



written by Stephen Collins

## Helmut Kohl was forever grateful for Irish support during EU presidency

Helmut Kohl never forgot the role Taoiseach Charles Haughey played in helping to smooth the path of German unity during the Irish presidency of the European Union in the first half of 1990.

Addressing the joint Houses of the Oireachtas in October 1996 the then German chancellor paid tribute to Haughey and his government for the support they gave to his plans in the face of strenuous opposition from Britain and France.

"I will never forget how in a dramatic meeting of the European Union in December 1989, it was not least the Irish prime minister who supported us Germans and myself in a very difficult situation," said Kohl.



"During his [Haughey's] presidency in the first half of 1990, Ireland played a decisive role in the process, since the area of the then GDR, today's east Germany, could be smoothly integrated into the then European unity without any real big problems," said the chancellor, speaking in German.

Haughey and his minister for foreign affairs, Gerry Collins, defied British and French opposition during the Irish presidency in 1990 to win over support for immediate EU recognition for Germany unity.

British prime minister Margaret Thatcher and French president Francois Mitterand were strongly opposed to facilitating a quick move to German unity. Their suspicion was hardly surprising in the light of the second World War. but Mitterand cited an old joke, "I like Germany so much I'd prefer to have two of them", and Thatcher was reported to have said "we have to stop the German bully".

### **EU Summits**

There were two EU summits in Dublin in the first half of 1990 to consider the issue. The deal reached in Dublin was far from a given, with considerable resistance from many of the 12 member states apart from including France and the UK.

It was the Irish presidency that helped to set the agenda for the two summits and to ensure that Kohl got his way. In the end Britain and France agreed to put aside their reservations and the other members states followed suit.

Immediately after securing the deal Kohl praised the diplomacy of Charles Haughey and Gerry Collins for opening the door to what he described as "the dream of all Germans".

He never forgot what the Irish government had done for him, as his 1996 speech revealed, but more importantly he demonstrated his gratitude in practical terms.

### **Motorway Network**

In 1992 he ensured that against all the odds the Irish government, then led by Albert Reynolds, secured an 8 billion package of structural and cohesion funds that helped to transform the country. The motorway network in today's Ireland is one manifestation of that EU package.

Kohl wasn't the only one in Germany to appreciate the Irish assistance in 1990. In 2010, the then German foreign minister, Guido Westerwelle referred to the importance of the Irish presidency of 1990 in supporting German unity.

"That was an immensely important step, largely promoted by our Irish friends. It was a real milestone in the unification process," said Westerwelle.

"Thank you very much for what your country did for German unification. It was very important in our history and we will not forget it."