**Delors: a great European**

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Few influenced—indeed, defined—the course of European integration as much as Jacques Delors, an iconic personality in whom knowledge and diligence were combined with political empathy and vision. As France's Minister for Finance under President Mitterrand, he helped bring stability to the French economy after its initial socialist experiments in an open economy. Subsequently, as President of the European Commission (1985–1995), he was the mastermind and driving force behind the creation of the internal market and economic and monetary union. This was the era in which European integration made its greatest leaps forward. Together with Kohl and Mitterrand, he was one of the leading figures at a historic turning point for Europe after the fall of the communist regimes at the end of the 1980s. Of course, that era’s inner circle of great European leaders also included Margaret Thatcher, who represented a different world view and with whom Delors found himself at odds. If Delors had decided to enter the political arena in France following his return from Brussels and been elected president of France in place of Chirac—which, according to the polls at the time, at least, was eminently possible—, then both France and Europe could have been very different today. But history is not written with ifs.

Delors was never elected to political office. He was the technocrat in whom political intelligence was combined with sensitivity, which is a somewhat rare combination. He was a French socialist—or, more precisely, a social democrat—who tried to combine the dynamism of competitive markets with social solidarity. He was also a great European with an unshakeable belief in his vision of a united Europe as the only realistic option for defending common European interests and values. And he fought for this vision with considerable success. Being extremely methodical by nature, he knew the dossiers he was negotiating in detail, while he also had a political strategy and outstanding collaborators. These included Pascal Lamy, who served as Delors' *chef de cabinet* at the Commission and subsequently held leading positions in international organisations. The Delors team left an indelible mark on Brussels.

After his withdrawal from European politics, Delors created an important European think tank based in Paris and Berlin for examining and producing concrete proposals for the further integration of Europe. Delors believed deeply in Franco-German cooperation. And his interventions in the European public discourse were always timely.

Delors was not an easy man. He worked hard and expected the people around him to do the same. He was as extremely demanding of others as he was of himself. And he had very little tolerance for sloppiness and inconsistency. His relations with Greece and Greek politicians were not always the best. He helped our country a great deal—the famous 'Delors packages' brought a lot of money though some of it was wasted, but he could also be a harsh critic. We sometimes pushed him to the very limits of his tolerance, and I had the misfortune to experience some of those moments in person.

We bid farewell to a great European, the most significant and finest president the European Commission has ever had, and an outstanding intellectual. We thank him.