



European Council

The President

040826/EU XXV. GP
Eingelangt am 07/10/14

PRESS

EN

SPEECH

EUCO 184/14

PRESSE 472

PR PCE 160

Brussels, 17 September 2014

**Speech by the President of the European Council
Herman Van Rompuy
on the occasion of the inauguration ceremony
of the "Jean-Luc Dehaene" room
at Madariaga - College of Europe Foundation**

I am not the right person to speak about Jean-Luc Dehaene. I was fascinated by his intelligence, his political skills, his imagination already over 40 years ago. Although I appreciated his predecessors as Prime Minister a lot, I still consider him the most important Prime Minister since Gaston Eyskens left office in 1972. *Et le meilleur Président que la Commission européenne n'a jamais eu!* He had a completely different public image compared to who he really was: a listener, a man of empathy, a long cry away from the bulldozer reputation. In the last period of his career the public at large recognized how a genuine he was, and rewarded him with respect and popularity.

He assumed political responsibilities at local, federal and European level, as mayor and as minister, as Premier and as MEP. *"All politics is local"* – a case in point. Intellectually and from experience, he was well placed to make the synthesis. And he did.

He once made a brilliant comparison between Belgium many reforms of the State and the successive EU treaty changes. One of the surprising conclusions is not that both are "work in progress" but that in both cases the end goal, the terminus *ad quem* was not clear and even not really needed provided that we kept to the right direction, meaning more federalism in Belgium and "more Europe". He was a pragmatist. This is not the opposite of principled. Not at all. This means that one acknowledge that we are ready to meet and overcome obstacles, that that takes time, that there are side-path and crossroads. A pragmatist is the opposite of an opportunist.

Jean-Luc was a great European. He proved that during his premiership as member of the European Council, as vice-president of the Convention and as Europarliamentarian. His European convictions were in line with the Belgian traditional view on European integration. He said in interviews that the way I assumed my role as PEC was precisely what the Convention had in mind. On my birthday in 2012 he send me a text message : *"Goed bezig"* (well done) and a year later when I received the Charlemagne Prize : *"Dubbel en dik verdiend"* (well deserved). Coming from him, it made me proud. He never was a real parliamentarian in his own country. On the contrary. But he became a convinced defender and promoter of the European Parliament.

Maar dat alles verklaart nog niet waarom we hier vandaag bijeen zijn. Zelfs niet dat hij voorzitter was van de Raad van Bestuur van het Europacollege. Wij zijn hier omdat we niet alleen een groot man maar een grote vriend verloren. We hoefden daarvoor zelfs mekaar niet vaak te zien. Dat laatste zullen we nooit meer kunnen. Er rest ons alleen de herinnering en de erfenis. Voor mij en anderen de steeds weerkerende vraag bij elk probleem " Wat zou Jean-Luc ervan gedacht hebben? Wat zou hij eraan gedaan hebben ?" Die vragen blijven voor immer.

Het is een zeer goed initiatief van het Europacollege om ons hier bijeen te brengen, en ons de kans te geven dat hier te zeggen.

All that I have said so far still doesn't explain why we are gathered here today. Even if Jean-Luc used to be Chairman of the Board of Directors of the College of Europe. The reason we are here is that we have lost not only a great man but a great friend. For that, we didn't even have to see each other that often. And now, we will never be able to again. We are left with the memories, his legacy. For me and for others, the ever returning question to every problem will always be "what would Jean-Luc have thought about it? what would he have done?" These questions are forever.

It is a very good initiative by Madariaga to bring us together allowing us to say this here today.
