



Vincent Dujardin, Michel Dumoulin, ***Jean-Charles Snoy: Homme dans la Cité, artisan de l'Europe 1907-1991*** (Bruxelles: Le Cri, 2010, 502 pp., ISBN 978 2 8710 6555 5).

Biographies are often written to highlight various aspects of the life of well-known figures such as former prime ministers. At times, biographies also serve to rescue the life of the more obscure from oblivion. The biography of Jean-Charles Snoy – a twentieth century European administrator, diplomat, politician and intellectual from Belgium – is an obvious example of the latter. Even within his own country, Snoy is not a name that rings a bell for many. Nonetheless, there are clearly reasons to remember his life and times.

Jean-Charles Snoy et d'Oppuers was born in 1907, a period in which the French-speaking nobility ruled Belgium in political, economic and cultural terms. Snoy experienced how the particular world in which he was raised and which had proved its value over time, silently and occasionally loudly, fade away. Snoy was, however, not simply subject to this wider transformation within Belgium. He also played an active role in trying to save what he considered to be important. Snoy could not and would not escape his responsibilities. At the age of 22, after the sudden death of his father, he became the only man of noble descent. At the age of 32, a few months before the start of the Second World War in Belgium, he was appointed Secretary General of the Ministry of Economic Affairs. In the meantime he became the father of a large family and was involved in local politics.

What makes Snoy distinct from many others is his engagement in the early years of the Benelux, the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (the forerunner of the OECD) and the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Community for Atomic Energy (ECAE). As a close aide and friend of Paul-Henri Spaak, he became one of the co-writers of the Treaties of Rome, something for which, if anything, he is best known and still remembered. From the Conference of Messina in 1955 – his presence was almost accidental – to the signing ceremony of the Treaties in 1957, he was head of the Belgian delegation, on occasions taking over the role of Chairman Spaak when absent, and later becoming the first Permanent Representative of Belgium to the EEC.

During the 1960s, he went back to the private sector but at the turn of the decennium he briefly re-entered the public scene as a Member of Parliament and Minister of Finance. In 1971, he finally became mayor of his home town, a small village in the rural area south of Brussels. Twenty years later he died at the age of 84.

As the subtitle of the biography suggests, Snoy's life is much richer than the different worlds in which he participated and the various positions he occupied, even if this list of positions is impressive and his role in the success of the Treaties of Rome undeniable. Snoy was first and foremost a catholic, *un homme de la Cité de Dieu*, meaning that eventually *le spirituel* has precedence over *le temporel*, all earthly things (and also that he felt a natural inclination towards multilateral politics). In line with his personal conviction, he was a European. Europe with its civilisation, its values, its vocations, constituted Snoy's horizon and destiny. At the same time he was also genuinely noble, acting in line with traditions in order to preserve them, but he was not against moderate reform. Snoy was not a business man but *un homme d'affaires*, a technocrat but not a bureaucrat, *un homme du service public* but not a full-blooded politician, unlike Spaak, for instance. Although he was a politician for a relatively long time, he never felt completely at ease within the world of party politics. Perhaps he was too consensual, and not secular enough. Despite this, or maybe because of it, Snoy was widely respected and hailed by his colleagues, especially abroad, during and at the end of his public career. This conflict between the world of faith and politics prompted him to leave national politics early, bitterly and disappointed.

In this biography these different perspectives bring Snoy to life again. Snoy certainly achieved much in a single lifetime, but it is to the credit of the authors that they integrate such variety into one narrative. No perspective seems to be neglected. For instance, a lot of attention has been paid to Snoy's family life. To this end, a large variety of sources was at the disposal of the authors, including the minutes of the Belgian government. They have been used very accurately. One could even say that Snoy helped the authors a lot – or perhaps made their job more difficult – as he wrote extensively on a wide series of topics, mainly national, European and international political, financial and economic affairs. Moreover, his diaries and letters are numerous and offer us an insight into his thoughts, habits and reflections from past times. The only thing which is excluded is some background and specialised information about the Treaties of Rome. Yet the combination of these different sources not only guides the reader through Snoy's life, but also offer a journey through the major events and turns in Belgian and European politics during a significant part of the twentieth century. Snoy was often in the front seat: from his correspondence and close relation with King Baudouin to his membership of the Werner Committee. A rich career such as Snoy's also leads to a lot of interesting junctions. As Minister of Finance, for instance, he had to deal with the preparation of the accession of the United Kingdom to the EEC. As a strong supporter of European economic integration, this was something he had been in favour of for long time, taking a stand against General de Gaulle, for instance. Moreover, with the introduction of VAT, Snoy was involved in the implementation of a European decision that dates back to the Treaties of Rome.

Snoy lived many lives simultaneously. Therefore, this biography has much to tell and deserves reading. Gifted with an outspoken character and clear principles,

convictions and ideas, this man played a crucial role in one of the founding moments of the European integration process. Therefore, the biography of this *artisan de l'Europe* also deserves to be translated into English and German.

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