

Short biography of Jean François-Poncet

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Jean François-Poncet was born on 8 December 1928 in Paris. He spent some of his childhood in Berlin, where his father was French Ambassador from 1931 to 1938. He was therefore a helpless observer of the rise of Nazism and the increasingly perilous situation in Europe. When he returned to France, he attended the Law Faculty at the Paris Institute of Political Studies before continuing his higher education studies at the US Universities of Wesleyan and Tufts. After he was awarded a degree in Law and a PhD in Economics, he joined the French National School of Administration (ENA) in 1953.

While his father was High Commissioner and then once again Ambassador of France to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), Jean François-Poncet joined the French Foreign Ministry in 1955 as Embassy Secretary assigned to the Directorate-General for Political Affairs. He rapidly became Policy Officer then Deputy Head of the Private Office of Maurice Faure, Junior Foreign Minister, and it was in this capacity that he became involved in working for European revival in Brussels as a member of the Intergovernmental Committee established by the Messina Conference (the Spaak Committee). Following this event, Jean François-Poncet also became Secretary-General of the French delegation that took part in the work of the Intergovernmental Conference on the Common Market and Euratom at the Château de Val Duchesse. This meant that he attended the ceremony held on 25 March 1957 in Rome for the signing of the Treaties establishing the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC or Euratom). He was then appointed Deputy Director for European Affairs in the Foreign Ministry until 1960, when he became Senior Lecturer at the Paris Institute of Political Studies. Jean François-Poncet then held various diplomatic posts, in particular in Africa and the Middle East. He wrote numerous articles and, in 1970, a book on the economic policy of West Germany.

In 1971, he spent some time in the world of business before rejoining the Foreign Ministry in 1976 as Junior Foreign Minister in the first government of Jacques Chirac. He did not stay in this post for long, however, because in July 1976 he was appointed Secretary-General of the Presidency of the Republic. His knowledge of Germany and his new role at the Élysée made him a close adviser to President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in matters relating to Franco-German policy. The good relations between the French President and the German Chancellor, Helmut Schmidt, provided an effective stimulus for European integration, in particular in the monetary field. In November 1978, the President of the Republic appointed François-Poncet as his new Foreign Minister in the third government of Raymond Barre. He was involved in the European political cooperation mechanism and played an active role in the negotiations which opened in February 1979 in Brussels for the possible accession of Spain and Portugal to the European Communities. He was particularly affected by the issue of enlargement because at that time he was President of the General Council of Lot-et-Garonne, whose agricultural production strongly risked facing competition in Europe from fruit and vegetables originating in the Iberian Peninsula. At the same time, François-Poncet also faced opposition from within the French government majority itself at the first elections to the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage in June 1979. François Mitterrand's arrival in power and the change in the presidential majority after the elections of May 1981 marked the end of Jean François-Poncet's ministerial ambitions.

However, he did not cease in his efforts for Europe. He was Senator for Lot-et-Garonne from 1983 onwards and, in the early 1990s, relaunched the French section of the European Movement, which became involved in the campaign carried out in spring 1992 for the ratification by France of the Treaty of Maastricht on European Union. Jean François-Poncet is an attentive, vigilant observer of European and Community policy and is currently Vice-President of the French Senate Delegation for European Union and Deputy Chairman of the Senate's Committee for Foreign Affairs, Defence and Armed Forces. In this capacity he was asked to write a long report in February 2008 on the Senate's bill authorising the ratification of the treaty signed in Lisbon on 13 December 2007 by the Heads of State or Government of the 27 Member States of the European Union.