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STATEMENT BY PRESIDENT JENKINS AT HIS FAREWELL  
PRESS CONFERENCE, JANUARY 5, 1981

Roy Jenkins bid farewell to the Brussels Press Corps on his last day as President of the Commission of the European Communities and made the following statement:

"I leave my present responsibilities with a mixture of personal sadness and public optimism. The optimism is for the position of the Commission in Europe. I will tell you in a moment why. The sadness of course arises from parting for the last time in my present capacity from so many familiar scenes and familiar faces. It would be very odd if I would not feel that. I look back on the last four years with some memories which are better than others. That is always so of any period of one's life. There are times of achievement and times of disappointment and setback. So it has been here. But I am glad that I came, glad that I did the job and that I would not have wished to spend the past four years otherwise.

At the same time I believe that four years is the right period not for a Commissioner but for a President. This fifth, sixth and seventh time round the same annual course would mean he lost in staleness more than he gained in wisdom. Therefore, whatever the future may or may not hold for me, my term has in my view been of the right length, neither too short nor too long.

I part however with particular sadness from my fellow-Commissioners. There have of course been some differences of view, even occasions of tension. That is inevitable in any body of 13, even if they did not come from different political backgrounds and 9 different countries.

But I can say with absolute honesty that I have enjoyed working with each one of them, and I regard the general level of informed discussion and of friendship as being higher than that in any British Cabinet in which I have served.

Let it be noted that we lost no member of the Commission for the first three years and ten months - and only one for electoral reason then. This is a much greater record of staying together than you can find in almost any national government or any group of comparable size. We haven't even driven each other into permanent ill health. Let it be noted also that a very high proportion of members of the Commission are anxious to stay on for the future. Most of them could find plenty of other things to do. This would not happen if we were full of discontent or low morale. I pay high tribute to my twelve colleagues of the last Commission.

I come now for my reasons for public optimism. I am not going to attempt a detailed catalogued balance-sheet. In any event you have most of you quite rightly already drawn up and published your own. I tried in a series of speeches during the autumn to indicate the way forward.

What I believe, looking back, is that the Commission with luck has now survived its most difficult period. Of course it has gradually over the past fifteen years or perhaps more been disappointing the hopes of those who thought it was an embryo government of Europe. I doubt if I ever thought that. Nor did I think there ought to be a nominated as opposed to an elected government of anything. But the real danger was failing to achieve that always over-ambitious and somewhat imaginary role, it would be left with the dangerous role of being a secretariat of governments, a view which I have always resolutely resisted.

I believe that danger is past. We have in a sense come of age arithmetically and metaphorically. We have now to learn to live with harsher climate - economically obviously. We have to deal in this harsher climate with a wider and less coherent Europe than that of the original six - and this will become more so as enlargement progresses. We have had to live in a climate of public opinion in which much of the original, exciting, deeply felt and emotional enthusiasm for a united Europe, a lot of which sprang from the horrors of the then recent past, has receded.

We have had to adjust to certain changes in the institutional balance - to the increasing emergence of the European Council as a focus of Community decision-making, and to life with the new directly elected Parliament. The position of the Commission was to begin with much less secure in the European Council than in the treaty-based Council of Ministers. That I believe has been rectified. Equally I think we have so far achieved a good and important relationship with the new Parliament.

The Commission itself needs flexibility in these changing circumstances. I hope that governments will not allow it to become too big after the inclusion of Spain and Portugal. In my view 17 would be too big. I hope that the further implementation of the Spierenburg Report - we have done what is within our internal power - will be carried out quickly. The changes it recommended will improve the effectiveness and morale of our relatively small staff, for whose dedication, and in the great majority of cases, very hard work, I offer my grateful thanks.

I wish the new Commission and particularly my successor, Gaston Thorn, the best of good fortune. I might say he will need it. He will face daunting but not impossible tasks. I believe he will surmount them. The mandate offers a great opportunity.

In conclusion, I thank you all for the job you do in presenting the always complex, sometimes humdrum, occasionally quarrelsome business of the Community to the European public. I don't always agree with the judgments of all of you, but I greatly respect your professional skill and integrity. I thank you and I wish you well in the future."

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