

Address given by Nicolas Hommel at the end of the Presidency of Jean Dondelinger (Brussels, June 1976)


Caption: Address delivered by Nicolas Hommel, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Communities from 1973 to 1980, in June 1976 at the end of the Luxembourg Presidency of the Council in honour of Jean Dondelinger, Permanent Representative of Luxembourg to the European Communities from 1975 to 1984. In his address, Nicolas Hommel outlines the Ambassador's efforts to improve the efficiency of Coreper and restore its influence on national governments.

Source: Allocutions, messages de fin d'année de Monsieur Nicolas Hommel, Secrétaire Général du Conseil des Communautés Européennes, 1973-1980. [s.l.]: [s.d.].

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MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE OF PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVES (II)

Brussels, June 1976

End of the Presidency of HE Ambassador Jean Dondelinger
Permanent Representative of Luxembourg

Mr President,

Before you became President, your authority on Community affairs, based on long experience and a brilliant mind, was already undisputed. But, as if to confirm it, immediately before becoming President, you set out your personal thoughts on the European Council in a penetrating and courageous study. Of course, it was an analysis of a new type of institution. But was it not also to show us the huge resources that you planned to make available to the Presidency and the Community?

And you certainly did that. Your dedication, fortunately combined with an enviable physical resilience, was almost unparalleled. Dedication is a quality shared by all Presidents. But every President has his own style. Yours was unique in two ways. You aimed to give Coreper greater prominence by altering its procedural routines and also to strengthen the role of the President by having him take on maximum responsibility.

You constantly assessed the state of the Community and saw, in particular, that Coreper had some weaknesses and was losing its influence on those whom it advised. Quite rightly, you took advantage of the opportunity that your Presidency gave you to tackle that problem. You set to work, almost desperately, to improve the way in which Coreper worked by changing its composition and making all the procedural improvements that it needed to become more efficient. You knew yourself that this could make you unpopular. In fact, your efforts were sometimes misunderstood, because you were tampering with the routine and seemed to be fuelling certain frustrations. But your ambition was to make Coreper efficient, to restore its reputation in the eyes of governments. You wanted to give it back the spirit that it had had when things in Europe were going well.

And then you were willing, above all, to take on all the responsibilities that are allocated to the President. There had never been so many compromises and notes from the Presidency, often of your own creation, sometimes backed by your authority and common sense. You also took on the responsibility of fiercely defending Coreper's position, its role and *raison d'être*. How stubborn you were in your determination to influence the Community's position in the North-South Dialogue when you left Brussels. How many times, even recently, did you raise the debate above the technical aspects, using your responsibility as President to dare to tell truths that made people think and examine their consciences. How forcefully but tactfully did you put your case to the President of the full Council against the threat to your committee's prerogatives and the undermining of Community procedures in general.

I have to say that your efforts, which sometimes took all your strength, deserved to be more successful. But the problems throughout your Presidency could not have been more difficult or delicate. The direct election of Parliament, the definition of the energy policy, general Mediterranean policy and, especially, relations with Greece and Turkey, the preparations for the North-South Dialogue, UNCTAD, I could go on and on. Although none of these major problems was resolved, you did succeed in making progress on them. I am sure that your successor will be happy to have had such an efficient predecessor, so full of belief in the Community.

For the Secretariat, if I may say so, you have been a demanding but sympathetic President. Despite your determination, despite the extraordinary dedication and the almost necessarily varied skills of your colleagues, you have probably had to use its services more than you personally would have wished. But, even in that, you never took the easy way out, and our work bears evidence of your personal and political contribution, especially in some of the major speeches made by the Council President in the European Parliament and to international organisations.

From now on, since you will no longer have to defend the interests of your country or give the committee the fruit of your wisdom, your thoughts and your in-depth knowledge of the Communities, we shall less often have the chance to admire your brilliant analyses and summaries, to be moved by your fiery speeches or amused by your words, often full of humour and sometimes frank, but so objective that they never seemed critical or disillusioned.

Mr President, you showed authority in your Presidency. The fact that you represented the smallest country in the Community, although irrelevant from the legal point of view, might have undermined that authority. But that was not at all the case. You were less tied by the interests of your country, and your impartiality, more natural than official, was one of its components. Your personal attributes did the rest. Because of all that, your Presidency was remarkable and courageous. I congratulate you.