Having had the privilege of sharing many hours and days with Professor Böckstiegel during more than fifteen years of professional collaboration, the work on this profile did not start in the typical manner over a cup of tea or during a visit arranged for the purpose. Rather, it is mostly based on a recollection of numerous occasions when I could observe Professor Böckstiegel both “at work” and “away from work”. In that sense, the story is very much a personal one, but since it traces encounters in a number of settings, it touches on a variety of features that make up a Böckstiegel portrait.

I first met Professor Böckstiegel at the Iran-US Claims Tribunal in The Hague in 1984 when he joined the Tribunal as its president at a particularly difficult point in the Tribunal’s life. At that time, he was already a renowned scholar, teacher and international arbitrator. He had started his career in a law firm in Germany. In 1971, he became Professor at the University of Cologne where he has remained affiliated ever since. From his early university days, the positions he occupied in Cologne showed his main academic interests: he held the Chair for International Business Law and was Director of the Institute of Air and Space Law. In addition, the offices he held and the functions he performed outside the university reflected his position as an outstanding international lawyer and as the most prominent German member of the international arbitration community: President of the German Association for International Law, Director of the International Institute of Space Law, Chairman of the Space Law Committee of the International Law Association, Chairman of the German Institution of Arbitration (DIS), and member and chairman of numerous arbitral tribunals in national and in international proceedings of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the London Court of International Arbitration (LCIA), UNCITRAL and many others.

When Professor Böckstiegel arrived at the Iran-US Claims Tribunal, the most comprehensive survey ever undertaken of the law and practice in the area of arbitration and state enterprises had just been completed under his direction – a study that proved to be highly relevant to the work of the Tribunal in view of the legal status of many of the Iranian respondent parties to the claims. The atmosphere at the Tribunal was quite tense when Professor Böckstiegel arrived: the working relationship between the Iranian, American and third country members had
collapsed after an incident in which a third country member had been physically attacked by an Iranian member. The proceedings had been suspended and the first President of the Tribunal had resigned. Having worked as the legal assistant for that first President, it was my job to assist the incoming President – President Böckstiegel – in his difficult task of leading the Tribunal out of its deadlock and back into a functioning institution. I could observe from close quarters how Professor Böckstiegel managed to do precisely that: he got the Tribunal back to work again and kept it working in a business-like manner. He did so by steering a course between equal treatment of the parties and full consideration of their case, and firm control of the procedure and organised management of the proceedings. Abilities that distinguish the skilled and experienced arbitrator, but which were even more difficult to achieve in the politically loaded context of the Tribunal with its thousands of claims by individuals, companies and the two Governments. Professor Böckstiegel combined fairness to both sides with clarity of the procedure, not only with respect to the parties but also vis-à-vis his fellow arbitrators, both party-appointed and third country – features that have been his trademark far beyond the Tribunal. Thus, for instance, the initial frowning of some at the precise time-keeping at hearings soon gave way to supportive understanding and compliance when they realised that this was only a consistent application of the previously laid-down “rules of the game” and yet another feature of equal treatment that was to everybody’s benefit.

To the staff of the Tribunal and his immediate collaborators, Professor Böckstiegel was an ideal boss: demanding the highest professional standards, giving maximum freedom on how the job was to be done, and supporting “his people” inside and outside the workplace. He was always a great sport – which he showed not only when playing at the Tribunal’s annual table tennis tournament. I found out, though, what his favourite sport of thirty-five years really was when, having been invited with my family to the Böckstiegel’s apartment in The Hague, Professor Böckstiegel spent half an hour showing our five-year old son how to putt on a practice green in the living room between the main course and dessert. Further on sports, while everybody is aware that Professor Böckstiegel has a handicap that would allow him to play professional golf, not many people know that he is a former hurdles champion – an achievement that adds another meaning to the title “Turbo Prof” which has been used by some since he stepped out of his Porsche on his first day at the Tribunal. That Professor Böckstiegel’s wife Ali is an equally great sport could be witnessed by everyone attending his farewell reception in The Hague where she made it through two hours of standing with a broken leg in a fresh cast from a skiing accident, losing neither her smile nor her good humour.

After his departure from the Iran-US Claims Tribunal, and still with his base at