

Speech of the President of the Government to present the goals of the Spanish EU Presidency during a meeting organised by the Association of European Journalists

Madrid, Thursday, 12 February 2009

In the first place, I would like to thank the Association of European Journalists for this invitation to talk about the projects of the Spanish EU Presidency during the first six months of 2010; and I would like to thank, in particular the words of the President of the Association, Diego Carcedo; and also those of his General Secretary, Miguel Ángel Aguilar, and I would also like to thank the Carlos de Amberes Foundation, which is hosting this meeting today.

There are still a few months to go but we already know that our Presidency is going to be highly demanding and engaged. There are still a few months to go and it is true that we haven't heard that much about the Spanish EU Presidency, and I am sure that the Association of European Journalists, which has played an essential role in our European commitment, will be a catalyst of this debate about the goals and the challenges of this Presidency.

Spain couldn't possibly react otherwise, being such a pro-European country. We are going to assume that Presidency against a complex, uncertain background: the current situation, which is so complex and uncertain for the International Community and for each of the member states, for the Union, for its present-day reality and for its future.

We need a strong European Union more than ever, a European Union that may be able to exert leadership. And, since such a thing cannot be guaranteed, our commitment with this idea of Europe must be even bigger, if possible, at present.

Thus, let me start this speech by referring to Europe, to present-day Europe; i.e., let me refer to Europe, which is facing a serious global economic crisis; which is facing the challenge to build a sustainable, balanced productive model; which is facing a pending challenge: its own political integration; which is trying to pass to a multipolar system of international relationships, a hard change we all desire, because this is what Europe must fight for, now and in the forthcoming months.

Thus, it is in this context that we can contemplate both in hope and in fear of frustration that Spain will take its Presidency, an engaged, demanding one, to its ultimate consequences.

Just in case some may have doubts, I am not trying to encourage to a theoretical reflection about the European project, which is nonetheless always welcome; I am just trying to do something I deem more urgent: I am trying to search for solutions and to define Europe's role once and for all, the Union's role, the role of its institutions, of its agents for a present and for a near future that are characterised by uncertainty.

I'll try to explain things clearly in order to stress my opinion: the European leadership in these times of crisis will mark to a great extent the moment and the way in which the member states will overcome this crisis; and the European leadership in these times of change will mark the structure of the new international financial system and the scope of the commitment with a fair, balanced international order, with the fight against climate change and with the achievement of the Millennium Goals.

This does not only depend on the European leadership, on the responsible and active role of the Union, of course, but, in fact, without it, the things I've referred to would not be the same. And it will be worse for Spain, for the most widespread position of Spanish citizens; quite surely, it will be worst by far. For Spain, the success of this approach is the key of its own success.

To sum up, and paraphrasing a very well-known expression, the world has come to a constituent turning point and Europe must become a necessary power. Necessary, which is right the opposite of unnecessary.

In my opinion, the Union has proved to have a positive attitude, a leading attitude, in its reaction against the financial crash last September, but we cannot just remain satisfied about other behaviours we are witnessing lately in some places in the Union. We can see certain worrying symptoms of a counter-European nationalism, of xenophobe and there is also the protectionist temptation. We haven't succeeded either in modelling the leadership within the Union lately, in combining the institutional leadership of the Council and the leadership of certain member states and to promote – through consensus – that more active role we all wish, and also the role the Commission must play.

In order to attain all these goals, we need a strong European Union, the one we started to outline with the Treaty of Lisbon: the European Union of integration, solidarity, innovation, competitiveness, education and citizenship; a European Union with one single voice in the world, once and for all.

In order to make the European Union stronger, the Treaty of Lisbon has created strong institutions: a President of the European Council that must be a person with a political weight, an efficient High

Representative for Foreign Policy and Security Policy, and an independent, dynamic European Commission, whose competences have been strengthened by the European Parliament.

If things go as we all hope, the Treaty will essentially come into force during the Spanish Presidency, but, right now, all this depends on the Irish referendum. Ireland, by the way, is not the origin of our weakness, of the European weakness, but a consequence of this weakness.

