

## **Berlin: from wall to gateway**

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**By Enrique Barón Crespo**

20 years ago, the Berlin Wall, which had transformed the Hellenic Brandenburg Gate from the historical access to the city into an impassable barrier, fell. With symbolic intent, the quadriga crowning the gate, which once Napoleon had taken to Paris, was turned to face the other way. Not only were a city and a country divided by an iron curtain, but a continent and a world were cut in two across the entire continent as a result of the Yalta and Potsdam Conferences, . At 169 kilometres, the Berlin Wall was the most visible part of this curtain, which stretched 1 800 kilometres across Germany and into Czechoslovakia and Hungary. Even so, it was much shorter than the Great Wall of China, at 6 770 kilometres. In the long term, the common element shared by these structures was their ineffectiveness in trying to stem the tide, even though they have left a lasting impression, and not just in physical terms.

My contribution will focus on the European dimension of the events, based on my experience as President of the European Parliament (EP) at the time. My intention is not simply to give an autobiographical account as, right from the start, the EP was the European forum in which the issue was publicly and openly debated. Since then, its contribution has been constructive, and nowadays men and women from the two Europes separated by the Wall meet and work within its walls. The fact that its current President is the Pole, Jerzy Buzek, is further evidence of this farsighted and historic reconciliation.

The evening of 9 November 1989 found me at the Grand Hotel Plaza in Rome with my wife, Sofía Gandarias. We were preparing for the Gala Dinner put on by the Italian Government at the majestic Villa Madama on the occasion of my official visit to Italy. I

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received a phone call from a young journalist, Marco Zatterin, who told me that the Berlin Wall had fallen. He asked me for a statement. My response was to ask him in turn whether the Wall had fallen in a physical or figurative sense. As he was not sure, we took half an hour to check the news. Needless to say, during the exquisite meal with the President of the Republic, Francesco Cossiga, the Prime Minister, Giulio Andreotti, and the Foreign Minister, Gianni De Michelis, the only political dish was the news and its consequences.

This was not because we were caught unawares. In fact, throughout the year, a series of signs had suggested that the Soviet Bloc was a pressure cooker about to blow. The borders of the Soviet Union had been defined by Stalin at Yalta and Potsdam, where he had imposed his map of Central and Eastern Europe with a traditional imperial political and military logic according to which: ‘whoever occupies a territory also imposes his own social system as far as his army can reach. It cannot be otherwise’. In 1945 the Soviet Army had reached the heart of Berlin – the Reichstag – next to the Brandenburg Gate. This hugely emblematic location was where the famous photo of the Russian soldier flying his flag over the ruins was taken.

At the heart of the empire, Gorbachev’s policy of perestroika (restructuring) and glasnost (transparency), which was welcomed more in the West than at home, had delivered the immortal warning ‘life punishes those who come too late’ to the apparatchik Erich Honecker, veteran leader of the German Democratic Republic. He was overthrown on 18 October, three weeks before the fall of the Wall. In the meantime, the ever-rebellious Poland had held elections in April, with 99% of the votes going to Solidarity, resulting in the formation of the Mazowiecki government. In the summer, Gyula Horn had pierced the barrier between Hungary and Austria, and tourists from East Germany were occupying the West German embassies and escaping to the West. Mass demonstrations were also occurring in Czechoslovakia.

These fundamental seismic movements were penetrating to the very heart of leaders and citizens who, in the main, had lived through the war. Faced with these events, positive reactions came immediately from Chancellor Kohl, supported by President Bush Senior

and Felipe González, together with deafening silences that reflected the fears of returning to the past and the desire to maintain a 'status quo', as expressed in the cynical comment of Mauriac: 'I love Germany so much that I am glad there are two of them'.

