

KEY MOMENTS OF HIS PRESIDENCY

My election was a very big moment, not just for me, personally. I remember that when I returned to Spain, many people, and not just members of my party or friends, told me they were proud that a Spaniard had been elected President of the European Parliament.

I remember, Paco Ordoñez, the foreign minister, a very good friend, and very witty, told me: "Congratulations, Enrique! It is the first time we have managed to get more than the quota allocation from the European Community."

It is not that I felt compensated by the applause which followed my speech to the European Council of Maastricht, but I did feel that we were on the point of achieving something after a very long struggle. The leaders of countries with a long history of political, military and bloody conflict had been able to take this step, to pool so many things – this was truly important to me. It is certainly the most emotional speech that I have ever given.

What rankles most is the implosion of Yugoslavia and the way it happened. I tried everything that could be done but it remains a very bitter memory. It was probably my worst moment as President.

I had the privilege and the good luck to live through this period of change in the world and, above all, in Europe.

What do I have to say about it? Well, that I was a privileged witness, but also a key player; that I was able to contribute to changing things, and for the better. And then, I believe that as Europeans, together, we got it right. That is what strikes me as the most significant: that it was a historic step.