline the integrative effects of Secretariat action by reminding the reader of the state of the regional system during the initial period of the Commission's existence. The contribution of an international institution to the integrative process should not simply be measured in absolute terms, leaving aside the state of

<sup>36</sup> We should, however, stress once again that member governments were not always satisfied with the methods and techniques used by the Secretariat to promote what it considered to be the general interest of Europe. In determining the content of this general interest Myrdal was always careful to take into consideration the avowed or implied policies of member states, and he rarely if ever overstepped the strict limits imposed upon his action by these policies. But, in spite of this caution, the Secretariat regularly came under fire.

the systemic environment in which it functions. In appreciating such a contribution we should constantly keep in mind the relation between the state of the system and the degree of integration attained. In the case of the Economic Commission for Europe, its contribution to the integration of the European economy taken as a whole can be fully understood only if we take into consideration the high degree of heterogeneity of the regional system during the greater part of its existence. More specifically, we would like to suggest that the integrative effects of the Secretariat's action have been important enough to warrant the statement that it has been for the past seventeen years one of the most efficient and politically effective bodies contributing to the process of the integration of the whole of Europe.

*I have long worked for the cause of United Europe and even of a United States of Europe, which would enable that continent, the source of so much of our culture, ancient and modern, and the parent of the New World, to resume and revive its former splendours. It is my sure hope and conviction that European unity will be achieved and that it will not ultimately be limited only to the countries at present composing Western Europe.*

From a speech by Winston S. Churchill to the United States Congress, Washington, D.C., January 17, 1952. (Denise Folliot [ed.], *Documents on International Affairs 1952* [New York, Oxford University Press, 1955], p. 51.)