Transcription of the interview with José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado (Madrid, 9 March 2010)

Source: Interview de José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado / JOSÉ MARÍA GIL-ROBLES Y GIL-DELGADO, Cristina Blanco Sío-López, prise de vue : Delphine Kiefer.- Madrid: CVCE [Prod.], 09.03.2010. CVCE, Sanem. - VIDEO (01:53.57, Couleur, Son original).

URL:
http://www.cvce.eu/obj/transcription_of_the_interview_with_jose_maria_gil_robles_y_gil_delgado_madrid_9_march_2010-en-e9c26dd4-36c1-4953-ad14-578cf7d29ed6.html

Last updated: 04/07/2016

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[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] Good morning. I would like to begin by thanking you for your hospitality and your time and, above all, by stating how privileged we feel to have you contribute to this project.

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] Thank you very much. I'm very glad to contribute, firstly because you are all very kind, and secondly because I believe that it is imperative to help ensure that Europeans are as well informed as possible about the European Union, and that's no easy task.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] I would like to ask you, first of all: how did your interest in a more Europeanised politics come about, above all in relation to your father's legacy, your experiences and your time in Portugal, but also with regard to your academic career after the war?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] I spent my entire time growing up in Portugal, from the age of 15 months to 18 years, and during the war I lived in Estoril, which had a very international atmosphere, meaning that, on the one hand, I was mixing with boys of my own age — seven, eight, twelve years old — from England, Germany and Italy and so on, and, on the other, that I saw a lot of refugees arriving from Eastern Europe, so for me, European issues were prominent from an early age. Exiles always think about their country, but in this case I also witnessed, and in some senses

shared, the experiences of other exiles from other countries. Then, little by little, my parents helped confirm this European perspective through trips around Europe and their contact with European figures, so it was a natural development.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] Especially because of your father. What did he pass on to you in terms of this European sentiment?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] Well, he was a man who lived and breathed politics, and at home there had always been a great interest in European and national politics. And since we were in Portugal, we were concerned, right from the outset, with the politics of not one country, but two. To the point that I consider Portugal to be my second home, meaning that I follow political developments in the country closely, speak Portuguese whenever I can and don't see it as foreign. That lends you a different way of viewing relations between European countries, so my father had little need to lecture me in any way, but rather he led by his own example and life experience.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] Thinking about the exiled Don Juan, what relationship did you or your family have with him?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] Estoril is a small place. My father was a member of the Privy Council of Don Juan, so it was quite normal, while out walking, to come across him playing golf and to say hello. He was a very good-natured man, very open with everybody, including us youngsters. We used to organise football matches, as was usual for boys our age, and the present King of Spain and his brother Alfonso, God rest his soul, also joined in. And as children we played with the *infantes* and other members of royal houses, the Orléans family, who were also there, and the Savoys, too, at that time, playing the games that children all over the world play, and this made for a very international atmosphere and one in which we took a natural and open view of things.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] I wonder whether you could describe to us the experience of addressing the Hague Congress with the speech that your father had been unable to make 50 years earlier.

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] Well, it was a very moving moment. And one in which I think I managed to convey my own emotion to my audience, judging by its reaction. From a Spaniard's point of view, it meant closing a cycle, completing something for which so many Spaniards had fought from within the organisations of the European Movement and from within secret organisations seeking to be fully part of the European Movement. I wasn't there in Munich, but I felt the effects of the repression that took place in its wake and I could see that this was precisely the other side of the coin: a Spain that was fully involved in the European Movement, at its very heart. This brought great satisfaction.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] Thank you. I would also like to ask you to comment a little on the work of Spain's first institutions devoted to European studies, such as the Seminario de Estudios Europeos at the Ateneo de Madrid (Athenaeum of Madrid), coordinated by José Miguel de Azaola, the Seminario Funcionalista at the University of Salamanca and the European League for Economic Cooperation in Barcelona; and, in particular, to tell us about your time reading European Studies at the Ateneo de Madrid: how did this experience influence your later work as President of the

European Parliament and as an MEP?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] The organisations you've just mentioned, along with the Asociación Española de Cooperación Europea (Spanish Association for European Cooperation), which was also very important and operated in Madrid (on premises at which the European Movement continues to be based today, after having somehow inherited them), were introducing young Spaniards to the idea that Europe was inconceivable without democracy, that Europe was the democracy of the future for our countries, including Spain, which meant that, in thinking about the future of Europe, we were also thinking about Spain's future. Of these organisations, the Ateneo de Madrid — where I started out — was probably the most federalist of all. José Miguel de Azaola was also very clear about Europe's future and had some excellent connections. I remember once that, as members of the Ateneo, we had the opportunity to dine there with Denis de Rougemont, for instance, who was one of the European figures de Azaola managed to attract to Spain and who afforded us a very up-to-date insight into matters. And at the same time, we must remember that the Ateneo was embarking on its European studies at a time of crisis and problems — the Ateneo de Madrid started down this path just after the failure of the Defence Treaty in Paris and just before the Treaty of Rome and the Euratom Treaty, which meant that we were witnessing the emergence from the first European crisis. It is always worthwhile remembering that Europe is in a perpetual state of crisis and not to become alarmed by the fact that one crisis is succeeded by another.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] Thank you. What are your memories — talking in more political terms now — of the World Congress of Christian Democrats held in Lima in 1964, about Leo Tindemans's participation in the event and the ideas and principles that led you to join the Christian democracy movement?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] When I went to Lima, I was already a member of Democracia Social Cristiana (Christian Social Democracy), one of the organisations operating in Spain amidst the clandestine activity of Franco's last days — rather remote last days, since this was 1964 and Franco didn't die until 1975. It was a time of great hope for Latin America, hope that, unfortunately, came to nothing. The battle cry of those attending the Congress, of the Peruvians, was: '*Cornejo, Frei, Caldera y América Latina entera*' ('Cornejo, Frei, Caldera and the whole of Latin America'). Cornejo was Peru's great hope at the time, which was dashed, like many others, by a military coup. It was a time when people thought that Latin America could take the European path and form communities like the Andean Community that would follow in Europe's footsteps, and this was the vocation of the Christian Democrat Organisation of America. In some countries, like Venezuela and Chile, things went well at first. Then Chile had to contend with the troubling Pinochet interregnum before democracy was restored there later; with Venezuela, we are still waiting; in Peru, it is exacting a great deal of effort, and in the rest of Latin America, well, they are getting there bit by bit. But without the same atmosphere of hope and elation. You asked me about Leo Tindemans. Tindemans was a symbolic figure for Christian Democracy at the time and for European integration itself. He was a man with a vision and therefore served as a symbol and an example to our Latin American friends, and I think we all revered him.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] Returning to Spain, could you explain to us briefly how the Alianza Popular (People's Alliance) was born during the transition and how it became the Partido Popular (People's Party) we know today, and talk to us in particular about the Partido Popular's admission to the European People's Party? How did this arise …?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] I wasn't a member of the Alianza Popular during the transition. The Alianza Popular was formed by the magnificent seven — seven ministers who had served under Franco — largely in order to represent a certain continuity with Francoism, alongside renewal in the form of the Unión de Centro Democrático (Union of the Democratic Centre). Later on, when the Unión de Centro Democrático disbanded, Fraga was able to embark on what had always been his objective, namely the shift towards the political centre, which Suárez had previously occupied for himself, and a series of developments, such as the Hernández Mancha presidency and Fraga's return, led to the reinvention of the Alianza Popular as the Partido Popular, taking in liberal currents, most of the UCD centrists and the Christian democrat groupings, some of whom had been in the UCD and some of whom had remained outside. The decision was then taken (after the Alianza Popular's experience in the European Parliament as part of a group with British and Danish Conservatives) to join the Christian Democrat Group of the European People's Party and to become a member of that party, decisions that were effected in two separate steps. I joined the party just as it became a member of the EPP Group, while membership of the European People's Party came later.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] We've mentioned the period of transition to democracy; I wonder whether you could tell us about the development of the Centro de Estudios Comunitarios (Centre for Community Studies), which you yourself founded.

