

Margaret Thatcher, Champion of Freedom, by José María Aznar [El Mundo, 09.04.13]

In 2010, I had the pleasure and the honour to present the II FAES Freedom Award to Margaret Thatcher. She is, without a doubt, worthy of this award and of any other one which has to do with freedom: her life was a constant boost of freedom. As a woman and as a political leader, to see gender equality a reality; as a liberal, to establish an open and competitive economy and to save on the taxpayers' wallet; as an anti-statist, she was an advocate of the individuals' capability to act and decide, both men and women.

Unfortunately, when I saw Margaret Thatcher at her residence in London, she was not the same woman I had met for the first time in September 1990, in a meeting of the European Democrat Union. Thatcher, a leader who used to hobnob with the US President Ronald Reagan and pushed for a democratic change in the East of Europe in addition to dominating the political scene within the European Union with determination, conviction, and intelligence, was now severely struck by her illness.

When Margaret Thatcher rose to power in 1979, she was doing much more than just becoming the first female Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. She was laying the foundations of a conservative revolution which will go down in history as the revolution of freedom. Contrary to the widespread perception which heralded the inexorable decline of the United Kingdom, she managed to clearly detect the elements which were dragging down the country, and, through a reform of a stagnated and ossified economy, she was able to bring down every obstacle that got in the path of modernization and was able to once again place the United Kingdom in the first rank of the economic field at an international level. She faced the mining trade unions in a direct manner, and managed to subdue them after two years of wild strikes. She believed that these were hindrances of the past, and, with firmness and resiliency, she succeeded in putting them back in their proper places.

She was, like me, a victim of a terrorist attack. However, Thatcher did not waver from her battle against terror, not even at a very difficult time in Northern Ireland with the hunger strikes carried out by a series of convicts from the terrorist group IRA. Her moral clarity allowed her to differentiate unequivocally between good and evil and between friends and foes, against whom she was ruthless, but always with respect for legality. I've always admired her for this and I applied this philosophy during my time in office. Her rejection of the policies of appeasement and her refusal to negotiate with terrorists became a milestone in the conflict of Northern Ireland.

Thatcher was also an heir of the Atlantism left by one of the greatest political leaders of the United Kingdom, Sir Winston Churchill. She believed that leaving the United States to fend for themselves was not the right move and therefore, always strove to work side by side with Ronald Reagan. The reinforcement and the strengthening of the Atlantic bond were the keys to augmenting the

importance of Europe, whilst also being the best alternative to provide peace and stability to the rest of the world. Margaret Thatcher is usually branded as anti-Europeanist. However, that's not true. It's just that she did not agree with the socialist state-led vision of the so-called process of European construction. She believed in and endorsed a Europe that was open to world, not protectionist. She advocated a Europe that was a sum of the nations that formed it, not in an abstract entity rising above them. In sum, she believed in a Europe that granted freedom to individuals and to nations.

Thatcher, along with Ronald Reagan and the Pope John Paul II, is a key figure in order to explain everything that has taken place in Europe and in the world from the end of the 70's up to nearly our days. She refused to accept that Communism was a system that would always prevail in the East of Europe, her non-conformity with those who aspired to live off the generosity of a State in perpetual expansion, her rejection of the idea of people not being responsible for their actions, and her firm belief in the values of western civilization made Thatcherism a political philosophy of courage, effort, sacrifice, responsibility, and freedom, a universal doctrine A doctrine for change and a better world.

She seconded deregulation, defended individual freedom, and was unwavering before the enemies of the West. These were some of the beliefs that marked her political career. Margaret Thatcher was a true conservative revolutionary. She knew that her responsibility was to make decisions, even if they were unpopular. She ruled from pragmatism but also from conviction. It was because of this that she was so overwhelming a woman.

When I saw her for the first time in Helsinki, and when all of us attended the press conference held after the meeting, she was the one in the spotlight. Her words were eloquent and distilled honesty and strength. I've always looked up to her in spite of the differences. With her death, she joins the hall of fame of the conservative champions of freedom who laid the foundations of the world we live in with resolution, determination and strength. A world that is now better and freer. Rest in peace. Her legacy remains and will always remain amongst us all.