

St Margaret's Church
Westminster Abbey



A Service of Thanksgiving
for the life and work of
The Lord Plumb DL
1925 – 2022

Monday 28th November 2022
1.00 pm

Speech by Professor Dr Hans-Gert Poettering,
President of the European Parliament 2007-2009,

at the Service of Thanksgiving for the life and work of
The Lord Plumb on November 28th, 2022 in
St. Margaret's Church, Westminster Abbey

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on behalf of the many hundreds of members of the European Parliament who worked with and appreciated Henry Plumb over many years, and for whom he was not only a colleague, but a friend.

In the name of the President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola, and the President of our Former Members Association (FMA), Klaus Hänsch, I wish to express my deep personal appreciation for Henry and my sympathy and my condolences to his family and friends.

With Henry, Lord Plumb, the only British President of the European Parliament, we have lost a British patriot and passionate European. With a shrewd combination of enthusiasm and pragmatism, Henry always advocated a strong United Kingdom in a strong European Union. As a Member of the European Parliament from 1979, the first direct election, until 1999, Henry served Europe, in the best sense of the word, in all his roles – as President of the European Parliament, as Chairman of the Parliament's Committee on Agriculture, as Leader of the European Democrats in the Parliament, as Chairman of the Parliament's Joint Assembly with the African, Caribbean and Pacific States, and in many other roles. It was he who invited Pope John Paul II to speak in 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 was a confident partner of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. He was a determined, courageous and far-sighted advocate of strengthening the European Parliament as an institution and in its relations with governments, overseeing the implementation of the Single European Act, which finalized the common market.

In retirement, Henry became the first President of the Former Members Association in December 2001, and he led it until May 2006, since when he was Honorary President. This established the tradition that the FMA President should always be a former President of the Parliament for four years.

Brexit deeply shook Henry Plumb. However, it had been a great satisfaction for him to support the government of Prime Minister Gordon Brown in the House of Lords in the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, marking him out again not only as a great Briton, but a great European.

If the United Kingdom had rejected the Lisbon Treaty, it would not be 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 was a self-confident personality, as farmers often are. After being elected President of the European Parliament, somebody told him that he should call his Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. His response was "She should call me." As far as I know, the great lady called Henry soon thereafter.

Before the Pope addressed the Parliament, Henry warned him of the risk that a certain member – let's call him a "turbulent priest" from Northern Ireland – might stage some kind of a stunt and interrupt his speech. Henry said: "If this happens, just leave it to me from the chair".

The Pope replied: "Yes, of course, you are the boss!"

"The boss" passed away at the ripe old age of 97. As he said famously in his younger years: *"I was born a Briton, but I will die a European."*

As we now bid farewell to this extraordinary personality, we also remember his great wife, Marjorie, who passed away a few years ago, always supporting her husband and accompanying him on many journeys.

It was a privilege for me to have been on friendly terms with both of them. I was invited to their farm and had the privilege of speaking with Henry Plumb shortly before his death.

For the 20th FMA anniversary, he sent us a video message with his best wishes and greetings. He was a great person whose positive charisma and humor conveyed hope and confidence. He was a role model to many, including myself. We will keep him in good and grateful memory.

May the time come in the future when Henry Plumb will have a successor as President of the European Parliament coming from the United Kingdom. Thank you, Henry, and your beloved wife, Marjorie, for your great service as a British patriot, a committed European and a personal friend.