As you all know, the Irish Government has undertaken to hold a new referendum on the Treaty of Lisbon before the end of the current mandate of the European Commission, that is to say, before next 1 November. I am confident that the Irish nation will value the efforts made so far, by the European Council, in order to pin down the issues sent to it by the Government of Ireland; I hope they will value that and, most of all, I hope they are interested in supporting the Treaty to build this stronger European Union, which could seem very urgent to the Irish at present, now that we all are facing this serious crisis.

Spain truly wishes they will offer their support. It will surely be very easy for the Spanish Presidency to strengthen Europe by implementing the new institutional framework; but we will try to attain this goal one way or the other, with or without the Treaty and we have already foreseen two scenarios.

Besides, in a way, we are going to anticipate to the Treaty of Lisbon by doing something which is really innovating, namely, preparing a Presidency in coordination with the previous Presidency, Sweden, of course, and also with the next two ones, Belgium and Hungary, which will provide the process with greater continuity and bring about more benefits for European citizens, as far as the questions the Secretariat of State has been working on over the last few months, which have resulted in an agreement that was concluded, precisely, last night.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Fifty years ago, the European Union was created from economic and energy development, from agriculture and through the common market, through something Schuman called “de facto solidarity”.

For the Government of Spain, today, in this globalised world, the strength of Europe must be built upon two main principles: the capacity to generate innovation in all areas, the transforming willingness and the willingness to promote equality at all levels, both inside and outside the Union. All the actions carried out during our Presidency are going to be aimed at implementing these two transversal motor ideas.

We understand innovation has to do with technological innovation, but also with economic, institutional and political innovation. Innovation is a necessary condition for European citizens to come out from this crisis, with the real possibility to generate new employment and better jobs. And becoming a sort of great museum without international weight would be quite contrary to our great goals.

The second idea is equality. Europe has led the fight for equality of opportunities and solidarity among social groups, among regions and States; and also abroad, becoming the first global donor of aid for development; and for gender equality. The world we are building now needs to expand on equality, solidarity and cohesion. Now, the European leadership must be characterised by this sign of identity.

Innovation and equality are going to mark and give sense to the three priorities of our Presidency:

- Firstly, we must change towards a new economic model that may place Europe at the foremost position of global competitiveness and may let us come out from the current economic and financial crisis faster and more easily.
- Secondly, the reaffirmation and expansion of the social European Union, characterised by solidarity towards its citizens and towards the nations around it.
- Finally, the adaptation to the new multipolar world of a European Union that must have a single voice and follow a single trend of action.

The European dimension has always been present in the measures we have implemented progressively to face this crisis. There has been coordination in Europe and not only among the different member states, but also with the different institutions, right at the heart of the Council and through the leadership of the Commission, in order to boost up economy by providing two hundred and thousand million Euros, 1.5% of the European GDP.

At the G-20 Summit, in Washington, we decided to find a coordinated solution for this crisis. Now, by the beginning of April, in London, we will have to conclude this task, contributing to outlining the new financial system, which cannot wait longer. Before that, several preparatory meetings will be held by the 27 member States and the European Governments attending the Summit in London in order to coordinate our positions. The European Union must go to London and be ready to talk with one single voice and to lead a meeting that will have to go beyond any

joint declaration and serve to make decisions in the short term and in the medium term, in a task that will last longer.

I don't need to tell you what it means for Spain our participation in this global constituent project, for we have come to form part of the group of leading countries. Unfortunately, due to well-known historical reasons, we did not attend Bretton Woods, San Francisco and, even, Rome. This time we have recovered our position as a country.

The possibility to make the position of the European Union prevail wouldn't have been possible without one of our main assets: the euro. The role the European Central Bank plays in order to provide the financial system with liquidity and bring about the cut down of the interest types has become essential and is going to be essential in order to overcome this situation.