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] The Centro de Estudios Comunitarios was set up by a whole group of Christian Democrats, some of whom had been in the UCD and some of whom hadn't, when the UCD disbanded. We understood that for the course that had been taken to continue we needed an organisation that would retain these doctrinal roots, which is what we set up. If I'm not mistaken, it was in 1981 that we founded the Centre and, since then, it has continued to exist in accordance with its initial premise, which was essentially to maintain doctrinal ties amongst ourselves, regardless of the political path taken subsequently by our members, and to uphold the organisation's independence by keeping it self-sufficient, without the need to ask either a political party or the State for money.

2. The relationship between the transition to democracy and Spain's accession to the European Communities

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] Do you consider Spain's transition to democracy and its membership of the European Communities to be parallel processes — two sides of the same coin? How did you view this parallel development against the backdrop of change?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] Spain's transition was a step preceding European integration. Following the European Parliament's Birkelbach Report, which was adopted in the immediate aftermath of the European Movement's Munich Congress, it was clear that it would be impossible to accede to the Union without a democratic system being in place. Consequently, the transition was a fundamental stage in the process of aligning the Spanish political system with the other European political systems. From the outset, it had the support in this respect of the major European political movements of the time. All European political parties — some of which had yet to be properly formed, the only one in place during the Spanish transition being the EPP, with the rest founded later — all political movements supported Spain's transition. Before the transition was even complete, Spain applied for and was granted membership of the Council of Europe, as a

preliminary step, before joining NATO and then the European Community, albeit after eight years of negotiations.

3. Experience as an MEP and President of the European Parliament

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] How did you come to join the European People's Party? What long-term plans did you have when you took up your seat as an MEP, and can you describe the point at which you first came into contact with the European People's Party?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] Well, since 1977 and Democracia Cristiana Independiente's defeat in Spain's first democratic elections, I had occupied myself primarily with making press statements, writing books and with the Centro de Estudios Comunitarios. And it was as a consequence of this work that, in 1989, Marcelino Oreja suggested that I should stand for the European Parliament as an independent candidate on the list he was heading, and I was thrilled, because I'd always been a fervent European, so to become a Member of the European Parliament was obviously a dream of mine. What were my plans at that time? Well, in general terms, to contribute to European integration; I had no precise plans. European parliamentarians need to find their feet and it usually takes a couple of years for them to become versed in everything and to master all areas of Parliament's work. But that was my hope and that is what I was able to achieve during my 15 years [serving as an MEP].

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] Which key figures in the European integration process left a deep impression on you and which ideas influenced you specifically?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] Well, philosophically speaking, I think that within the political grouping I represent, we have essentially been guided by Maritain, with some help from Mounier. We have all absorbed the teachings of Jean Monnet, which have left an impression on all of us. We have also been influenced by the founding fathers, Schuman, Adenauer, De Gasperi and Spaak, all of whom played an important role. There have been other great European figures, some of whom I was personally acquainted with. I didn't have the opportunity to meet Helmut Schmidt, but I had a fair amount of contact with Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, who pushed very hard for European unification. During my period of political activity within the European Parliament, the most prominent figures were Helmut Kohl and Mitterrand, both of whom I admired for different reasons. And I enjoyed a very good relationship with Jean-Claude Juncker, who is one of the European figures with the most well-defined ideas in this sense. I also had much to do with the great politicians of Italian Christian Democracy: Andreotti, Colombo, Mariano Rumor, may he rest in peace, and Aldo Moro, with whom I campaigned in 1977. These are the men that left their mark on me.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] And what, specifically, can you tell us about your meeting with Salvador de Madariaga when you were 25 years old?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] I was delivering some messages to him from my father — I travelled as far as Oxford. Madariaga was a man of great openness, of great intellect — which I cannot begin to describe now — and I was a mere pipsqueak, having recently passed the legal

entrance examinations to the Cortes Generales (Spanish Parliament), but he was kind enough to lend me an hour of his time, to ask about the situation in Spain, which was very close to his heart, and to ask me my opinions, and naturally I did all I could to wheedle his own out of him. Of course, I was familiar with them from his books, but it was important for me to hear them from his own mouth, along with an analysis of the situation in 1960. He was a man with the ability to think far ahead into the future.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] Now let's move on to your experience, primarily as President of the European Parliament but also as an MEP. In this regard, I would like to know which events taught you the most valuable lesson and of which achievement you are most proud in your 15 years of serving the European Parliament.

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] Well, as an MEP, I experienced the fall of the Berlin Wall and, consequently, the transformation in Europe's internal relations, above all in regard to the Franco-German axis, of their relative weights, which is still relevant today. I saw the step forward in the political integration of Europe that was embodied by the fall of the wall; I was involved in the next round of enlargement, followed by the major round of enlargement. I therefore experienced enlargement first from the position of Chair of the Committee on Institutional Affairs, then as President of Parliament and finally as Chair of the Delegation to the EU–Bulgaria Joint Parliamentary Committee, all of which were important events. I should tell you that the decision on the first 11 countries to join the euro area took place during my presidency, as, therefore, did the difficult appointment of the first President of the European Central Bank and the definitive introduction of the euro. These, I think, were important milestones. I will also mention the resignation of the Santer Commission as a significant stage in the development of Parliament–Commission and Parliament–Council relations. So I was fortunate to experience a very eventful period.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] And in terms of achievements, above all in your role as President, which achievements or actions stand out the most for you?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] My aim was for Parliament to become increasingly like a parliament of the Member States, i.e. for it to have greater legislative capacity, greater powers of scrutiny and greater budgetary control, and I think I managed to make significant progress with regard to the first two aspects: with the Amsterdam Treaty and with relations with the Commission. Unfortunately, I failed with regard to budgetary procedures, where matters essentially remain deadlocked.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] You referred to the comparison between the national parliaments and the European Parliament. There is also a three-way relationship, so to speak, between the European Parliament, the national parliaments and regional parliaments. How do you view this relationship today and how do you think it should develop in order to ensure a positive balance?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] When I arrived at Parliament, the relationship between national parliaments and the European Parliament was practically non-existent. The awakening came with the affair of the Corte di Assise in Rome, and it was a rude awakening, because national parliamentarians felt manipulated and it took place amidst a certain degree of antagonism. When I took over as President, this antagonism had begun to abate and I was able to set about establishing

