Richard N. Gardner was United States Ambassador to Italy from March 1977 to February 1981, during the Carter administration, having previously held diverse positions under John F. Kennedy. Under Bill Clinton, from 1993 to 1997, he served as US Ambassador to Spain. In Rome, Amb. Gardner helped found Aspen Institute Italia and remained a member and active supporter of the Institute’s activities throughout his life.

His diplomatic service in Italy was marked by the “anni di piombo” (the country’s violent “years of lead”), by the kidnapping and murder of Aldo Moro and by the Bologna train station bombing. In his volume Mission: Italy. On the Front Lines of the Cold War (published in 2005), Amb. Gardner recalls those years and the experiences that shaped an era. He played a key role in laying the groundwork for the first visit by Giorgio Napolitano – then a leader of the Italian Communist Party – to the United States, in April 1978.

Born in New York in 1927, he had degrees from Harvard, Yale and Oxford, and held a high level position in a prestigious law firm in New York.


Among other titles and honors, Amb. Gardner was a member of the Trilateral Commission and Professor Emeritus of Law and International Organization at Columbia University.