

# Farewell address given by Jean-Marc Boegner as the Permanent Representative of France (3 February 1972)

**Caption:** Farewell address delivered by Jean-Marc Boegner, Permanent Representative of France to the European Communities from 1961 to 1972. The diplomat emphasises the importance of the work of the Committee of Permanent Representatives (Coreper) and outlines the Committee's relations with the Commission and with the General Secretariat of the Council.

**Source:** Archives historiques des Communautés européennes, Florence, Villa Il Poggiolo. Dépôts, DEP. Emanuele Gazzo, EG. L'évolution des institutions et organes de la Communauté, EG-40.

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## Address given by HE Ambassador Jean-Marc Boegner, 3 February 1972

Mr President,  
Your Excellency, Commissioner,  
Mr Secretary-General,

After listening to the three of you, my first inclination would be to exclaim: long live the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. Yet I shall resist that temptation and confine myself to thanking you for all that you have said with, I am convinced, such sincerity and feeling. Believe me when I say that what I have just heard will remain deeply imprinted in my heart.

Before saying what I have to say to my colleagues, and before leaving them, let me begin by thanking the Tunisian Government, which, some 11 years ago, after committing an unacceptable offence against my person, restored my liberty, thereby enabling me to take up the post that I was offered of Permanent Representative of France to the European Communities. Mr President, I have loved that Committee just as we all love it. I would say that I have loved it as a sailor loves his ship, as a peasant loves his field or his vineyard, as something to which we are attached with every fibre of our being and, I would say, by our very nature. Indeed, it seems to me that what characterises the group that we form is that it allows us to be entirely ourselves within it: to be what each of us is, each with his own temperament and style, without having to worry about appearances, save, of course, the usual diplomatic courtesy, while yet being able to devote ourselves to our work with all the resources of our various personalities. It is precisely because we may behave so naturally, I believe, that we are so deeply attached to our group. At all events, surely we are in a sense the natural children of the Community, since we were not even mentioned in the Treaty of Rome. Nor do I think that we need blush at our obscure origins, for I have always heard it said that alley cats were the most intelligent and smartest cats of all. I believe, therefore, that, if we have gradually found our place not in an alleyway but in the meeting rooms of Europe, well, it is because we have deserved it because we all approach our work very seriously, with great loyalty and in a spirit of disinterest. I believe that, little by little, it is that approach, loyal, honest, serious, with no attempt at all to seek publicity or carve out a career for ourselves, that persuaded our Ministers and the Community institutions in general of the value of the Committee of Permanent Representatives. I also believe that the reason we love that Committee, Mr President, is that we feel that we are all equal within it. I think that the best reflection of that equality is the fact that we chair the Committee in rotation and that each of the five colleagues trusts whoever is chairing it at the time; I think that that clearly shows the kind of rules of the game that we observe, which means that our discussions are always marked by the desire to treat one another as equals, regardless of the interests that we have to defend.

Having spoken of liberty and equality, I shall not refer now to fraternity because I do not want to call to your mind the motto of a Revolution in which a king lost his head, given that several of my colleagues represent monarchies; yet I would say that we are moving towards fraternity. Our activities are also marked by serenity and good humour. Of course, our discussions are sometimes difficult, since it is quite legitimate for us to have interests to uphold and reconcile; but, in the end, we are all experienced enough to regard all that with the necessary detachment, to give everything its rightful place and never to dramatise. That, too, I think, is one of the features of our Committee. I believe that another link between us is the good humour we are accustomed to bring to our work and sometimes, I would say, even the very simple jokes that we allow ourselves to make.

As I said a moment ago, the Permanent Representatives were, so to speak, the foundlings of the Community. That was clearly not the case of the Commission, whose birth certificate is stamped on every page of the Treaty. It is, therefore, a legitimate child, although perhaps the fruit of what I would describe as a morganatic marriage between what was, at the time, called supranationality, and sovereign states. Those rather hybrid origins may, at times, have led the Commission to search for its birthright and travel down roads along which we on the French side could not always follow it; but, to tell the truth, I do not think that is really important. I am particularly grateful to His Excellency Ambassador Albert Borschette for joining us today, on the understanding that this will not set a precedent for other Committee of Permanent Representatives' meetings unless, of course, another of my colleagues has to take leave. I would like to

express my profound admiration for the Commission. We have often had difficulties with it, not just we ourselves but perhaps we more than the others. But the Commission will grant me that, firstly, I have never tried to interfere with its independence and, secondly, that my colleagues and I have always refrained from doing anything that might undermine the Commission's independence of judgment, opinion or action. Let me also express my admiration for all that it has done since the birth of the Community in order really to constitute, within our Institutions, the vital organ of reflection, of proposal, of action and of management. I need only refer, for example, to the recent negotiations on enlargement to highlight the prominent role that the Commission plays. I could say the same of many other issues, such as monetary questions, which we recently discussed, and the common agricultural policy, of trade relations, which are being discussed at this moment in another room and where a Commission representative is defending the Community's position, and very skilfully too — in short, we find that the Commission provides outstanding and vital services to the Community in every area. And I should like to acknowledge that today, as I address it for the last time.