good relations with the national parliaments, work that has subsequently been continued and built upon by all my successors. Thus, thanks to the agreements concluded in particular, we entered a period of cooperation. Nevertheless, cooperation with regional parliaments is at a very early stage. During my time as President, I managed to secure two seats as observers on the Committee on Regional Affairs for parliaments with legislative powers, but these were not retained over the following terms, which is a shame. And there are still huge difficulties, with very little progress in this regard. What should be done? Well, I think that this type of cooperation needs to be deepened, and the Lisbon Treaty does now provide an important channel to ensure that national parliaments do not feel stripped of their powers: the special procedure ensuring respect for the principle of subsidiarity. I hope that this will encourage some to take more of an interest in European affairs. There are parliaments that do take a great deal of interest, such as the British and Danish parliaments, and there are others that appear less concerned — I won't say which ones — and I hope that the latter will now show more interest and make use of these procedures where they consider it appropriate and, above all, that they will work with the European Parliament, as has been the case, in particular, during the presidencies that followed mine, with mutual visits by committees, involvement in committee work, a good system of electronic communication, the secondment of officials, etc. There are many possibilities.

4. The role of national parliaments in the European integration process, the balance between large and small countries and the idea of a 'hard core' of the European Union

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] How did you view the balance of power between the larger and smaller countries within the European Parliament?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] Well, in the European Parliament the smaller countries matter a great deal, as in the European Union as a whole. I usually make a slightly playful analogy, likening the smaller countries to ball bearings in the Union mechanism ensuring that it functions without bumps or friction, because they are much more aware that the common European interest doesn't coincide with specific national interests. It unites countries in an entirely separate interest. As a consequence, the smaller countries usually provide good presidencies and help the Union operate smoothly. I've never observed any difference in voting between the large and small countries; no, because the small countries and some of the large countries share interests and the interests of the large countries coincide with those of some of the small countries. This means that, today, Europe has blocks of interest rather than greater regions, which cover various countries and sensibilities, and this is reflected in the voting and not in a large–small divide.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] In this sense, what are your thoughts on the idea of a 'hard core', a 'core Europe' within the European Union?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] I think that the hard core was, to some extent, nostalgia on the part of the six founding countries, but the option of a hard core ended with the euro, because the euro showed that countries that were not founding members had the same capacity as the founding countries. And, at the same time, it demonstrated that the real hard core is ever-changing, meaning that it is a step towards including all Union Member States. It is not a closed group, but an open one, an avant-garde, to use a French expression, a vanguard that endeavours to carry with it the other countries of the Union. In this respect, it serves a purpose; just like the enhanced cooperation mechanisms. The euro isn't officially a form of enhanced cooperation, but it works that way. That is my belief.

5. The powers and procedures of the European institutions and their benefits for the population

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] Let's talk now about the co-decision procedure. I would like to know whether, in your view, the role of the European Parliament has grown noticeably over time. And, from a practical point of view, how has this growth come about and what are the main sticking points with regard to the use of co-decision?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] In certain areas of the Council, there has always been resistance to the loss of the power of veto that occurs as soon as the Council begins to take decisions by majority vote, albeit by a qualified majority, instead of unanimously, which is when co-decision works well. There were some doubts about whether co-decision was too complicated a procedure to work, but it has been shown that this is not the case. And it has been proven to work well, because, of the first 100 legislative proposals subject to the co-decision procedure, 98 were adopted, which is an overwhelming percentage and one that shows that the system works. Of course, the Council, Commission and Parliament all made a huge effort to ensure its success in practice, otherwise it would have been dropped.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] Looking at it from another perspective, what are the benefits of the practical application of co-decision for European citizens as a whole?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] I think the practical benefits are that the institutions are growing accustomed to seeking a consensus. This was already becoming the case with the consultation and cooperation procedures, but co-decision makes it an absolute necessity, meaning that the mentality of one institution imposing its view on another is giving way to cooperation between them, to working together for the common interest. The co-decision procedure strengthens this process and encourages the mindset of needing to work together and come to an agreement right from the outset. To the extent that some co-decision procedures don't get as far as the first reading, i.e. by the time of the first reading, an agreement has sometimes been reached on the main points.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] Staying on the subject of the practical workings of the European Parliament, what is your view of the 'Santer procedure' or 'Question Time'?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] The 'Santer procedure', which was introduced during my presidency, had and has a great advantage. Firstly, it is live, meaning that Parliament finds out in real time about Commission decisions, and secondly, it's very animated — it's not as rigid as other parliamentary procedures, enabling backbenchers to participate spontaneously without first having to pass through the filter of their political group, which makes for a lively debate. It's a tricky debate for the President, who needs to have good advisors around him or her and fairly quick reactions, but it's very rewarding.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] Let's move onto your role as President. I'd like to hear a little about the powers and specific duties of the President of the European Parliament.

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] The President of the European Parliament has to serve everybody. I always use the French expression *une bonne à tout faire*, because he or she has to do a bit of everything: not just to preside over the most important sittings, but also to take care of parliamentary discipline, to look after the internal administrative side of Parliament's work and, therefore, to be aware of everything from the needs of a specific MEP to the schedule of visits and sittings, etc. At the same time, the President has an important diplomatic role, because the European Parliament has many dealings not only with other parliaments but also with other countries. The President has to make many official visits and receive foreign representatives at the highest level — I still remember some of them, of course — so he or she represents Parliament to the outside world, giving press conferences and television interviews and making speeches at the beginning of each European Council, which involves somehow putting across Parliament's position on the main issues of the day, summarising what MEPs are saying and conveying the majority view and not his or her own ideas. In short, the President never stops.

6. Euro-Mediterranean policy and European immigration policy

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] I would like to turn now to a very different subject and to change geographical direction. You mentioned and referred to the Euro-Mediterranean policy as 'one of the main pillars of our external policy'. How do you think it should be implemented in future, now that there is so much emphasis on Euro-Mediterranean relations?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] Well, I think that the European Union has more or less reached its limit in terms of the new members it can incorporate, but it should establish very special relations with its neighbours: on the one hand, the neighbourhood policy is specifically directed towards the East and, on the other, one aspect of neighbourhood policy is the Euro-Mediterranean policy. These are the regions from which we were invaded throughout our history, so it is in our interests that they are well developed and prosperous and enjoy good relations with the European Union. The Mediterranean, like the East, is now an area of peaceful immigration — the peaceful invasion of the present time. As such, it is the subject of a Community policy. I think we have managed to avoid the Union for the Mediterranean becoming a process solely for the European countries on the Mediterranean. It is a process with implications for the entire Community and in which all the countries of the Community should participate. Secondly, it's a process that will take a great deal of time, because we have a situation where the Union is an integrated whole, with a highly evolved civil society, whereas neither of these conditions are in place for the countries south of the Mediterranean: they do not form an integrated whole, have no interest in integration and have only a fledgling civil society, which means that relations are unstable. They can be improved with this or that Mediterranean country, but it's difficult to build on them with these countries as a whole.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] What attitude and measures do you think should be adopted with regard to the emigration you mentioned from the countries south of the Mediterranean? And in this context, could you say something about the creation of a 'migrant card', which you proposed during your term as President of the European Parliament.

