



Paul Magnette

CETA : quand l'Europe déraile ?

“To face up to such a steamroller, we have to muster as much ability and conviction as we can. In terms of convictions, we are provided for. It’s two years that we’ve been submerged in these debates on international commercial treaties in general and the CETA in particular. We have turned and returned the treaty in every direction; we’ve read it, analyzed it and examined it in company with the best experts and we have stated precisely which parts conflict with our values. In terms of competence, this work prepared us well, but we were conscious of the negotiating strength of the people across the table from us.

Because, in these discussions, the devil very much lay in the detail, we had to be able to rely on the best lawyers. Only too well did I remember the advice that was impressed on me by Elio Di Rupo when I was fighting nuclear power producers to extract an annual levy from them amounting to several hundreds of millions of euros: “Don’t underestimate the adversary; do as he does – get the best lawyers!”

Even before entering into negotiations with the European Commission, we got university professors and law firms with the highest levels of expertise in these complex areas to prepare analytical memoranda on all the points that could be of use in the negotiations and, taking advantage of a few rare spare hours in the weekend, we reviewed the texts in their finest detail. Among them, Nicolas Angelet was to play a crucial role. A professor of international law at the Brussels French-language non-denominational university (ULB), he is recognized by his peers as intelligent far beyond the mundane. A French-speaker from Flanders, he has a law degree from the University of Ghent, his home town, and a degree in European international law from the ULB, where he teaches. Furthermore, he holds a doctorate of laws from the Catholic University of Leuven, whose prestigious law faculty has provided the European institutions with quite a few of its most brilliant minds. He is also a lawyer at a very large international firm, where he represents not only international organizations, the Belgian government and states from every corner of the world but major corporates as well. He unites, therefore, all the science of the professor with all the art of the

practitioner. Perfectly trilingual, he can dictate amendments on the fly in impeccable legal language, whether in French, English or Dutch. Throughout the negotiations, Nicolas Angelet would play a discreet but vital role. Without ever taking part in any official meeting, he agreed to read and proofread every document that we sent to him in real time, at every hour of the day or night, including on Saturdays and Sundays, and he drew our attention to more than one essential point of detail. On our request, he also drew up a large portion of the texts that we would table at the negotiations.

Right down to the last day of these discussions, we were delighted to have called on the expertise of men and women who bore no allegiance to our political parties and had no direct link to Wallonia but who took up arms alongside us and placed the best of their knowledge and their array of contacts at our disposal simply because they were convinced that our cause in objecting to the CETA was a just one.”