

Summary of Oral History Transcript

Benjenk, Munir P.

Interview conducted by Professor Robert W. Oliver, on 1985-11-18

Benjenk, a Turkish national, briefly covers his background from graduating from the London School of Economics, working for the BBC, serving in the Turkish army, a ten-year career with the OECD in Paris mostly, except for 1955-56 when he served as their representative in Washington and, subsequently, as the director of a technical assistance project in Sardinia where he met a World Bank team working on an irrigation project. He also met the World Bank representative in Europe whose office was in Paris. In 1963 he was induced to join the Bank. He was originally recruited by Demuth into the Development Services Department of which he was director, into a middle-level senior position as an executive responsible for monitoring the Bank's technical assistance program.

Soon thereafter, around '64, Pierre Moussa, the head of the Africa Department, asked for Benjenk's release to the Africa Department for three or four months to go on an exploratory mission to Algeria which had just acquired its independence in '63. The results of the mission were pleasing to the Bank and it was decided, with the approval of the two vice presidents, Burke Knapp and Jeffrey Wilson, to set up a resident mission for the whole of North Africa (Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco). Benjenk was asked to head the mission, however, it was still not decided in which of the three countries to set it up nor, it seems, was there consultation with President Woods. Benjenk elaborates on his meeting with Woods when the latter was informed and his rejection of the plan based on the fact that it was not the proper time.

Woods then asked Benjenk to accept an assignment as head of a division in the Operations Department, working specifically on North

Africa. There was a hiatus of a few months until this was made final during which Benjenk was asked to go to Europe and recruit people for the Young Professionals Program. Benjenk elaborates on Woods' involvement and the subsequent administrative processes in finally obtaining the assignment in early '65. For two years he headed the North Africa Division, one of five divisions in the Africa Department. The Department's Director El Emary replaced Moussa after the latter's resignation, and was someone whom Woods trusted. Benjenk covers briefly the organization of the Bank at that time, Woods' management style and relationship with the various executives, and his own personal feelings with regards to dealing with Woods. In this context, Woods' relationships with the governments, and his technique in having opposing views brought before him for the purpose of toning down the more exacting conditions the Bank staff wanted to impose on countries.

In May '67 Woods promoted Benjenk to Deputy Director of the newly-formed department, Middle East and North Africa, which was headed by Lejeune. Benjenk elaborates on when the Bank at one time concluded that Morocco had violated a clause in a loan agreement and the manner in which it was handled by Woods. He then compares Woods' management style with that of McNamara's and at times Black's, talks of Woods' relationship with the Executive Directors, and, specifically, with the governments of North Africa, he talks briefly about reorganizing the Middle East North Africa (MENA) Department with the remnants of the European Department thus becoming EMENA, the 1970 split of the Africa Department into two: East Africa and West Africa. And, the '72 reorganization under McNamara which institutionalized what in fact had existed and saw the creation, initially, of five regional vice presidencies, and his appointment as Vice President of EMENA from 1972 - 1980.

In '80, Benjenk was asked to replace a colleague as Vice President for External Relations, reporting directly to the President. He mentions certain specific aspects of the reorganization, namely, the appointment of William Clark, a British journalist, as head of the

Information Department working under Demuth and, in '73, after Demuth's departure, his promotion to Vice President of External Relations. Clausen's decision to set up a Managing Committee choosing as its members the seven vice presidents reporting directly to him, including Benjenk. And, finally, his decision to retire when he reached his 60th birthday.