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] Immigration policy is a sensitive one, because it's caught between two needs. Firstly, Europe needs immigration — we will still need at least 20 million immigrants over the next decade, which is easily said. Yet on the other hand, these immigrants need to be integrated, otherwise they will return to their countries of origin — though the majority do not — so they must be integrated. And this is a tricky process, in which it is still too early to speak of

any great success. Instead, the avalanche of immigrants is provoking very strong grass-roots opposition, with the risk of xenophobia or outbreaks of xenophobia and racism in European countries — today nobody is in a position to preach, because we have all suffered or are all suffering from this situation to a greater or lesser extent. We therefore need to act while maintaining this difficult balance: integrating immigrants while attempting to regulate the flow to prevent an overload. We're tackling it using trial and error. We must wait and see whether we have any success, but it will be difficult. You asked me about the migrant card: it would be of crucial value for integration, but it's also crucial that it is not conceived as an empty gesture; the card must be given to people who have been in the European Union for some time and who are acquainted with it, to those with a real desire to integrate, and various systems are being trialled in different countries to verify the existence of this desire to integrate. If both conditions are met — a sufficiently lengthy period of residence and the desire to integrate — the card should grant immigrants the same opportunities for travel, work and association that Europeans enjoy.

7. The boundaries of the European project and the pace of European integration

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] You mentioned that Europe is reaching its limit. What, in your opinion, are the geographic boundaries of the European project?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] I believe that Europe's geographic boundaries begin with the Finnish border and run along those of the Baltic countries, Poland, Slovakia and Romania; everything to the west of there is the European Union. The Balkan countries will require a greater or lesser amount of time, with some countries acceding before others, but ultimately they will probably all get there, for the sake of our own peace of mind as Europeans and the stability of the region. With the other countries we can and should develop close relations. President Prodi's motto of 'everything but the institutions' is important in this regard, because a Union cannot be stretched to the point of growing indefinitely and we have, I believe, reached the limit of our financial and institutional capacity.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] Going back to the workings of the institutions, how has the gradual shift in the balance of power between the Council, Commission and European Parliament affected the pace of European integration itself?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] European integration began with an all-powerful Commission, because it was integration of a technical nature, in the form of the ECSC, with a swift transition to an all-powerful Council and a Commission that safeguarded the common interest and championed progress in this regard. And then the European Parliament gradually entered the picture, in particular with the introduction of election by universal suffrage, and its power has been increasing all the time by its own momentum, meaning that, while Parliament's power has been growing, so, too, has its awareness of this power. This means that, as it has been exerting this power, it has become conscious of the power and possibilities at its disposal, which has altered the balance between the institutions, so that, today, Parliament and the Council are virtually on an equal footing. Formally, there is very little left to be achieved, but now that the political power is evenly shared and the Commission has begun to perform a different role, the very important role of initiative (of acting to ensure the common interest, for which it is specifically empowered), Parliament will increasingly have to take on the work still performed by the Council, namely the exercise of the Union's external policy.

8. The European Parliament's power of scrutiny, differentiated integration and the relationship between the public and the institutions from the point of view of transparency and communication

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] In terms of the power of scrutiny, to which you personally attach so much importance, what is your opinion of the European Parliament's role in this regard?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] I believe that, over the last two centuries, parliaments have ceased to be chiefly legislative bodies and have become instruments of scrutiny. Why? Because parliaments today fit into a context of a political party system and the European Parliament, too, is increasingly taking its place with a political party system. This system and that of parliamentary discipline means that within parliament political positions are negotiated, but it is not a place in which debate succeeds in changing the convictions of those taking part. These days, parliamentary debate is aimed at the people and makes public the positions of various groupings and the reasons behind the agreements reached — that is the basic purpose of parliamentary debate today. A parliament is therefore a place in which political consensus is achieved and broadcast. However, it also fulfils a very important role: that of scrutinising the executive. And the European Parliament has great scope in this regard, precisely because party discipline is not as strict or as strong as in the Member States and their parliaments. The European Parliament is more akin to the United States Parliament, where there are two parties, but within which there is huge room for manoeuvre for individual parliamentarians or for parliamentarians in specific areas. And the same is true of the European Parliament; in this sense, it is more similar to Congress than to the national parliaments.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] I would now like to ask you about a very complex issue, that of European citizens' identification with the Community institutions. How do you explain the apparent contradiction of a parliament with increased powers, greater representativeness, but a lower turnout among European voters in the European Parliament elections?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] I think that there are two factors at play: firstly, Europeans are less and less interested in a traditional form of politics, although we need to wait and see what happens with the new electronic developments that are boosting awareness and participation — the election of Obama was very significant in this respect — with the new forms of involving citizens. However, so far, turnout remains low in both the United States and Europe. Voters are used to saying: 'I vote from time to time on what is on offer', and since they're not always satisfied with what is on offer, well they may decide to vote or not to vote. Secondly, the European institutions are remote — new, remote and relatively unknown — and don't represent the traditional model with which citizens have been acquainted from an early age in their own country, which is that in place in their Member State or region, where applicable, or even, to a certain extent, their town hall. The institutions seem far away and because of this distance they tend to disconnect.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] In this regard, do you think that the policies of transparency in administrative procedures are managing to awaken citizens' interest in the institutions a little?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] I think there are two separate sensibilities in Europe.

