

## **Annual Memorial Service - 9 April 2024**

### **Speech of President Pat Cox, former EP and FMA President**

Good afternoon.

Mr. President, dear Klaus Hansch, thank you for inviting me to make this closing oration today.

Mr. Vice President of the European Parliament, Othmar Karas, thank you for your presence and tribute on behalf of parliament. The deceased members whose memories we celebrate today were active members of this House and it is right and fitting that their passing should be observed on its behalf by you, it's Vice President.

Dear FMA colleagues I am honoured to share this memorial service with you. Politics always and everywhere is a contested space but in this association when our mandates have ended and our parliamentary race is run the FMA offers us a zone of collegiality and mutual engagement. It is a right and proper thing that annually and this afternoon we recall and mark the passing of those who have served as our political peers, with whom, given our diverse ages and backgrounds, we worked together in this House.

My last greeting is preserved for those family members, relatives, and friends who join us today. A special and warm welcome to those present from the Martin, Schlechter, Napolitano, Nothomb, Cicciomessere, and Spencer families. Your presence especially elevates our remembrance service.

I hope that in addition to grief and loss experienced by you that being here brings you and your extended families some comfort and justifiable and grounded pride in the public service rendered by your relatives.

Personally, emotionally, I am touched, we are touched by the passing of former friends and comrades. I recall the words of the English poet, John Donne, written four centuries ago:  
No man is an island to itself  
Each is part of the continent - a part of the main

The poet reminds us that we all are social animals. We live in the shadow of each other. Indeed, today we live in a world of staggering interdependency and shared vulnerability. Global warming, war and peace, nuclear proliferation, and exposure to pandemics speak loudly to us of these interdependencies and vulnerabilities. No man, no woman, no child is an island.

The poem continues:  
Each man's death diminishes me  
For I am involved in mankind

We recall in this passage our sense of loss, presented by the passage from life to death of those whose energies and appetite for life we knew and shared.

The poem concludes with a reminder of our own mortality:  
Therefore, send not to know for whom the bell tolls  
It tolls for thee

Those who died this past year include some very illustrious European personalities. I think in particular of Jacques Delors and Giorgio Napolitano, that latter with whom I worked closely during my Presidency of this House. And who will forget the colourful personality of Silvio Berlusconi too?

Others on the list have lower profiles but each in their own way and according to their own preferences made significant contributions. I am glad, for example, that the Spencer family is here today to celebrate the European Parliamentary service of Tom, a larger than life character. This year many former UK MEPs are on our remembrance list.

Among them, from personal experience, I can attest to the fact that many were among the most active and impressive parliamentary performers of their day. I remark this not to diminish the contributions of the deceased deputies of other nationalities but to observe that though the UK chose to leave our Union there always is and will remain an open door and open heart in the FMA for the memory and families of those who made their mark here.

As war has returned to our continent I would like to make one political remark. I regret that the UK chose to leave our Union but it underlines one powerful truth about what and who we are, namely a voluntary union of free and sovereign peoples - free to join - free to leave. What a total contrast to Russia's aggression in Ukraine where the unity sought by Vladimir Putin is from the barrel of a gun or the destructive power of the blast of a missile.

There are too many on our list of deceased former colleagues to eulogise each in his or her turn. Permit me to select three from that number by way of illustration of their service.

The first is a Belgian, Charles Ferdinand Nothomb. He was elected in the first direct elections in 1979 and served just one year, leaving on becoming foreign and later interior minister of Belgium. I got to know him decades later through the International European Movement where he served as Vice President and dedicated years of focus on seeking to develop and improve South North relations in the Mediterranean basin. He personified what characterises many former members. Their and our vocation of service does not end with our departure from parliament or the end of our political mandates but often accompanies us for the rest of our days.

Doeke Eisma was a Dutch colleague who was ceaseless in his determination to elevate the status of the fight against global warming already in the 1980s and 1990s. What a pity he and other pioneering voices like his were not then listened to as attentively as they deserved. We are paying a heavy price today for the accelerating frequency and intensity of extreme weather events as Mother Nature speaks to us in increasingly angry ways for our neglect and indifference.

This year saw the death of sitting MEP from Sweden, Erik Bergqvist, a man in his mid-fifties. He lived in the low population but resource rich part of Northern Sweden. Ever before his

election to the European Parliament he was a strong advocate for his region. Erik had a wonderful sense of humour, was blind, but in terms of policy impressed everyone he met by how much he could see.

In these three illustrations - and my apologies that time does not permit a more extensive recounting of so many other contributions - I wished briefly to underline the connections and significant work that colleagues have contributed to this parliament and more widely - often off the public radar screen - but no less relevant for that, since they were honouring their mandates and fulfilling their duty of service to their electorates, even continuing later into their private lives.

For every woman and for every man whose memory we honour today we thank them - we thank you their families for carrying with them the joys and burdens of holding public mandates.

Jean Monnet remarked:

Nothing is possible without men but nothing lasts without institutions

Perhaps if he was speaking today that sentiment must include women also, but the essential point remains. The institutions go on but they stand and were built on the shoulders and cumulative efforts and commitment of those who have gone before.

For those former colleagues who have gone before us and whose memory we celebrate today

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We honour them

We thank them

We miss them

May they rest in peace.