After making an initial welcoming statement, I convened an extraordinary meeting of the Enlarged Bureau (the body that at the time brought together the Conference of Presidents and the EP Bureau) one week later, on 16 November, to decide on our response. The group chairs reflected European diversity: four were French – Jean-Pierre Cot, a former minister, for the Socialist Group; Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, former President of the Republic, for the Liberals; Christian de La Malène, a resistance fighter, for the sovereignist Right, and Solange Fernes, for the Greens – and there was one Briton, Sir Christopher Prout, for the Conservatives; one Italian, Luigi Colajanni, for the Left; one Greek, Vassilis Efreimidis, for the Communists, and two Germans, Egon Klepsch, the EPP representative and the Republican, Franz Schönhuber, a former SS officer. The proposal made was to welcome these events, which were in line with the commitment to respect the fundamental rights of individuals, as recognised in the founding Treaties, including the right to free movement and also self-determination through free and fair elections. The decision made was to support the informal meeting that was to be held by the European Council in Paris under the French Presidency, to request the venue of the Foreign Minister, Roland Dumas, to report on this meeting, and to accept the invitation of the President of the Volkskammer to visit the German Democratic Republic (GDR).

At the same time, with the invaluable assistance of my Chef de Cabinet, Ambassador Pons, and the Secretary-General of the EP, Enrico Vinci, I sent invitations to President Mitterrand and Chancellor Kohl. This invitation for them to appear together was unprecedented. Both immediately accepted. One week later, following the announcement that the Sakharov Prize was to be awarded to Alexander Dubcek, the President-in-Office of the Council, President Mitterrand, and Chancellor Kohl appeared together. It is much more enlightening to hear their own words as central figures in

these events, than to rely on current speculations as to their respective behaviour, based on declassified files or second-hand reports.

President Mitterrand appeared as President-in-Office of the Council to report on the latter's meeting. This was his second appearance in a month because 'history is writing itself day by day'. He stated that on 9 November in Berlin, history in action had offered the world the spectacle, which had been unlikely even the day before, of a breach in the Wall that, for nearly 30 years, had in itself symbolised the fractures in our continent. On that day, democracy and freedom had won one of their most wonderful victories. The people had spoken; their voices had crossed borders and broken the silence of an order that they had not wanted and that they aspired to reject in order to recover their identities.

After indicating his excitement, welcoming Chancellor Kohl and expressing his regard for Gorbachev for the role that he had played, he placed the issue in a moment of reflection, in a joint analysis of the consequences for the European balance, and also the willingness of the Community and its members to assist the Eastern Bloc countries that 'have made commitments to themselves'. His conclusions with regard to the future concerned the very future of the Community itself and the common values which were demanded and which knew no bounds. His first conclusion involved 'affirming our own identity as a Community in order to open up to the East', which 'absolutely depends on the political will to show that, in the end, it is political unity that has prevailed over all the actions taken since the founders conceived the European idea'.

He then set out concrete measures, such as the negotiation of an urgent agreement with the IMF for Poland and Hungary – countries that merited additional effort as they were trying to establish democratic systems – and also a trade agreement with the German Democratic Republic. Aware that 'nothing is ever enough; nothing can ever be done quickly enough', he suggested measures to accompany the reform movement, such as the creation of a Bank for the development of Eastern Europe, the extension of training programmes such as Erasmus, and the admission of countries to the Council of Europe

and GATT. He highlighted the need to be ready, at the imminent European Council in Strasbourg in December, 'to successfully complete the fundamental plans that will allow our Europe to equip itself with the necessary economic and monetary, social and environmental policy tools and also to complete the internal market'. He concluded by expressing his desire for 'the way in which the Community decides on its actions to serve as an example to the Eastern Bloc countries, which are searching, moving, worrying and hoping. For the millions of men and women who, like us, dream that one day Europe will be Europe'.

