

THE FALL OF THE BERLIN WALL AND THE WAY TO MAASTRICHT: THE FALL OF THE WALL

I was elected on St James' Day, 25 July 1989. There had already been signs that something was afoot; that profound changes were affecting the Cold War division of Europe.

On 9 November 1989, I was on an official visit to Italy. And I remember this vividly because I was staying at the Plaza Hotel in Via del Corso. My wife and I were getting dressed to go to the gala dinner hosted by the Italian President at Villa Madama — which is one of those large Roman palaces with frescos by Raphael. We were the guests of President Cossiga, the President of the Republic, and Prime Minister Andreotti. It was somewhere around 8.30 or 8.45 p.m. when I received a call from an Italian journalist, who told me that the Berlin wall had fallen. He asked me what I thought. Naturally, I asked him whether he had used "fallen" literally or figuratively. He replied that he didn't know and I explained that I didn't either. I said I would make enquiries.

Dinner was a very odd affair since, obviously, President Cossiga, Andreotti and the minister, De Michelis, and I were all making conjectures. We were trying to find out exactly what had happened. And we came to various decisions. One of them was that it would have to be discussed at the next plenary session. I suggested inviting President Mitterrand, who was the President-in-Office of the Council — because it was the French Presidency of the second half of 1989 — and Chancellor Kohl so that they could appear side by side. They agreed, and, two weeks later, parliament held its plenary session.

Mitterrand placed considerable stress on the positive aspects of the ongoing democratic process in Central Europe, while Kohl was very emphatic about unification, focusing in particular on an aspect of the Bonn Constitution, namely that this was one of the founding commitments of post-war Germany. We can express this as we always do, in the words of Thomas Mann "not a German Europe, but a European Germany".