

## **Terrorist attack in Madrid**

We were in Strasbourg. If I recall correctly, it was a Thursday morning.

I was at my desk at about 06.45 to sign letters. One of my staff members – a Spaniard, a member of my Cabinet – came into the room crying and said to me: ‘Switch on your television, something awful has happened at home in Spain, in Madrid’. He knew people who regularly took this line, and indeed, unhappily, it turned out he knew some people who died in this and so the emotion touches you. This is then not far away; this is here and now.

The only thing I knew about the story was that it was an enormous disaster, that large numbers of people were killed and injured, and that the numbers were rising. Then the telephone calls started to come from some colleagues in the House and one or two from Madrid, saying ‘you must make a statement in Parliament’. Well, I did not need people to telephone to tell me my duty. Of course I had to make a statement in Parliament, although normally the President does not preside on the Thursday morning because you have the Conference of Presidents to preside. But they were adding other things about who had done this, suggesting that this was a terrorist act by ETA. There was no evidence yet, from what I could see looking at the TV stations, whether Spanish or otherwise, of any indication of a claim who did it or evidence of who may have done it, and in areas like this you have a duty to be evidence-led, proportionate and fair.

I gave my statement in the House. I condemned the terror, I pledged us in the collective sense to do whatever could and should be done to find out what had been done and to seek to root it out, but I said nothing as to responsibility. I am pleased that I exercised the maturity of judgment to refuse to bow down to what was unwarranted pressure.