The birds of ill omen –birds of ill omen exist at nearly all levels- that go around saying that the Monetary Union, which has just celebrated its tenth anniversary, is in danger must know that our single currency has been and still is a haven of stability and, more than anything, it is the most valuable asset and the most essential one in times of so much uncertainty, in these times we are going through. Thus, it is not by chance that now there is a long waiting list to enter the Monetary Union.

Creating the most dynamic and most competitive economic area in the world was our main aim when we adopted the so-called "Lisbon Strategy" ten years ago, when the euro came into force. This innovating idea has brought about positive results, but these results have not reached the initial expectations. We need a strengthened European economic strategy, one provided with new instruments in order to build the Union of innovation and employment. We can't wait ten more years in order to attain this goal.

Thus, during the Spanish Presidency we are going to promote an in-depth revision, a revision of the essentials, of the Lisbon Strategy. Thus, coordination won't be enough. We must come up with more advanced strategies in the medium and in the long term. This time, after this crisis, we must move on with courage, making daring decisions so as to turn the European Union into the most dynamic economic area in the world faster.

In order to make it possible for Europe to become the motor of global economy and move on towards political economy we must also move on towards a common energy policy. And, once more, it is during our Presidency that the 2nd tri-annual Energy Action Plan 2010-2012 is going to be implemented. We must also implement the plan on great infrastructures in Europe.

The European Union must keep being the first in the fight against global warming and its effects. We, Europeans, must stay together and set forth clear aims for this will mark to a great extent the results of the Summit on Climatic Change in Copenhagen next December, a meeting that will serve to lay the foundations for a post-Kyoto period. And the attitude of Obama's Government is highly encouraging with regards to the change in the policies of the United States.

Thus, the first priority of the Spanish Presidency is: fighting the crisis and creating a new, more competitive, innovating and sustainable economic model in order to defend sustainability as the main axis of the most advanced, innovating economies in the medium term.

Second priority, expansion of the social European Union, of the social rights and of the equality de facto between European men and women. It is an attempt to recover and enhance the concept and the exercise of European citizenship at the social level.

Against the biased mistrust generated and spread with determination by the neo-conservationist trends over the last few years, the model of the European social economy has become a reference to overcome this crisis.

It is necessary to update and strengthen the economic and social cohesion policy which has yielded such good results in Spain and in other countries and which can spread to the countries and regions that have entered the European Union later. Thus, we intend to promote a new statute about the Ultra-peripheral regions.

Besides, I intend to progress in the creation of a European civil society definitively based upon gender equality, fighting those public and private spaces that still oppose it, and I also intend to turn the fight against gender violence into a European aim enriched through some of the best contributions by some of the member States.

The "Erasmus" Programme, a programme of scholarships for students, might be one of the programmes that have contributed to the construction of Europe from its foundations. I propose to expand this type of programmes and introduce them in different areas at career level.

We are also going to use the Spanish Presidency to keep creating an authentic European immigration policy. We hope we will advance towards the full integration of immigrants in our societies, towards the creation of a framework of fluent dialogue and cooperation with the countries of origin and with those immigrants cross on their way to other countries, and towards the establishment of new control systems in our external borders.

Spain has developed a national immigration policy. We have made it without xenophobe riots, the riots we have seen in other countries. We have been able to transmit to the European Union our vision and, together with the rest of the member States, we have started to build up a common policy.

Our main aim is strengthening the values of freedom, human dignity, security and justice, i.e., the defining features, the necessary features of the European Union we believe in.

A new dimension for our Presidency: 2010 will be the European Year against Poverty and Social Exclusion, which amounts to saying that it will be the year of solidarity, both inside and outside the borders of the Union.

At London and, of course, during our Presidency, we will insist on the fact that given the current international financial crisis and economic deceleration, we must make an effort and prevent the necessary financing for developing countries to attain their development goals decrease.

My Government will observe its commitment to set aside 0.7% of the Gross Domestic Product to Development Aid by the end of this Legislature. The fight against hunger and poverty must keep being the main priority of the Spanish and European cooperation policies.

