

Fourteenth Annual Memorial Service 3 May 2023

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Introductory Speech of the FMA President

Klaus HÄNSCH

Dear First Vice-President,

Mesdames et messieurs les Députés,

Chères familles,

Mesdames et messieurs,

It is a particular honour and it fills me with great emotion to welcome you to our annual ceremony, under the patronage of the European Parliament, to pay tribute to the former Members of this House who passed away in the course of last year.

I would like to warmly welcome and thank First Vice-President Karas for his presence, representing the President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola, and the former President of the European Parliament, Enrique Barón Crespo, who will close today's ceremony with a final address. I would also like to extend my warm greetings to the former Presidents of the European Parliament and of our Association, Pat Cox and Hans-Gert Pöttering.

Today, we pay tribute to our colleagues, accompanied by their family members present here today and connected online. I greet them all warmly. We would like to express our gratitude to you, dear families, for your discreet and unceasing support that enabled our deceased colleagues to carry out their duties and serve not only the citizens of their own country, but also all Europeans, with unwavering commitment, tenacity and passion.

Among them, with profound emotion, I pay homage to an exemplary figure and an eminent European, José María Gil Robles Gil-Delgado, President of the European Parliament from 1997 to 1999.

A man internationally known for his many fine qualities.

José María was a **great European**: a figure who is emblematic of European history after the Second World War. He said 'I started dreaming of the European Union in the late 1940s, I have done nothing but imagine and build its future as best as I could.' Demonstrating great personal engagement, he was at the forefront of democratic change in Spain as the country emerged from one of Europe's longest dictatorships (from 1939 to 1975) (which obliged him in his youth to follow his family into exile), dedicating his life to democracy and to Spain's accession to the European Communities in 1986.

José María was an outstanding politician, a man of authority, open, intelligent and conciliatory, able to combine great humanity with great firmness and a fine sense of irony. He was my immediate successor as President of the European Parliament, bearing witness to the substantial political reputation he had acquired while serving as a Spanish Member in the Group of the European People's Party. I remember him as a very sincere man with great respect for law and order in our united Europe and steadfastly faithful to the idea of developing the foundations provided by the Treaties for an ever-closer union among the peoples of Europe.

'He led Parliament in times of change with great determination to make this institution stronger and closer to the citizens' as highlighted by President Metsola.

He played a successful role:

- in strengthening the European Parliament through the Amsterdam Treaty,
- in consolidating Parliament's scrutiny of the European Commission,
- in supporting deeper European integration (through supporting the Constitutional Treaty and later the Lisbon Treaty),

- in contributing to the legislative process for the entry into force of the euro and the opening of accession negotiations for 10 new Member States.

He laid the foundations for the adoption of a statute for Members, guaranteeing the independence of this institution.

Throughout his political career, he always reflected his Christian conviction that solidarity and human dignity played a central role in the European project.

José María was a **gifted lawyer, strict and rigorous**. From 1974 onwards, he published a number of legal works on the restoration of democracy and on parliamentary and public law. He was the author of several publications. Someone wrote that 'He was both **impressive and modest**, two very rare qualities in a politician.' I venture to hope not too rare...

Most importantly, José María was a **European activist** throughout his life, constantly in contact with civil society, always listening to the real needs of people and devoting his time to teaching the younger generations, and he was the recipient of several academic honours.

He shared his unshakeable European convictions with passion. Very active as President of the Spanish Federal Council of the European Movement and of the European Movement International (1999–2005), an esteemed Professor holding the Jean Monnet Chair, President of the Jean Monnet Foundation

for Europe and President of our Association of Former Members of the European Parliament.

In our turbulent times, his words resound as a source of inspiration:

‘Don’t get tired, building Europe is something that requires a lot of effort, a lot of illusion, but that compensates for all the disappointments when you see all that is achieved.’

‘Que no se cansen, construir Europa es algo que requiere mucho esfuerzo, muchisima illusion, pero que compensa todas las desilusiones cuando se ve todo lo que se consigue.’

Muchas gracias, Querido José María. Your legacy will live on forever in this House.

It is now my great honour to invite the First Vice-President of the European Parliament, Othmar KARAS, to take the floor.

Thank you.