There is the Nordic sensibility, for which transparency is fundamental; if there's no transparency in administrative procedures, etc., it is not real democracy. With central and southern Europeans, this sensibility is not so evident. They are very different — this is a continent of 500 million people who think very differently: someone from the Netherlands, Sweden or Finland will be very concerned with knowing the ins and outs of public bodies; someone from France or Germany will be relatively unconcerned; and a Spaniard or Italian will frequently take the view that these institutions are not worth knowing about, as they're corrupt, so what is the point of worrying about it? So the answer to your question varies depending on which part of Europe people live in.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] Which means that we should, perhaps, construct a differentiated communication policy. From your point of view, would it be appropriate to tailor it to citizens by region or by sector?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] I think that is what is happening, because in reality journalists differ in each region of Europe. It was journalists — I don't know whether they were Dutch or Swedish — who were the first to kick up a fuss about whether MEPs signed the attendance list. Journalists from the founding countries or those that had joined up to that point had never worried about who did or didn't sign the lists. From that moment on, there has been differentiated information, but, as is always the way in Europe, there is a great advantage, which is that of imitation, meaning that the southern countries are copying and, to some extent, assimilating this Nordic culture of transparency within public institutions and in scrutiny of them. And not only the southern countries. One example is what happened in the United Kingdom with MPs' expenses. This, I think, reflects the expansion throughout Europe of the Nordic vision of transparency and clarity in institutions.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] You mentioned earlier, when talking about the duties and powers of the President of the European Parliament, your involvement in an important report in connection with the signing of the Treaty of Nice on enhanced cooperation and the selective application of Community policies, etc. What, in this regard, was your position on the idea of differentiated integration and what is your view of it now?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] Differentiated integration is a mechanism that has always existed and been necessary in Europe, because we have all gone through transition periods — some lasting as long as 20 years — in which we have taken up one policy but not another, because we were not in a position to do so. And at present, the countries that joined in the most recent rounds of enlargement are in this position. I think that enhanced cooperation is an option that helps the most determined countries to press ahead with a step and to show the others that this step is necessary and worthwhile. No form of enhanced cooperation in the official sense has been necessary so far — it has taken place under treaties, which haven't referred to it in this way, firstly with the Social Chapter and later with the euro, meaning that this arrangement was already in place under the treaties, but it is part of the same thinking. And enhanced cooperation can take place and is taking place, for instance — without being referred to by this name — in the Union's foreign and security policy. Not all countries are taking part in all the Union's missions — in Darfur or Atalanta … They are participating in different ways, but this allows a great deal of flexibility and enables policies to go ahead before being extended to all countries at a later point.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] Moving to a very different subject — what do you think is the relationship today between public opinion and the perception of the legitimacy of the European

project and its institutions?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] I think that public opinion senses the need for the European Union and, ultimately, Europe is advancing overall and its parliaments reflect that fact, even when a referendum is held and the result is ‘no’ — the opinions of those saying ‘no’ are so diverse! And among these people, almost nobody is saying, ‘I don’t want Europe’; the vast majority of ‘no’ votes are saying, ‘I want a different Europe’. There is therefore a general need for unification in one way or another. And this must be conveyed to the institutions. I don’t think the legitimacy of the institutions per se is at issue. What is at issue is how they work and how they serve people. In this regard, there are wide-ranging opinions within the Union and there is also overwhelming ignorance — people don’t know what many of these institutions are for. And as people don’t know what they’re for, they don’t even have an opinion as to whether or not they’re of any worth.

9. The introduction of the euro in Spain

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] One of the subjects that has provoked and continues to provoke the most debate is the introduction of the euro, the single currency. What do you think are the power and the political and sociological effects of the introduction of the euro, as well as its symbolic power for the European integration process?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] The euro was a huge step forward towards European integration, which was taken as smoothly as possible, meaning that there were some protests about possible price rises but, in practice, the euro became the common currency without any resistance. To the extent that it is pointless to talk to my grandchildren about pesetas, because they don’t know what they are; for them, their currency has always been the euro. In addition, for many people, the euro has been a way of maintaining a level of monetary stability that numerous countries have never known. It was nothing new in Germany, Luxembourg or the Netherlands, but Spain, Italy, France even and Belgium, they had to get used to the entirely new situation of living with a currency that doesn’t devalue, and that has a been a positive new discovery. In this crisis, moreover, there have been two important revelations: firstly, the euro has served as a defence against the crisis. The crisis would undoubtedly have been much worse for everyone without the euro, and Europeans are aware of this fact. And secondly, a fact that is starting to emerge now, the euro ultimately makes us dependent on each other. What is happening in Greece was the first realisation that a country in the European Union was struggling, that everybody was struggling in some part of their economy. And it’s taken a lot for us to realise that; we’re just beginning to take it on board now. That means that we cannot afford to let a European Union Member State suffer a serious crisis without stepping in to help, because that would mean cutting off our nose to spite our face, damaging our own currency, which is fundamental to us. So the euro is a powerful instrument of solidarity that we hadn’t noticed until now.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] You have said that the euro — or its introduction — is a more effective way of exercising sovereignty and also serves as a means of ensuring the sustainability of a general level of well-being. Could you expand on these ideas a little?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] Yes. Why is it a way of exercising sovereignty? My good friend and colleague at Parliament, Fernand Herman, always used to say that the Bank of Belgium was sovereign in monetary matters, but for 20 minutes: the amount of time it took for the exchange

rate for the Belgian franc to adjust to that for the Deutschmark. For the rest, it wasn't 20 minutes, but it was no more than a few hours or days. However, a currency shared by all makes it possible and necessary to solve problems mutually; it forces us to exercise shared sovereignty that we would not otherwise have with regard to the rest of the world. Now that they have the euro, Europeans can say to Mr Soros, 'Don't try speculating, because we won't let you speculate with the euro.' None of the individual currencies could have stood up to Mr Soros and, in fact, he made a great deal of money through speculation, because they didn't have the power — they had theoretical but not real sovereignty. And not being subject to these fluctuations also obliges us to be far more careful in how we manage our budgetary and fiscal matters: the euro prevents excesses. It is not that they cannot occur; they do — we've seen it in certain European countries — but, in the long term, the others have to say: 'You can't do that, because it affects all of us.' So it limits excesses and helps to ensure general well-being. I'm trying to explain it so that it is comprehensible — I could put it in far more scientific and economic terms, but, aside from the fact I'm not an economist, I think it's more important for people to understand.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] What has been the specific relationship between the European Parliament and the European Central Bank?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] The Central Bank is an independent institution and Parliament has always respected this independence, while taking advantage of the difficulties surrounding the appointment of the first President, Wim Duisenberg, and the possibilities afforded by his hearing before Parliament to obtain from him a promise that both he and his successor have honoured scrupulously, which was to keep Parliament informed of all the European Central Bank's decisions and strategies: it's what we could call scrutiny by means of information and publicity. Making public these strategies and decisions means that they must be well-founded and cannot be adopted behind closed doors without any explanation as to what has been done. They must be explained and must therefore be reasonable and for the common good. So the relationship between Parliament and the Central Bank is based on respect for the latter's independence but also on accountability.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] What specific impact has the introduction of the euro had in the countries of southern Europe, in particular in terms of job creation?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] In the countries of southern Europe …

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] Yes, in those that joined the Union in 1981 and 1986 …

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] I think the euro has obliged them to adopt a more sound, less inflationary economic policy. And when a less inflationary policy is adopted, this boosts economic growth and economic growth boosts job creation. It's no coincidence that, in Spain, the consolidation effort required to join the euro — which was on an extraordinary scale and comparable to the one we will have to make to emerge from the current crisis, when we really put our minds to doing that — resulted in a level of job creation never before known, because this effort lends credibility to economic and budgetary policies. And credibility and responsibility attract investment, which is, in turn, instantly reflected in the creation of jobs.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] In Spain's particular case, how well has the Stability Pact worked, in your view?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] From what I've said, you can infer that the Stability Pact worked very well as long as we adhered to it, i.e. during the eight years of the two Aznar governments and the first Zapatero government, in which it was adequately respected. When crisis hit and we attempted to run away from it and began to deviate from the Stability Pact, then it obviously worked badly, and not only is the crisis not easing, not only are we not emerging from it, but it is getting worse.