Europe's leadership in the future will depend, to a great extent, in my opinion, on its growing commitment with development aid policy; a policy, a commitment – let's keep this in mind – that is twice as worthy because it has an undeniable, urgent moral value, on the one hand; and a preventive value, to avoid the conflicts caused by extreme poverty, on the other hand.

European cooperation for development in different nations helps us renew the European ideals. Europe's foundational idea was peace. Peace keeps being Europe's main goal, but peace for all cannot be conceived without solidarity.

Thus, we want the Spanish Presidency to be judged by the progress in the European social model, in equality de facto between men and women, in the European immigration policy and in cooperation for development. I can't and I won't forget about human rights, which we will defend, for it is one of the main pillars for the construction of Europe and for its international projection. Unfortunately, Europe has lost relevance in this area and we should recover our relevance.

And, now, to conclude, I will talk about our third priority.

A multipolar world is offering Europe a whole set of new chances for leadership, but we must make the most out of them. We are the first international trading power, the first donor abroad and the

second power from the point of view of our military capacity. If we want to make this stand out in the international arena, it is necessary to move on towards the integration of Foreign Policy and Security Policy. And both the open current situation and the Lisbon Treaty are an excellent occasion to do so.

Firstly, I intend the Spanish Presidency to support Croatia in the European Union, as well as Turkey's expectations to enter the Union. That great country has been waiting for too long.

I want the Spanish Presidency to be a "Euro-American" presidency, in the broadest sense of the word.

And, of course, we must pay special attention to the relationship between the European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean, and work intensely to strengthen this strategic association between these two regions that we have created over the last few years.

Thus, we will make our best to turn the 6th Summit between Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean into a qualitative leap towards the strengthening of the relationships between two world regions that share strong historical, social, cultural and economic bonds; and also democratic values and principles as well as the commitment with peace, with human rights and with multilateralism.

We hope the Association Agreement between the Union and Central America – the first one between these two regions – will be finally subscribed.

This new multipolar world that is developing, Europe and the United States must keep being essential allies and partners. This is a great occasion to strengthen our transatlantic relationship with the new American Government, but Europe must also be able to match those expectations, to keep pace with these circumstances. And we must fight climatic change and focus on trade relationships in order to close once and for all the Doha Round, and we must also assume more responsibilities to maintain international peace and security, especially in those areas that are closer to us, but also in those that are further away, if international peace is threatened.

In 2010 we will be celebrating the fifteenth anniversary of the previous Spanish Presidency, under a Socialist Government, a Presidency during which we also promoted the so-called New Transatlantic Agenda in order to improve the relationships between the European Union and the United States. Well, in the Summit European Union-United States that will be held on spring 2010, we intend to approve of a Renewed Transatlantic Agenda.

Neighbourhood policies are also going to be one of the main concerns during our Presidency, be it the Union for the

Mediterranean (Euromed), whose Summit will hopefully be held during the fifteenth anniversary of the Barcelona Process; be it with Morocco, a country with which we intend to work on the existing Advanced Statute of Association.

Besides, the Spanish Presidency will turn to Africa, a continent that is progressively becoming more important for us. In fact, our relationships are based upon two main pillars: the Global Political Dialogue European Unión-Africa and the Joint Strategy European Union-Africa, a strategy that was approved of during the previous Summit in Lisbon.

As to Russia, we must integrate it in the Euro-Atlantic space we are currently creating. The attitude of the Russian leaders at present and the attitude of Obama's Government, offers a new chance and we must use it, for we cannot renounce to it.

We will also carry out extensive activities abroad, promoting the relationships with Asia, among other places. I will mention, in particular, the relationship and the Summit with Japan, and we will also promote the already quite consolidated relationships with China and India. China's revival – and I call it revival because in 1820 China represented 33% of the World Gross Domestic Product, and, together with India, now it embodies one of the greatest changes in our world this century.

And, then, of course, the Middle East, and the efforts Europeans must make in order to achieve regional peace and stability, which must be built from scratch after the consolidation of the cease fire in the first place and the rechanneling of a peace process between the Israeli population and Palestinians, in the second place.

