

Address given by Joseph van der Meulen following the resignation of Christian Calmes (Brussels, 14 June 1973)

Caption: On 14 June 1973, Joseph van de Meulen, President-in-Office of Coreper, delivers an address following the resignation of Christian Calmes, who had been Secretary-General of the Council for 21 years. In his address, he recalls Christian Calmes' professional career from the date on which he took up his role in the ECSC Special Council of Ministers in 1952.

Source: Allocutions prononcées à l'occasion de la cessation de fonctions de S.E. Monsieur le ministre plénipotentiaire Christian Calmes, Secrétaire Général du Conseil des Communautés Européennes. Bruxelles: Secrétariat général du Conseil, 15.06.1973. "M. Joseph van der Meulen, Président du Comité des Représentants Permanents", p. III/1-4.

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**Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives (690th)
Brussels, 'Charlemagne' Building, 14 June 1973**

Joseph van der Meulen, Chairman of the Committee of Permanent Representatives

Dear Colleagues,

Secretary-General, my dear friend Christian Calmes,

We could not let you go without having you here in Coreper with us one last time, if only for a few minutes. As Ambassador Boegner rightly said, all those years ago, 'We love Coreper as a farmer loves his fields and a fisherman loves his boat'. And you, dear Christian, have been very much an integral part of this, so it was in this 'inner circle' that we wanted to say farewell one last time. We go through so many different emotions around this table: now that the time has come for you to go, our feeling is one of great sadness.

Now is a time for remembering. My memory takes me back to the very start of the Communities, when we were building Europe with the most rudimentary resources, relying on an instinct that was almost entirely basic but proved to be oh so right. I remember 1952, when you first started working for the ECSC, the crisis in 1954 and the relaunch at Messina, experience of which subsequently helped those dealing with the Treaty of Rome. The work you did during this period was not lost on historians. In Claude Delmas' 'L'Histoire des Projets d'unification politique de l'Europe entre 1815 et 1970' I have read your assessment of the work done on 20 May 1955. You said then, talking about Paul-Henri Spaak, that 'putting a politician in charge who will make it a point of honour to achieve a result is guaranteed to be effective'. Secretary-General, today we can return the compliment.

Then you were there 'when the bells of Rome rang out on 25 March 1957 to announce the signing of the Euratom and Common Market Treaties', as our friend Georges Vedel wrote, 'and all of those privileged enough to attend the ceremony on the Capitol felt extremely moved'. This was the moment when Paul-Henri Spaak said 'I am trying to restrain my emotions, but I think we are all aware that this is a great date in the history of Europe'.

How different all this was from when you started out, how much experience had been gained, how much work had been done. Then came the period which General de Gaulle described thus: 'in speculating on great issues, it is tempting to dream of Aladdin's magic lamp, which he only had to rub to soar above reality. But there is no magic formula for constructing something as difficult as a united Europe. Let us therefore base the structure on reality. There will be time enough when we have completed the work to beguile ourselves with tales from The Arabian Nights.' Mr Calmes, you carried on the work without beguiling yourself with any illusions at all.

Then there was the period of the Fouchet Plan, the relaunch at The Hague and finally the Paris Summit. You were always there, preparing for meetings large and small, and you have worked right to the very end, up to the present day, on the 'fallout' from the Conferences of Heads of State or Government.

We owe you a lot, dear friend. The members of your team, who are all glad to have been able to work under you, have told us that they deem themselves fortunate, and that you are largely to thank for this, which is quite something. All of your personal qualities have been greatly valued by the Secretariat as a whole, from top to bottom. We in Coreper owe you a huge debt of gratitude for your painstaking preparation of our meetings and documents, which has been an essential element in our success.

Now, at the very time when the machine you have run is reaching a peak of productivity and efficiency, you have decided to retire and devote all your energies to the history of your country. Following the example of your illustrious father, you are now going to apply yourself to the history of Luxembourg, a cardinal point on the map of our continent. I am reminded of what Horace says in one of his 'Epodes': 'The fellow's worth a fortune who, far from commerce, cultivates his father's farm with his own oxen and is free of usury, like the folk of yore.' Our best wishes go with you for this titanic undertaking. As Livy wrote in the preamble to

‘Ab Urbe condita’, ‘Like the poets we historians should rather begin with good omens, vows and prayers to the gods and goddesses to vouchsafe good success to our efforts in so arduous an undertaking’. We are praying to the gods with you, my dear friend.

Now you will be living among the vineyards in the pleasant hills of your lovely country, under the watchful eye of Saint Nicholas, and you will be dividing your time between your books and your duties as Chamberlain, for we must congratulate you on your recent appointment as Extraordinary Chamberlain to HRH the Grand Duke.

My dear friend, thank you so much for all your work in the service of Europe. This is not ‘goodbye’ but ‘until we meet again’. On behalf of the Permanent Representatives and the Deputy Permanent Representatives, we would like to present you with a book that you are sure to find interesting. It is the ‘Description de tous les Pays-Bas, autrement appelés la Germanie inférieure ou Basse-Allemagne, par Messire Luis Guicciardini gentilhomme florentin’, published in Amsterdam in 1625.

It contains a description of the Netherlands as it was then, which included most of what is now Benelux.

Glancing through it, I can see a description of Mechelen, for example, and I recall that this is a word that is still used in Luxembourgish: if someone wants to appeal to a higher court, he still says — and this is proof that the Netherlands existed — ‘wir gehen nach Mechelen’.

Secretary-General, we are delighted to present you with this book, which has been signed by all the Permanent Representatives and Deputy Permanent Representatives in the Community that you have served for so many years. Thank you.