10. The principle of solidarity and the plan for a European Constitution

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] You have described the concept of solidarity as being at the heart of the Union, as a key component of the European integration process: can you say a little more on this subject?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] Well, it's not an idea thought up by me. It was an idea expressed very clearly by Helmut Kohl and which I am convinced is valid. Why? Because the European Union means substituting confrontation with understanding. It was the inspired idea of Jean Monnet: instead of fighting, we're going to get along and work together. To work together and get along, it's necessary to assume responsibility for each other, and that is solidarity. It makes us responsible for one another, because you cannot work together benefiting yourself while others are suffering; you can work together only if both parties gain from this common endeavour and this common understanding and that is the basis of the European Union. It is what differentiates it from a marketplace in which everyone is out to secure the best price for his or her products and nothing more. No, in the European Union it is about mutual gain, and that's solidarity; it's the guiding principle, and anybody who doesn't understand that doesn't understand the European Union. And there are still countries that don't understand that and must finally begin to accept it. Those that can gain are those that gain together or not at all: that is solidarity. This requires everybody to give and not just to take.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] One of the greatest challenges recently facing the European Union was the initiative to produce a Constitution for Europe. You took part in the Convention procedure, which you described as 'open, transparent and pluralist'. It could be said that the Constitutional Treaty venture was a milestone, including in terms of its overall visibility as an initiative that sought to address major outstanding issues of European Union integration, such as the binding nature of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, the simplification of the treaties, transparency and the Communitarisation of the area of freedom, security and justice. What was your experience of the Convention?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] Well, yes, I would like all that to be achieved through a convention, but it seems improbable. Following the arduous adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, I think we will have at least 10 years in which there are no substantial changes to the treaties. What will take place is a development of the treaties and an adaptation of them in practice; that is happening

already. In practice, we are learning how to bridge one of the largest gaps in the Lisbon Treaty, which is the economic governance of Europe, i.e. how we can ensure much better economic cooperation than purely intergovernmental cooperation, and here we are experimenting and searching. Similarly, we will have to see how we can conduct a common external policy in certain areas, or a security and justice policy; we will find ourselves in a period in which the reality will be the development and consolidation of the treaty. So it will be a decade in which we will have a constitution in practice, which in reality is a Union treaty, but not a formal constitution. When will that change? I don't have a crystal ball. I think that once we have solved the problems I mentioned and when we've addressed the financial and budgetary problem, i.e. after 2014, when we will have no excuse not to deal with the Union's boundaries — the issues of Turkey and Ukraine — and will have to tackle the question of a formal constitution, but I repeat that this could take 10 years.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] You stated that the Constitutional Treaty would help to make the European Union 'the first transnational democracy in international society in the age of globalisation'. Given your determination, above all, to introduce for citizens a fundamental pillar of the European Union, and your defence of the European social model, how do you think objectives of this kind have been pursued since the result of the referendums in France and the Netherlands and the entry into force of the present Lisbon Treaty?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] I think the arrival of the Lisbon Treaty brings with it some instruments that must be developed and at a crucial moment, that of the economic crisis. The economic crisis is a challenge for Europe, because it means that the model that, for a while, people wanted to introduce in place of the European social model, which was the North American model, based heavily on a self-regulating market, is in crisis. It's in crisis in the United States itself and in the rest of the world, meaning that the European Union has to return to its social model, which is one of Rhineland capitalism and not capitalism in the style of Milton Friedman or Mrs Thatcher, a capitalism that entails far greater social protection and regulatory intervention by the state. We have instruments under the Lisbon Treaty, but now and over the next few years is the time to deploy them. This will be the difference between emerging from the crisis in a healthy fashion and applying a stopgap solution.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] You have referred to the United States' Constitution as the constitutional ideal, including for Europe. Do you think it's the model towards which the European Union should move?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] No. We're very different. Historically, in terms of our formation, and, in practice, in terms of the nature of the population of the United States and that of Europe. They are different. The United States has a huge advantage, which is that it chose to start out with a constitution, something that Europeans couldn't do, because the federalists in favour of doing so understood that it was in vain; they failed because it was in vain, which is why the functionalist or Monnet model of 'successive steps' was selected. In this sense, having a constitution is a great ideal and we should not lose sight of it, but we need to reconcile it with the historical possibilities. Now we have lost an opportunity. These opportunities cannot be championed on a day-to-day basis. We only need recall the struggle in 1979 led by Altiero Spinelli and, in that case, we had to wait 20 years for the European Convention. So it is nothing to wait another 10 or 15 years to relaunch the European constitutional project.

11. European cultural heritage and the fundamental elements of a common European identity

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] How would you define the European cultural acquis and, accordingly, the notion of a common European identity?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] European identity has a particular feature that is reflected in the motto that was, if I am not mistaken, coined by some schoolchildren in Luxembourg, namely 'united in diversity'. The first time I heard it was in a Europe-wide competition organised by a French newspaper (*La Tribune de l'Ouest)* while I was President [of the European Parliament], and it was children at a school in Luxembourg that suggested 'united in diversity'; so there is a common identity, but one that is made up of different identities, and that has been the case for centuries. For centuries, Europe has had a shared cultural identity — without it European unification could not have begun. Some say, 'you have to begin with the cultural', but it did begin with the cultural! It began with Greece and was followed by a cultural identity that carried on developing throughout the centuries. Don't tell Voltaire or da Vinci that we need a European cultural identity — we have one! But it is composed of separate cultural identities and that has always been the case. And we have to maintain this duality, which makes it particularly difficult to recognise this identity. It was recognised as such when Europe had a common language, when all of Europe spoke Latin — then it was evident. Even during the Renaissance itself, when every cultivated European spoke Latin, as did university scholars, and, later on, during the Enlightenment when the language of the educated was French. Well, now there is no common language in cultural circles, although English is asserting itself. But without a common language, this identity won't be visible.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] What are your views with regard to the language policy of the European institutions and the development of a common language of communication? Is it English, as you pointed out?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] I don't have the least doubt. I have seen in 15 years how English has risen as the lingua franca in the European institutions. French is still used, but it's losing ground. When a group of academics meets to select the Jean Monnet chairs, they usually communicate in English. Some still speak French, but Europe's enlargement to the East, more than anything, has given English a boost on an unanticipated scale, with neither German nor French able to resist the rise of English. As a result, learning English as a second language is more or less essential. It would be even better if Europeans could learn another language as well, because it would be a means of preserving the linguistic wealth Europe enjoys and which is of the utmost importance. When I travel in Europe and visit a country whose language I understand and can give a lecture in that language, the effect is completely different from that obtained if I have no choice but to give it in English or French. Completely different.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] How could a Community policy be envisaged that is based on what you refer to as a general understanding of education as a meeting point for Europeans?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] On the one hand, we have the Bologna process. I said last Thursday in Pavia that the impact of European integration on education has been to make us smarten up our act. We have begun to make comparisons and to look at the problems our students have had and have when they enter the outside world and start work. And that is a good stimulus and will lead to a fair amount of harmonisation. This is a very slow process: Europe has 7000 universities or higher education establishments. For all of them to be aligned to a certain standard is

