

YASSER ARAFAT'S VISIT TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

He did not address the plenary session of the Parliament because he was invited by the Socialists and not by the Parliament, and as he walked through the door he said 'you are a very courageous man, President' and I said well, that is what I understand, but I said I wanted to see you to tell you to get out of violence and get round the table and talk. And I said, when you leave this office that is already in a press statement giving my reasons why I wanted to see you. And he said well, in my press statement President, I shall say I fully understand what the President of the European Parliament has said.

THE PRESIDENT'S VISIT TO THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

That meeting I had there with Gromyko was fascinating. He was very tough, he gave me a lot of lecture, he did not think that the European Union was an important issue at all, but then I realised he was testing me.

One of the subjects that we discussed was human rights, obviously, and I said while I was there I wanted to see Sakharov. Well he was not over enthusiastic, or at least the President was not enthusiastic, for me to see Sakharov, but it was agreed and I was taken to Sakharov and he was in a very poor little place. I remember his wife made us coffee on a little stove in a corner and he was living in very primitive circumstances. But Sakharov was a man of very great courage who was concerned about the human rights situation in Russia and elsewhere in the world and so he came over and, of course, we gave him the Sakharov prize, the Nobel Prize equivalent, that we had from the European Parliament.

But my visit to Russia was very interesting, to be there shortly before the changes which took place. I was always disappointed that Gorbachev did not come to speak to the Parliament. It was certainly my hope and my intention and I like to think it was his, but nevertheless it did not materialise.