

Thirteenth Annual Memorial Service 2 June 2022

Webstreamed from the Hemicycle

of the European Parliament

Introductory Speech of the FMA President

Hans-Gert PÖTTERING

Dear Vice-President,

Mesdames et messieurs les Députés,

Chère familles,

Mesdames et messieurs,

C'est un honneur et une émotion particulière de me retrouver avec vous, rassemblés dans cet hémicycle du Parlement européen, au cœur de la démocratie européenne, pour rendre hommage à nos anciens collègues qui nous ont quittés cette dernière année.

Nous sommes ici unis par le chagrin de deuil sous le patronage du Parlement européen et j'aimerais remercier **le Premier Vice-Président du Parlement européen, Othmar KARAS**, qui représente la Présidente du Parlement européen Roberta METSOLA, de nous honorer de sa présence ainsi que l'ancien Président du Parlement européen, Klaus HÄNSCH, qui prononcera l'oraison finale.

Nous rendons hommage à nos collègues accompagnés des familles de **Peter Michael MOMBAUR et Domènec ROMERA I ALCÀZAR** ainsi que des toutes les familles connectées en ligne que je salue chaleureusement (*les familles des Présidents Sassoli et Lord Plumb sont connectées*).

We huddle around them in a big virtual embrace as this occasion is a time for celebration and gratitude.

It is with particularly deep emotion that we pay homage today to two exemplary figures and eminent Europeans, President David Maria Sassoli and President Lord Henry Plumb, who led the House of European Democracy with balance and determination. Two figures who embodied political commitment in its noblest sense and who understood its profound meaning, that of uniting rather than dividing.

David Maria Sassoli passed away on 11 January this year at the height of his political commitment as President of the European Parliament. A life characterised by two great passions: journalism and politics, which manifested themselves above all at European level. He entered politics as an MEP in 2009. This was an experience that culminated in his election as President of Parliament on 3 July 2019, after having served as Vice-President and Chair of the Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean.

One of our colleagues recalled that when he was a member of the steering group for the 2021–2027 multiannual financial framework, his empathy, clear-mindedness and courage allowed him to transcend the political divide.

This ability was the hallmark of his entire political commitment, constantly accompanied by a disarming smile and kindness, and a continuous effort to engage in dialogue. His actions and public statements were permeated by his firm belief in Europe.

A protagonist in the political elaboration of a new concept of Europe in tumultuous years, it was President Sassoli, as recalled by many, who fought with every ounce of strength to keep Parliament operating, even in the most difficult months of the pandemic, to avoid having to close a bastion of freedom for all Europeans.

President Sassoli emphasised that the EU needs a new project of hope ‘to unite us all, a project that embodies our Union, our values and our civilisation’ and stressed that the Conference on the Future of Europe ‘should help us find innovative ways of reawakening the feeling that Europe is a project with which all Europeans can identify.’ To this end, he greatly enhanced the interinstitutional dialogue between Parliament, the Commission and the Council. After her election, President Roberta Metsola said that she would continue the strategy of her predecessor of building bridges. ‘David fought hard to bring people around the same table.’

Before his death, President Sassoli uttered what proved to be prophetic words during an interview: ‘We can only tackle global threats and ensure our values and interests are protected if we work together. We are a Union, joined by common history and built on the fundamental principles of democracy, individual freedoms and human rights. Yet these ideas are increasingly under threat around the world. If the EU crumbles, who will continue to stand up for these values?’ A great leader has left our midst and has gifted us an important political legacy.

Let me repeat the three words chosen by his son Giulio to remember his father at the funeral in Rome: ‘**dignità, passione e amore**’ – **dignity, passion and love**. Familiar and fundamental words, which will resonate with young people willing to enter politics and who look towards the future with optimism.

Rest in peace Caro David Maria.

With President Lord Plumb, the only British President of Parliament, we lose both a British patriot and a passionate European. With his shrewd combination of enthusiasm and British pragmatism, Henry Plumb always advocated a strong United Kingdom in a strong European Union. As a Member of the European Parliament (from 1979, when the first direct elections were held, until 1999), Henry Plumb served Europe in the best sense of the word in all his roles – as President of the

European Parliament, Chair of the Committee on Agriculture, Parliamentary leader of the European Democrats in the European Parliament, Chair of the Joint Assembly of the Agreement between the African, Caribbean and Pacific States and the European Union (ACP-EU) and in many other roles. We should not forget his invitation to Pope John Paul II, who spoke at the European Parliament in Strasbourg in 1988. It was a time of great hope for a free Europe: on 9 November 1989, the Berlin Wall fell and the division of Europe was overcome.

Henry Plumb was a confident partner of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. He was a determined, courageous and far-sighted advocate of strengthening the European Parliament in its relations with national governments.

Henry Plumb became the first President of our European Parliament Former Members' Association in December 2001 and led it until May 2006, after which he served as Honorary President. This established the tradition that the FMA President should be a former President of the European Parliament and should hold the position for four years.

Brexit deeply shook Henry Plumb. However, it was a source of satisfaction for him to support the government of Prime Minister Gordon Brown in the House of Lords in the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. Henry Plumb was one of the most committed

politicians, which will always mark him out as a great Briton and a great European.

If the United Kingdom had rejected the Lisbon Treaty, it would not have become the legal and political basis of the European Union today. Henry Plumb's commitment to the Lisbon Treaty is therefore also his legacy for our European future.

Henry Plumb passed away at the ripe old age of 97. We may recall his remark from his younger years: 'I was born a Briton, and I will die a European.'

I had the privilege of speaking with Henry Plumb shortly before his death. For the 20th anniversary of our Association, he sent us a video message with his good wishes and greetings. Henry Plumb was ennobled with the title 'Lord'. He was a great person whose positive charisma and humour conveyed hope and confidence. Henry Plumb was a role model for many, including myself. We will cherish his memory with gratitude.

May the memory of David Maria Sassoli and Lord Henry Plumb always serve as an inspiration to us all.

It is a pleasure to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the musicians of Quatuor Mona and to Gregory Houben for their participation in our ceremony.

It is now my great honour to invite the Vice-President of the European Parliament, Othmar KARAS, to take the floor.

Thank you.