For his part, Chancellor Kohl started by saying that 'in Western Europe, the Member States of the Community are actively preparing for the challenge of the 21st century, in which, thanks to the internal market of 320 million people, we can move towards the political union that we cherish and that must be achieved'. He then went on to examine the changes that were occurring with dizzying speed across the continent. He expressed his appreciation of Gorbachev's perestroika, which, for the first time since the end of the Second World War, was encouraging the justified hope of an end to the East-West conflict and of lasting stability based around a common freedom for the whole of Europe, 'to which not only London, Rome, The Hague, Dublin and Paris belong, but also Warsaw, Budapest, Prague and Sofia, and also of course Berlin, Leipzig and Dresden'. After commenting on the progress made by Poland and Hungary, he said that 'the desire for freedom among the Germans of East Berlin and the GDR has brought a peaceful end to the Wall and the barbed wire, with a celebration of coming together, mutual belonging and unity'. 'Those Germans who in the end have come together in a spirit of freedom will never be a threat, but solely a benefit to the unity of Europe.' 'The division of Germany has always been a visible and particularly painful expression of the division of Europe. However, the unity of Germany will only be achieved if we can unify our old continent. German policy and European policy are inseparable. They are two sides of the same coin.'

He then went on to examine the situation of Germans in the GDR: 'despite the joy at the freedom of movement, we are only at the beginning, we have not yet achieved the goal.'

People in the GDR want freedom in all areas of their life'. The new Head of the East German Government, Hans Modrow, a liberalising politician who later became an MEP, then spoke about the reforms announced and the need to eliminate the monopoly of the SED (Socialist Unity Party) in order to freely exercise the right to self-determination. In this respect, he felt it necessary to explain the philosophy of the GDR, whose government was holding fast to the goal identified by Adenauer of 'a free and united Germany in a free and united Europe', which was a dual constitutional obligation enshrined in the Basic Law (Grundgesetz). He emphasised that the task had a 'European global dimension'.

The tenor of the speeches made by the political group representatives was generally supportive. For the Socialists, Cot underlined the importance of Gorbachev's order that Soviet tanks should remain in their bases. After citing Willy Brandt's Ostpolitik as a precedent, he confirmed that the East Germans should exercise their free and sovereign rights, including the possibility of being part of a unified Germany in a united Europe. He concluded by welcoming the events, which had coincided with the Bicentenary of the French Revolution. On behalf of the EPP Group, Egon Klepsch (a German born in Czechoslovakia) made special reference to the use of funds to support the current events. On behalf of the Liberal Group, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (born in occupied Germany after the Great War) started his speech by confirming that 'today will perhaps mark the political birth of the EP, at a time when the tide of freedom is flooding across Eastern Europe'. The response should be 'to speed up the union of the Community and provide massive Community aid to the Eastern Bloc countries, subject to two vital conditions: not to run any unnecessary risks in terms of military alliances that could threaten peace, and to speed up the union of the Community in order to achieve a modern federalism based on subsidiarity'. He concluded that explicit support should be given to German reunification, not as a pretext for changing the Community, but as an incentive for its union in order to offer a framework for the political reunion of the German people. The other speakers' comments were along the same lines, except for the alarmist speech, according to the verbatim report of Parliament's proceedings, made by the Republican, Franz Schönhuber, who attacked Chancellor Kohl head on, accusing

the FRG of shameful opportunism and defending a German nationalist position as a pure patriot opposed to the Community. The Greek Communist, Vassilis Efremidis, the German Green, Piermont, who was against unity, and the Italian Neofascist, Rauti, also made various criticisms.

The Commission President, Jacques Delors, after welcoming the events and assuming responsibility for implementing the measures proposed by President Mitterrand on behalf of the Council, reiterated Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's comment about the political birth of the EP and expressed his agreement with the feelings of excitement and joy. He also added solidarity 'with our German friends on both sides of the iron curtain that is now falling'. As a militant pro-European, he expressed his conviction that the political cooperation measure adopted by the Council was the most important in the Community's history and that more resources, coordination and speed were needed to ensure that hopes were met. As a result, he said that 'the Community must be strengthened, its proactiveness increased and its integration accelerated; now we must design the architecture for the great Europe'.