a process that will take a long time. Bologna was conceived for a period of 10 years and has been renewed for another 10. We will have to see whether this results in adequate alignment. And if we look at secondary or primary education, there are countless establishments, so it is a fundamental task for Europe, but one that will probably take a great many years to complete.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] What is your view on the teaching of a shared European history?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] When I arrived at Parliament, there was talk in the Culture Committee [Committee on Youth, Culture, Education, the Media and Sport] of making a first attempt at a common European history. One attempt had been made and it wasn't bad, except for one small detail: it omitted Greece. And, of course, this rendered the entire effort invalid. Since then, further attempts have been made and should continue to be made. Until it begins to be dealt with in primary and secondary education, which is where this common European history is lacking, a great deal of political will and effort will be required, because there are countries like Spain that are, at present, attempting to teach 'the history of my village', rather than a shared European history, and 'my village' can sometimes be very small and so fails to provide a European perspective. We can move from that towards realising that we are in a larger European area, but it will take hard work and political will.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] What role can new information and communication technologies play in this regard, both in terms of creating a common European curriculum and, going back to an earlier topic, increasing democratic participation?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] I think we're experimenting: there are possibilities, and huge ones at that, but we're experimenting with ways of applying them in practice and some achievements have already been made. As an academic, I have the opportunity to work on a joint project with university lecturers in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland that we are going to carry out in the next academic year, because I have an IT system that enables my centre of excellence to link up with these other centres of excellence, otherwise it would be impossible. And when, on occasion, I wish to seek the opinion of the University Council for the Jean Monnet Project on certain matters, I can contact people there by electronic mail and they reply, and this means that we can hold virtual meetings that could not otherwise take place. We now need to establish the requirements for using these channels to obtain measurable opinions, in particular in the field of political participation. We need to combine two things: the spontaneity of participation and the conversion of this participation into opinions that are measurable. It is in the latter regard that we have our work cut out.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] How could this second aspect develop in practice?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] I think that this aspect is starting to be developed because of the interest politicians and civil society organisations have in ensuring that citizens participate and voice their opinions. Next we will need to establish a system for filtering these opinions: there's no point carrying out any old survey; a momentary opinion is no use and it should be borne in mind that democracy needs time, meaning that a political action cannot be assessed from day to day; it must be evaluated from one period to the next, so that the readiness with which opinions and assessments are issued should be adjusted to the amount of time needed to be able to take decisions. This second aspect is the part that we have yet to develop, to invent. But let's be grateful that there's

something left to invent.

12. The European Union as a parliamentary model

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] Could you explain in more detail this idea of Europe as a parliamentary model? It sounded very interesting.

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] Yes. I have been looking, for instance, at a very specific question: how the Commission President is appointed in comparison with the procedure for appointing the heads of government in the Member States. Initially, the President was appointed by the European Council, with Parliament gradually becoming more involved subsequently. First of all, a consultation period was held with Parliament, with the appointment continuing to be made by the European Council but subject to the consultation of Parliament. Then, after Maastricht, a vote had to be held in Parliament to elect the Commission President and Commissioners. The advance made with the Lisbon Treaty was the official recognition of a practice applied in the Member States, namely that the election results have to be taken into account when appointing the Commission President. The same is true of the Member States: the parliamentary majority has to be taken into consideration in the talks conducted by the head of state to nominate a candidate for Prime Minister and, subsequently, to appoint an elected Prime Minister. This is the procedure that has been followed for the formation of a parliamentary government and the one the European Union has followed. It is the procedure followed by the Commission, moving from a situation of independence with regard to Parliament to a situation where it is functionally independent of but politically dependent on Parliament. And this has been reflected since Romano Prodi's time — and as a consequence of the fall of the Santer Commission — in an agreement with Parliament applicable for the term in question, and an agreement relating to the second Barroso Commission is currently under consideration that is the same as for the first, for interparliamentary relations, which guarantees this good relationship and parliamentary dependence. The movement has therefore been towards a parliamentary system. One unknown remains, about which there has been no opportunity to write, because it has just materialised, which is Van Rompuy's proposal to turn the European Council into a body that meets on a monthly basis. What will its role be? That of a body that isn't legislative, that merely instigates but instigates on a monthly basis? What does that mean? Will it make the other institutions its instruments? It will be difficult and there will be some upsets. This is an unknown factor to look out for. However, with the exception of this one matter, the Community system has been moving ever more in line with a parliamentary or constitutional system.

13. Spain's role in relations between Latin America and the European Union and the integration processes taking place on the subcontinent

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] You have proposed — which struck me as very interesting and unusual — a supranational integration method for the countries of Latin America, which is based on cross-border political parties, the involvement of the subcontinent's non-governmental organisations and special cooperation between the European Parliament and national parliaments of Latin America, in particular at summits, given that this type of event marks an opportunity for forging special ties in the context of Europe's overall vision of relations between Europe and Latin America, with Spain as mediator. I wonder whether you could explain to us in more detail the nature of these proposals and their potential results.

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] Well, when I put forward this proposal, it looked as though Mercosur would prove successful, the Andean Community was taking shape and peace had been achieved in Central America, which meant that relations could be developed with that region. The idea was for regional integration to take place in various parts of Latin America, with full integration the ultimate aim, if possible, but, in any case, the idea was to begin with large-scale regional integration. However, events got in the way: first of all, Mercosur ran into huge difficulties, in view of the position of Argentina and Paraguay regarding Venezuela's admission to Mercosur. As a result, Mercosur is deadlocked at present. The Andean Community was turned upside down by the arrival of Morales, Correa and Chávez, meaning that it is now the case that Peru and Colombia are concluding individual agreements and the concept of the Andean Community is going nowhere. The Central American community appears to be staying afloat, given that what happened in Nicaragua with Ortega was not repeated in Honduras, and it seems possible, somehow or other, that a special agreement will be concluded with Central America that will enable a further step to be taken towards integration, but the truth is that, since I made this proposal, things have been moving backwards rather than forwards — we must recognise that. We have to hope that the highly contagious Bolivarian socialism ceases to spread and passes in time, like all bouts of populism in Latin America, that Argentina finally casts off the vestiges of Peronism — which are very prominent still — and aligns itself with the general world trends, and that Mexico succeeds in strengthening its democracy against violence, because Mexico has made a lot of progress, but needs to consolidate it. So if these three conditions are met we can try again, but until then we are dealing in pure rhetoric.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] What has Spain's role been in general, not only in relation to the integration of the subcontinent but also with regard to the mediation we referred to between the European Union and Latin America?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] For Spain, joining the European Union has enabled it to communicate with Latin America and conduct its relations with it in a credible manner, by leaving behind the imperial rhetoric and the idea of a single language and culture, and also making some important economic contributions and serving as an example to Latin America in terms of political transition and integration within a supranational whole. And that has afforded us great opportunities: for Spain, one of the key benefits of European integration was the opportunities it has given us for expansion in Latin America — let's not be coy — economically and culturally. The problem resides in the fact that this task is very much subject to the state of relations as a whole. And to the fact that Spain must be clear about what it is doing: its dealings with Latin America cannot diverge from those of Europe as a whole, because in that case they would count for nothing; they must reflect the European Union's general approach. Spain is able to influence this approach, of course, and it has exerted considerable influence from within the European Parliament and the European Council, but it must go with the bloc. There is no point in our signing up to some form of Bolivarian socialism; that would be treated with ridicule by the rest of Europe and by the Latin Americans themselves.

