

Memorial Service
Former Members of the EP
4 May 2011

“Our constitution is called democracy because power is not in the hand of a minority but of the whole people”. This sentence, taken from the Pericles’ Funeral Oration to the Athenians who had fallen in the Peloponnesian War, was the opening of the first draft of the EU Constitutional Treaty. It looks as fresh and to the point now as 2,500 years ago. Immortal thoughts never die. In the meantime, most of those who fell in Europe’s last bout and inter-European warfare have been honoured for participating in what some historians nowadays call European civil wars.

Today, we honour our colleagues, the members of our Parliament, who passed away last year, after service or while in service. We have listened in respectful silence to the roll call of their names because they deserve to be engraved in our memory.

They came from near or faraway lands. They had different faiths, languages, roots or visions. However, all of them shared with us their daily life for years. They worked together with us and let us enjoy the privilege of their imagination, perseverance and passion in an unprecedented endeavour: to prove that history is not destiny. To demonstrate that making another kind of history is possible. To show how it could be done on the basis of mutual understanding, common values and the vision of a shared future.

It has been said that the most representative buildings of Europe are the cathedrals. Let me add the Parliaments. Although they are not an exclusive European creation, they

certainly embody the spirit expressed by the Athenians meeting in the Pnyx Hill around Pericles, the discussions of the Roman Senate, and the blossoming of chambers since the Middle Ages until a full empowered free Parliament came into being as a landmark, as THE landmark of democracy.

In our common history, the first attack against democracy has almost always been made against Parliaments. It was the act of a Guy Fawkes stocking powder under the ground of the House of Commons. It was the burning of the Reichstag. It was the armed intrusion of a Colonel Tejero into the Cortes. We all understand what those actions mean without the need of any profound historical exegesis.

Our greatly missed colleagues worked with us so as to create a new kind of Parliament to nurture the young creature which is the European Union. It is a common endeavour that requires not only the ability to put stone upon stone but also the design of new rules on how to apply a shared will, on how to overcome the lack of understanding, on how to forget grievances or even hate among their peoples from which all descent.

This noble cause also deserves to be honoured because as Pericles said “we do not think that there is an incompatibility between words and deeds and the worst thing is to rush into action before the consequences have been properly debated.... They behaved in the way that the city deserved.”

Their memory is with us. They now rest in peace.

Enrique Barón