The debate ended with an overwhelming majority vote – with only two votes against – for a resolution in which the events in Central and Eastern Europe and the collapse of the Wall due to the people's peaceful aspiration for freedom were warmly welcomed. The resolution recognised the right to self-determination of the GDR's population, including the possibility of becoming part of a unified Germany in a united Europe; it called for a rapid response from the EC in terms of aid and cooperation for Central and Eastern Europe, 'within which institutional ties may be offered to all those countries that are interested in it' (a timid euphemism for accession); and, last but not least, it insisted on the importance of a mutual security policy and disarmament negotiations on the eve of the Bush-Gorbachev Summit. Chancellor Kohl commented at a later date on his astonishment at the firm Socialist support, both in the EP and among the Heads of Government in this political family, for the resolution of the German question.

The debate in the EP was important due to its timeliness, namely less than two weeks after the fall of the Wall, and particularly due to the nature of its participants: leaders and parliamentarians who had mostly lived through, participated in or suffered from the Second World War. Most Germans, members of the largest population in the centre of the continent, without any defined borders but with a strong cultural and historical identity, cherished the hope of reunification. For many others, the prospect of a unified and powerful Germany, which could once again adopt its ‘Sonderweg’ or special path, was seen as a threat. However, both the atmosphere and the result showed that the Community spirit had become deep-rooted among Western Europeans and also that it constituted a legitimate aspiration for those excluded from power by the construction of such an indestructible wall as an iron curtain, as I had the honour of saying directly on behalf of the EP before the democratically elected parliaments of Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

The words and silences of Mitterrand and Kohl during their joint appearance were particularly important. Much has been written and speculated about their differences, although it would have been strange if they had not had any. The important point is that they were able to channel positively and overcome these differences, despite the long history of confrontation, including on a personal level. That is one of the virtues of the Community method, or rather its spirit, which made it possible for Pierre Uri, a French philosophy professor who was persecuted by the Vichy Regime, to draft the Treaty of Rome from beginning to end, under the supervision and control of Hans von der Groeben, a senior German civil servant. The basic loyalty was maintained with a struggle as, on 28 November, Kohl announced in the Bundestag his 10-point plan for German unity, which included a plan for a German confederation and its membership of the European Community, thus rejecting the temptation of neutral unity. The process had a 2+4 format (the two German states plus the four occupying powers: USA, USSR, Great Britain and France), with the European Community dimension involving 12 Member States, and a wider European dimension involving the CSCE.

Two weeks after this unique public debate, I presented a decalogue of proposals to the European Council in Strasbourg, including enlargement, German unity and the need



to add political union to the planned agenda of an Intergovernmental Conference on Union, decided to lead the way. The role played by the European leaders of the Member States was decisive. Coming from different political perspectives, they were able to understand the extent of the changes in hand and the value of unity. This was not without its consequences as another of the main figures, the Christian Democrat Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Ruud Lubbers, paid for his clear warnings about the risks of reunification with a sneaky veto of his candidacy for the Commission Presidency in Corfu in 1994.

However, not everything was a bed of roses. Still in December, President Mitterrand made his unique official visit to the GDR, at a time of clear tension with Chancellor Kohl, which manifested itself in his non-attendance on 22 December at the formal opening of the Brandenburg Gate, which leads straight into the Pariser Platz. Although accepting the German desire for reunification as legitimate, the French President added 'if they want to and if they can'. Kohl's 10-point plan failed to answer three basic questions: his explicit non-recognition of the Oder-Neisse border with Poland; the speed and format of the reunification process; and also the issue of resulting alliances. One other factor was added: the election on 29 December to the Presidency of the free Czechoslovakia of the writer and resistance fighter Václav Havel. Mitterrand attempted a response with his plan for a Federation within the Community and a Confederation within the Council of Europe. Havel was the first to reject this division.

