

Address given by Nicolas Hommel at the presentation of commemorative medals for 20 years of European service (Brussels, 19 November 1976)

Caption: Address delivered by Nicolas Hommel, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Communities from 1973 to 1980, on 19 November 1976 in Brussels on the occasion of the second ceremony held to present commemorative medals for 20 years of European service. In his address, Nicolas Hommel gives an account of the development of the role and activities of the General Secretariat and addresses the question of staff demands concerning their working conditions.

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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PRESENTATION OF COMMEMORATIVE MEDALS FOR 20 YEARS OF EUROPEAN SERVICE

Brussels, 19 November 1976

This is the second time that commemorative medals will have been presented within the General Secretariat for 20 years of European service. In a spirit of always wishing to do better, I wanted to make this ceremony a more formal occasion than the previous presentation. The aim is not to copy other European institutions — the Council's General Secretariat is sufficiently *sui generis* to act in its own way — but very specifically to honour those who have been in harness almost since the creation of our General Secretariat. To add to the solemnity of this occasion, I had hoped that the President of the Council could take part in this ceremony, but because the progress of the Council sessions is too uncertain, it would not have been possible to schedule a ceremony properly. However, I have been able to convene a few former colleagues who have retired and your immediate colleagues and co-workers. In particular, I would like to thank your former Secretary-General, Mr Calmes, for being here; he deserves more than I do to be standing in front of this microphone this evening. (And there should be nothing to stop him speaking to you this evening.)

This commemoration has a memorable theme: twenty years in the European civil service. This has a considerable emotional element: to have been witness, each at his or her own level, to the growth of the General Secretariat and to the development of the European phenomenon, as I no longer dare use such a hackneyed and overblown phrase as 'European unification'.

The General Secretariat had modest beginnings; at first, it was a simple secretariat, a technical infrastructure with a very small staff, suspected by all those who feared the emergence of a rival, but subsequently highly appreciated in critical situations. Initially serving the ECSC Council, because of its value and following certain skilful political and diplomatic moves, the secretariat became the General Secretariat of the Council of the Communities. This advancement called for rapid growth in numbers, which went hand-in-hand with the extension of a complete language service. You could say that the General Secretariat changed in scale, growing from a cottage industry to an industrial operation.

However, the changes have also affected the General Secretariat's role and function, even though any change has aroused suspicion among those that it is designed to serve. The technical infrastructure function is obviously established and undisputed. On the other hand, its qualitative function as adviser has been subjected to strict limitations. The enhanced role given to the Presidency since the Paris Summit (1974), which entailed a broader, more diversified range of tasks, has certainly resulted in parallel growth of the General Secretariat's role. It has become, to a varying degree depending on the Presidency, the Presidency's secretariat as much as the Council's assistant or servant *per se*. The General Secretariat can now claim to be the Council's organiser, (caterer), memory and adviser. Despite this significant development, in qualitative terms, its role has not kept pace with its size.

On anniversaries, we consider the past; you will certainly have taken a look back at the development of the European phenomenon. In truth, the history of our Community is just a long series of crises: institutional crises, the empty chair crisis, the Euratom and energy crises, monetary crises, British crises, I could go on and on. In some cases, they led to agreements which were often merely hypocritical arrangements to get round difficulties or to avoid problems. This is not a reassuring assessment, and your efforts have certainly deserved a better result. Looking beyond the day-to-day tasks, each of you would have been rightly proud of your work and would have acquired greater motivation if today's Europe looked as we imagined it in the beginning. But the optimism which we must adopt means that we will accept the reality of things as they stand and that each of us will continue to make our own contribution to the advance of a Europe of realities.

Twenty years in the European civil service, that is an achievement: being present, belonging in and to the European civil service. The presentation of medals commemorates and celebrates that achievement. This commemorative medal does not in itself say anything about loyalty, value or merit — it is granted automatically. I say 'in itself' because, for those of you who were present at the birth of this secretariat and

who gave it their dynamism, their abilities and their faith, this medal takes on an importance and significance that it would not normally have.

Twenty years of European service is almost two thirds of the working life of a man or a woman, dedicated to a single cause. The fact that you have persevered for such a long time demonstrates commitment and bears witness to great dedication and genuine faith in the future of Europe. I take great pleasure in emphasising all this before you today, because this ceremony is taking place at a time when there is a spirit of protest hanging over this institution which makes it difficult to feel positively about the instigators and the other driving forces. The common factor in these protests is that they seek to give staff representatives an ever-increasing influence in management, with a view to gaining acceptance for a conception of work geared exclusively to employee rights. In so far as we are looking for the fairest possible approach and reasonable working conditions that are consistent with the Staff Regulations, as a man of good faith I have no problem with that. However, seeking, through benefits granted outside the Staff Regulations, to create working conditions that seem justified only to those who have neither responsibility nor a sense of responsibility would seem (if you will excuse the paternalist language) 'unreasonable and indefensible'. Unfortunately, that does not stop the protests finding a profound resonance among young people.

You will say that my comments do not concern you. You are right. You knew this Secretariat when it was set up, you have experienced its work, at times chaotic, often marathon-like, always hurried. You have accepted this way of life, considering your duties before thinking of your rights. It is thanks to your attitude throughout the existence of the General Secretariat in Luxembourg, in rue Belliard, in Val Duchesse, in the Ravenstein Building, that the Secretariat has been able to earn its reputation of great efficiency, which I cannot call into question. If I make these comments, it is first of all obviously to thank you and to congratulate you for the contribution that you have made to a great work (which has not continued with its initial momentum). The medal which I will have the privilege and pleasure of awarding to you will be the tangible expression of this.

The aim of these remarks then takes on a broader importance. You represent an attitude, an attitude of generations whose primary motivations are collegiality, responsibility, public service and, indeed, a certain Community ideal. You serve as an example. Amidst the general laxity, stay true to yourselves. If your example is no longer persuasive, your personal effort will continue to be a valuable support for this institution, which so urgently needs it.