Mr Secretary-General, you head an organisation that, as I have often found during the four presidencies that I have held over the past ten years, we all acknowledge is extremely valuable and works tirelessly. And if everything here is proceeding in a clear and orderly manner, as nobody will dispute, I believe that this is largely due to the General Secretariat. We must never forget that once we conclude our activities, the Secretariat has to continue working late into the night, sometimes under very trying conditions, to ensure that we can resume the next day or week without losing pace or flagging. So let me say to Christian Calmes and his entire entourage that we are most grateful to them. And when I say his entire entourage, I also mean all those who greet us so kindly in the morning when we arrive, who are always at our disposal when we have a question to put or a service to request; there really is a climate of good will and good humour in the Secretariat, which I think we must all acknowledge.

Mr President, I have performed a task that has, in fact, lasted ten and a half years, and I must say that the auspices for my work were very favourable. When this Community was created, nothing was self-evident, at least as far as France was concerned. The other day, I had occasion to say to Paul-Henri Spaak, whom I was visiting, that I thought, speaking of course only for France — and I believe history will prove me right — that the commitments entered into in Rome in 1957 were entered into by men who would probably not have managed to honour them and that they were honoured by men who would probably not have wanted to enter into them. I think that that sheds light on the true meaning of the task that I had to perform here. It was a difficult task, I realise, because it meant reconciling the political requirements of a large and ancient state with the integration of Europe. In the end, however, I believe that what happened was in the interest of all. And I believe that we must not forget that France made a considerable effort to ensure that it could make its contribution to the Common Market and also draw from the Common Market what it needed if it was to achieve the industrial revolution on which it embarked, perhaps too late, indeed surely too late, thanks to an enlightened leader and thanks to all the efforts of the nation. But our Community played a major role there, and I shall not forget that.

As you are aware, Mr President, I hoped that my assignment would not end before the enlargement negotiations had concluded. I am very pleased about them because let me say, and I think that everyone will agree, that of all the tasks that we have had to undertake here on one side or another, those negotiations were probably the most enthralling and most important, perhaps also the most exhausting at times. I was also very glad to find that the negotiations related quite simply to the terms for accession to the Communities and not the terms for maintaining the Commonwealth and EFTA. In that respect, matters were quite different from what they had been ten years earlier. This proves that time has done its job well. It has enabled these negotiations to produce the result that we know, and I am personally convinced that we have every reason to expect a very happy outcome for our Community. I was glad to be able to take part in the meeting of 22 January, which will be engraved in the memory of all of us, and to be able, like my colleagues and our Ministers, to listen for the first time to the new European anthem, which, I understand, is taken from the final movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. I would certainly not dispute that choice. Let me simply point out, by the way, that another Schumann, the composer, Robert Schumann, wrote an orchestral overture, which incidentally is played very rarely, entitled 'The Bride of Messina' or 'Die Verlobte von Messina', and which might also have been appropriate when we think of the conditions under which our Community was conceived.

I would like to conclude these brief thanks, as we say in the French Academy, by saying that I have learned three lessons from my task here. The first is a lesson of resolve. I believe that we owe what we have achieved to a strong, constant and persevering resolve and that we must continue to show that same resolve in order to continue, to defend what has been done and to make progress towards the economic but also political Europe to which we all aspire and which, I am persuaded, will have even more chance of success with the accession of the United Kingdom. It is a lesson of resolve but also of modesty, for I am confident of what we can offer one another and I am aware of what France can learn from its partners. It has already learned a great deal from them, and it still has much to learn from them; perhaps they also have something to learn from France — it is up to them to say so. At all events, I believe that however firm and rigorous a stand France has to take here under many circumstances, it must not forget what it owes to this Community and its partners. I have, therefore, also learned a lesson of gratitude from what I have experienced here over the past ten years. I believe that we owe one another a debt of gratitude, however bitter our discussions may sometimes have had to be. I think we owe one another a debt of gratitude for what we have given one another and for what we have managed to achieve together. First and foremost, therefore, I feel gratitude towards my colleagues, and also affection and high regard. I would like to be assured that my departure will not be a separation and that, whatever happens next, we shall meet again.

Thank you, Mr President.