The acceleration of the process, in which the citizens of the GDR voted with their feet, which threatened to become a mass exodus, precipitated events. In March, the population of the GDR voted for the first time in free elections, overwhelmingly supporting reunification. At European level, at the Dublin Summit the Franco-German plan opened the way to reform. On 1 July German political and monetary union became a reality. In the EP we kept pace with this process by setting up a temporary committee, that carried out a huge work put in by the t Rapporteur Alan Donnelly under the chairmanship of Gerardo Fernandez Albor. It involved 18 observers from the GDR who, after the elections, become MEPs from the Eastern 'länder'. We also approved these

regions as Objective 1 regions, which meant that overnight the unified Germany began to receive a volume of Community funds similar to that of Spain's, which at the time was the highest.

On 3 October the Day of German Unity was celebrated for the first time, with one of the largest mass demonstrations that I have ever witnessed in my life. All protocol and order services were overwhelmed when faced with the human tide that converged on the Reichstag. In the formal sitting of the Bundestag, the Federal President, Richard von Weizsäcker, placed the Commission President, Jacques Delors, and myself, as EP President, on either side of him. I had the honour of speaking on the same day at the formal sitting held in the Paulskirche in Frankfurt, which had been a sanctuary for German constitutionalism since 1848.

That same month, I spoke in Rome at the European Council meeting at the Palazzo Madama, seat of the Senate of the Italian Republic, on the EP's vision for the European process. I made a proposal to actively participate in the negotiations of the future Treaty and expressed concern about the initial signs of implosion in Yugoslavia. The then President of the Council, Gianni De Michelis, told the press that the audacity of my proposals had led to critical comments from various members of the European Council, starting with President Mitterrand, which brought me increased support in the EP. I also had the opportunity to explain to an impatient Chancellor Kohl the details of the negotiations with the Bundestag on the involvement of German observers, and to listen to an ever courteous and determined Mrs Thatcher on the pointlessness of the summit. Few could have imagined that her intransigent attitude to the European process, particularly German unity, would be one of the factors in her abrupt dismissal by the Conservative praetorian guard the following month.

In November, we convened the first Conference between the EP and the National parliaments of the Union, at which we jointly raised the need to give a political green light to the Union. It was a precursor to the Convention as a public and democratic form of European constituent debate.

At the next Council meeting, held in the Sala della Lupa of the Palazzo Montecitorio, we managed to convene the Intergovernmental Conference on Political Union, in addition to the Intergovernmental Conference on Economic and Monetary Union, which had been the subject of long preparations since 1987. For the first time, our proposal for the European Parliament's participation through the Preparatory Interinstitutional Conference was accepted, through which we were able to significantly strengthen the democracy and effectiveness of the nascent Union.

We managed to add citizenship, repeatedly proposed by the EP and included on the Council's agenda by President González, to the planned and prepared Monetary Union with the single currency. Thus for once we united money and life. With regard to democracy, our shortlist was to achieve codecision, in other words shared legislative power, participate in the election of the Commission with a five-year mandate coinciding with the European elections, and achieve recognition for the political parties. The result of this Treaty engendered in Rome was the Treaty of Maastricht, through which the European Union was born.

Although the tango says that 20 years is nothing, in this case many things have happened. The European Union has grown from 12 to 27 Member States (with two more additions just around the corner) and from 320 million to 500 million citizens. It has a single currency, the euro, which works, which protects us and which, in spite of us, has become a global reserve currency. At this point, we must pay tribute to Chancellor Kohl, who led the way in changing the framework for the euro, against his own public opinion. The EU is a pioneering model for political organisations of the future in a globalised world based on regional multilateralism. G-20 meetings more closely resemble the European Council than G-7 meetings, due to their organisation, paraphernalia and dynamic.

People power peacefully broke down the Wall dividing Europe and the world. However, there are still many mental walls between us in the noble cause that we share. They are more difficult to combat and overcome than physical walls. The laborious gestation of the Treaty of Lisbon, which salvaged the wreck of the Constitutional Treaty, bears witness to this. However, here, too, we are breaking down the walls of

mistrust and narrow nationalism. It is to be hoped that its implementation throws open an important gateway to the future of a European Union open to the world.