14. The role of the autonomous communities in the European integration process

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] At the same time, I would also like to know what you consider to have been the role of the regions, or in Spain's case, the autonomous communities, in the European integration process.

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] The autonomous communities put their faith in the European Union, some of them thinking that there would ultimately be a Europe of the Regions. I hope they realise that the Europe of the Regions is achieved *through* the states and not *in spite of* them, but their work has been very important, because the autonomous communities bring Europe closer to the citizen. And they have all involved themselves in an integrationist spirit, irrespective of their political stance.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] From that point of view, do you believe that the principle of subsidiarity is what lends European citizens their identity, that identity always corresponds most closely to the most basic geographic unit and that the two go together? How do you see it?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] Yes, using the term 'principle of subsidiarity' is an elevated and sophisticated way of saying 'what the citizen is aware of'. Citizens know who the mayor of their town is, what his or her weaknesses are, whether they like him or her and whether or not they should vote for him or her and are directly aware of the mayor's political doings. Next, they will be concerned with what is happening in their autonomous community, because that is ultimately who runs the hospital and their children's school and provides a series of services that affect them directly. Then there is the state, which seems more remote, before we even get to the European Union, except in the case of farmers. Farmers are the only ones to whom the European Union does not seem remote, because they know that the price of what they have sown depends on Brussels.

15. Spain's contribution to European integration and the personal significance of Europe

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] In this regard, how do you view enlargement in terms of the wider channelling of funding that has thus far been directed in particular at the autonomous communities, the Spanish regions, including from the point of view of solidarity, to which such importance is attached?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] We haven't fully grasped the situation. From my point of view, it would be great and I would be very happy if Spaniards continued to be as pro-European in seven or eight years when we are contributing money instead of receiving it. I'm not at all sure of that, but I think it's important. And it's important that in seven or eight years we realise that these countries are beginning to be of benefit to us, i.e. that they are not only countries that send us construction workers but which consume our products and also bring us great wealth and prosperity.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] You have mentioned many contributions that Spain has made to the European integration process, including the idea of cohesion, but what do you consider Spain's main contributions to this process to have been?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] I think one of them was, in fact, the idea of cohesion, which is a means of reflecting solidarity. Another was the idea of European citizenship and one of its instruments, the European Ombudsman, which was an important Spanish undertaking. And generally speaking, I think Spain has benefited the European Union with its enthusiasm, which was lacking. For many Europeans, it was something of a surprise to discover the enthusiasm with which

Spain joined the European Union and that it was capable of taking steps such as joining the euro, which they had not expected.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] What do you think are the roots of this enthusiasm, this pro-Europeanism — something often attributed to Spain? What is its basis?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] On the one hand, it is seen as an aspect of democracy, and on the other, for Spaniards it goes back to a time when we were very isolated, when we withdrew to our quarters and were shut away with our thoughts and misfortune, and then we returned to the company of others and that was an enjoyable sensation. And it gave us the feeling of being part of a family, of not being the odd one out.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] And from a personal point of view, as an exile, how was it to return to the European fold?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] It was the culmination of an important political ideal. No, 'culmination' is wrong; it was a major step towards achieving a political ideal, because we are only halfway towards achieving European integration: we have taken 60 years and in historical terms 60 years is nothing, but we have the advantage of having seen important progress made and of having been able to contribute, which is satisfying.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] Could you tell me a little more about your academic and intellectual output in the form of various legal works related, above all, to the restoration of democracy in Spain and public and parliamentary law in Europe?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] Well, in terms of the restoration of democracy in Spain, certain issues interested me in particular: during the pre-democratic stage, I was interested in the subjects of the right to strike and trade union rights, because these were necessary for the introduction of the new system, so I wrote about them. Later, when the transition period began, I produced some constitutional commentaries with particular emphasis on the system of autonomous communities, including a book entitled *Control y Autonomías* [*Scrutiny and Autonomy*] about the functioning of our political system from the point of view of the mutual scrutiny of institutions. And when it came to the European process, I was most interested in interinstitutional relations. Well, I was interested more than anything in the problems that I faced as President [of the European Parliament], naturally. And I had to deal with all the questions that were topical in Europe and, as I followed closely the issues relating to enlargement and constitutionalisation, I wrote about these the most. However, in recent times, I have concentrated specifically on something that is important to me: what is the nature of the European political model? Is ours a parliamentary model or not? How have the institutions' relations altered? Has there been a move towards a parliamentary model, as I believe, or have we moved towards a completely different model? I have published work on these questions in various places and have been refining my reflections and observations.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] In conclusion, I would like to refer to the title of one of your books — *Pasión de Europa* [*A Passion for Europe*], which I think describes the feeling that connects you most personally to the idea of Europe. In this regard, what does this idea mean to you and what has it meant throughout your life, and what are the principles and ventures you would like to leave as a legacy for the future, as a demonstration of this commitment to the process of European integration?

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] *Pasión de Europa*, what does that mean? It means ultimately feeling the same sense of belonging with regard to the European Union as in relation to your homeland and the country of your childhood. It is that feeling of patriotism that is easy to say but difficult to describe; it is a form of European patriotism, a patriotism for something that is in progress. I would like Spaniards gradually to begin to feel this type of patriotism. Firstly, because it relativises nationalism — Spanish nationalism and nationalism in the various parts of Spain — making it less absolute and more able to serve relations with others. And I think that, for a country as brittle and as prone to tension as ours, it is much needed. We need to see that you can be European in very different ways and these do not make some worse than others, only different, but that we can also have a great many things in common. I would like this idea to take hold in Spain. Well, I have helped to cover a stretch of this journey, just as my father completed a stretch of this journey and just as others will come along and travel a further part of it. It is the reason for teaching at university, for publishing and for giving lectures; it means explaining to people that this is a long but scenic road and that it is a road that will ultimately lead us as Spaniards to a better quality of life.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] Thank you very much for your contribution, from which we have learnt so much; it has been very instructive and has also alerted us to challenges of which we were unaware. Your testimony leaves the path clear for the new challenges facing a Europe on which you have left a clear mark and we hope — since this is a process of ever-continuing progress — to be able to continue this work, thanks to people like you, who have left an important legacy in the context of European integration. Thank you very much.

[José María Gil-Robles y Gil-Delgado] Thank you, also.