We are going to promote, firmly, the European Security and Defence Policy. Of course, either if the Lisbon Treaty is enforced or not, it will be relevant in this area.

We will try to promote the development of the revised European Security Strategy, planning our strategic targets according to the missions, capacities and partnerships. Before that, and since it is closely linked to it, we intend to elaborate a National Security Strategy, which I think will be very useful for the Government, but also for citizens to understand the challenges we face.

Later on, we will pay special attention to the relationships between the European Union and the NATO and we will consider the possibility to propose the creation of a specific organ depending on the Council and formed by the Ministries of Defence.

In fact, I would like the Presidency to be a chance to progress towards an effective deferment of the death penalty by 2015.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As you can see, the Spanish Presidency will have a very ambitious agenda. Our diplomats are working full time. I know it and I also know – and we have the recent reference of the French Presidency – that other unforeseeable events may take place and they may hinder the implementation of this agenda and we may have to adjust our priorities accordingly. But we must start from an ambitious starting point.

The Presidency is a great opportunity for Spain in such an important moment for Europe, because it is a very important moment for the world.

Right now, I can tell you that we have planned in-detail all the meetings included in the agenda and also the agendas of those meetings, from the European Councils to the working groups that will meet during the next six months.

The Spanish Presidency is a challenge beyond any governmental issues for it is the paradigm of a matter of State, beyond any partisan interests and aimed at completing a great national project.

Thus, we will make a special effort to reach a consensus with the rest of the parties, in the first place, and with the Autonomous Regions, in the second place, about the programme of the Presidency. Thus, I intend to start as soon as possible a consultation process in order to inform them about the plans foreseen and get acquainted with their ideas and support in order to complete or improve them. And, then, we will present the programme, of course, at the Parliament, at the Congress of Deputies.

This is surely one of the central issues of this Legislature, for the next few years, in Spain, and it will have to be shared – overtly and with transparency – with our society, with our citizens, with the Spanish citizens, who have always felt European and pro-European. This is why I am here today, talking before this Association, before civil society and before many people, many Spanish pro-European citizens: the members of this Association, who have contributed and can keep contributing right now to attain the goals of the Spanish Presidency.

And, besides, in a few months they will all have the chance to take part in the elections to the European Parliament and, thus, they will become aware about the relevance of the Union and of its future, relevance that we, the different political parties, should be able to transmit.

As you all know, the next elections will have to be held, of course, according to the norms established in Nice, thus, in Spain we will chose fifty deputies, four less than we should according to the Treaty of Lisbon which is already in force. Still, I would like to

remind you of the fact that the European Council has already answered our petition and we will recover those four seats at the European Parliament as soon as the Treaty is enforced de facto.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am about to conclude.

In a world characterised by uncertainty, after the collapse of the two great models that developed over the previous century, we will need a model and the new great commitment of both Governments and societies in order to overcome this crisis. That model is Europe's model, because Europe is, in the first place, the so-called "pax europea" and because this European peace entails co-existence, rights, welfare, creativity and freedom. It is a guarantee to guide us in a multipolar world, whose stability is based upon sustainable development and solidarity.

The European peace will be based upon equality and innovation, the two great values of our present and our future.

The European peace is, as we all know – and we have known it for the last three decades – the best way for Spain to defend its principles and interests from our European position.

Now that we witness the European efforts and the global efforts to resume an agenda that may help us overcome this doubtfulness, this uncertainty; now that we are about to receive the proposals concerning the future agenda of the European Union elaborated by the Reflection Group presided over by Felipe González; now I think that the only alternative for Spain is implementing a transforming Presidency, and not a management-based one. I think that the only alternative for Europe will be strengthening its institutions, in Europe and in the world. As Salvador de Madariaga said "Europe won't come true until it forms part of people's consciences".

I would like to conclude by expressing my conviction that Europe, with a Spanish Presidency, will match these historical circumstances and it will consolidate and transform our policies so that the Union may become better, moving on to perfection; so that our goals may become more widespread and so that our institutions may become more agile and aware of the desires and expectations of our citizens.

Thank you very much.