

Enzo Quattrociocche pays tribute to Colm Lincoln ('21)



Thirty years after joining the Bank, Colm Lincoln, former Director in the Office of the Secretary General, bade a fond farewell to the institution that had been his home for three decades.

In this moving and affectionate tribute by his friend, Enzo Quattrociocche, EBRD Secretary General, who describes Colm as a “piece of the Bank’s history”, we are taken on a brief journey of his time at the EBRD, as seen through the eyes of his colleagues.

The year was 1990 and on the world stage Nelson Mandela was released after spending 28 years in prison; Iraq invaded Kuwait on the orders of Saddam Hussein; and Germany was reunified.

Focusing in on events closer to home, on 29 May of that year our founding fathers in Paris signed the Agreement Establishing the Bank. Most notably of all, however, 1990 is the year that a Mr Colm Lincoln appeared on the EBRD's horizon. Yes, 30 years ago! I am sure it is longer than many of our colleagues have been walking on planet Earth!

Colm was working in Ireland's Department of Finance when he was invited to join the team which was working on establishing the Bank, in time for its opening in 1991. Together with the team, Colm helped to build the very backbones of the Bank. He compiled job descriptions, pay packages and salary grades. He invented the internal tax system, and worked to set up the personnel systems that would allow the Bank to hire staff.

The basic pillars of his work are still in place to this day, and the systems he set up have proved to be flexible and long standing.

Colm officially joined the Bank in September 1991, embarking on what would become a long career at the EBRD, spanning three decades. He started in Personnel, the old name for HR Operations, setting up the compensation system and he worked on setting up the Resident Offices. He moved to the Office of the Secretary General (OSG) in 1999 where he held a variety of roles before eventually becoming Deputy Secretary General.

Colm was much more than that, though. He was the "eminence grise" behind the genesis and codification of the EBRD's governance processes and played a major role in shaping the "rules of engagement" between the Board of Directors and Management. And I think I'm right in saying that Colm is one of the very few EBRD employees who can boast of having worked with all the Presidents of the Bank!

While this is invaluable work, it may sound like a lot of bureaucracy and little fun to some. However, Colm had an amazing ability to transform everyday office dramas into an interesting plot, with such emotional participation that is difficult to escape, and that in his case definitely stood the test of time.

In OSG we enjoyed and benefited handsomely from Colm's wit, acumen, sound advice and bottomless institutional memory. It's difficult to imagine OSG without Colm Lincoln. It is difficult to point to one single area of excellence because there are so many. Let me just say that Colm was a wonderful mentor to the many colleagues who served in OSG – myself included – and the hundreds of colleagues across the Bank who profited from his wise advice over the years.

Colm was also the driving force behind the EBRD Literature Prize, something he started with the aim of bringing the Bank's cultures closer to staff. So deep

is his love for art and history that travelling with him could be quite a challenge; it would not be uncommon to lose sight of Colm because he'd be squeezing in a visit to a church or a museum, even if your flight back home was imminent.

Thirty years on, Colm is retiring from the EBRD and it feels like having to say farewell, adieu, auf Wiedersehen, and до свидания to a piece of the Bank's history.

Yet, the good news is that Colm is not disappearing and will remain nearby. Therefore, there will be time to challenge ourselves and try to keep pace with Colm's unstoppable flow of thoughts over a beer when the virus gives us our lives back.

For now I just want to say a very, very big thank you to Colm from the bottom of my heart, and on behalf of our colleagues in OSG and the wider Bank. For Colm is the embodiment of the values that we nurture in the Bank: commitment, passion, dedication and... the freshness of those who remain young at heart.



*Item courtesy of EBRD Alumni Association.
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