

THE SPANISH PRESIDENCY 2010

This will be the fourth occasion that Spain has held the Presidency of the European Union. On each of the previous occasions, it faced important challenges. But none, like now, have coincided with a global crisis like the one that is affecting the economy and at a time as strategic as now in the European transformation process. This gives our Presidency a unique significance and, at the same time, even greater responsibility.

Spain has worked very closely with Belgium and Hungary to prepare a joint program for the next 18 months, in accordance with the Treaty, which was presented to the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs on the 7th and 8th in Brussels.

It has been a very positive experience to give continuity and consistency to the actions of the next three Presidencies.

But it will be the Spanish Presidency that must drive forward the project of the new Europe at this time of extraordinary political significance.

We have a strengthened legal framework to launch the Europe that we need. Now we need to apply it with determination and diligence.

At the same time, the experience of this terrible economic and financial crisis shows us the need to promote even greater co-ordination of economic policies between the countries of the European Union. To ensure recovery; to promote a new stage of growth; to begin creating employment once again; to maintain high levels of social protection.

Europe is ready to assume greater influence and presence in every geographical and multilateral area of the international stage. It must make progress in unity of action, in exercising our capacity for mediation, in its commitment to the prevention of conflicts and in the fight against poverty and exclusion.

Europe will only be strong when all its citizens are strong and when European citizens are seen to be strong, which requires new steps to develop and to make the rights of European citizens a reality.

These are the four main priorities of our Presidency:

- The first and essential priority for the development of the others is the full and effective application of the Lisbon Treaty.
- The second is to guarantee the economic recovery of Europe through greater co-ordination of every member state and the approval of the European strategy for sustainable growth for 2020.
- The third is to reinforce the presence and influence of the European Union in the new world order.
- Finally, the fourth is to place European citizens at the centre of EU policy, with initiatives designed to develop their rights and freedoms.

Full application of the Treaty is one of our prime objectives and an essential component of our political awareness. Spain has always maintained a constructive position in the Treaty negotiation process and now we have to place all our political ability at the service of its application and development.

With the Presidency comes the responsibility for managing the different Council bodies, collaborating with the Permanent Presidency to draw up the Agenda and draft the European Councils' conclusions.

We will take due steps to instigate the regulations necessary to develop the Treaty and, in particular, to establish the European External Action Service.

It is also our goal to consolidate a balanced working format to ensure that the rotating presidencies become an efficient and complementary tool for the new institutions.

The world-wide financial crisis highlighted the need for co-ordination between partners with political authority when applying economic and financial policy.

For many reasons, this co-ordination is even more relevant within the European Union, and the Treaty opens up new channels for improvement in this area.

Co-ordination is, in itself, an essential element for sustainable economic growth in Europe and, as such, it is not merely an option for the future, but rather co-ordination is a necessity.

It needs to be intensified to reinforce recovery, manage the strategies designed to overcome the crisis and put into practice progressive withdrawal of the financial sector support and other tax incentives, which will enable us to restore the balance of public accounts.

The Member States have taken unprecedented fiscal measures to combat the effects of the crisis. Now we must take the necessary measures, to handle the fiscal consolidation process that will ensure fulfilment of the Stability and Growth Pact within the established deadlines.

Likewise, we are also convinced of the need to continue the reforms that will enable us to successfully face the pending challenges still to come, in order to accelerate recovery and achieve vigorous growth which generates employment.

The first challenge is globalisation itself. The advanced economies, and particularly the European economy, are facing intense competition from the emerging economies, in the area of costs. Europe's response to this should be to improve its capacity to innovate.

Therefore, Spain's Presidency will promote the adoption of an ambitious European Innovation Plan that will cover the different aspects of innovation -regulatory, financial, educational and, of course, the reinforcement of specific policies to support R&D.

The second challenge is climate change: a phenomenon that we can not ignore. Europe is taking the lead in the international arena and has

already assumed commitments for emission reductions and the use of renewable energies. We need to take advantage of this transition to a low carbon economy to generate new jobs and additional sources of economic growth.

For this reason, the Spanish Presidency considers it a priority to ensure that the European Union continues to lead the world in the fight against climate change; to do this we will work to make sure that any agreement reached in Copenhagen comes to fruition as soon as possible in a global treaty that will check the increase in CO₂ emissions by 2020.

Additionally, we will encourage different industrial and technological initiatives to consolidate Europe's leadership as a 'green economy'.

The third challenge is to reinforce our social model in the areas of population ageing and the impact of the crisis, which has been especially noticeable in the labour market.

A well-trained workforce which is adapted to the new sources of economic growth and which is actively involved in a modern labour market, is a guarantee for sustaining the European social model and the pensions system.

To this end, the Spanish Presidency will promote initiatives to adapt workers skills to the demands of the labour market and improve educational quality, university excellence and continuous training.

The response to these three challenges -economic, environmental and social- will be drawn up within the framework of a common strategy for the transformation of the European Union by 2020.

The New Growth and Employment Strategy, to be approved during the Spanish Presidency, will deal with a limited number of quantitative goals and will establish a shared vision of the European Union's situation from a perspective of productive, environmental and social sustainability.

Finally, the New Strategy should establish a dynamic and operational governance with the participation of all social representatives. All the

European institutions need to feel they are active partners in the new strategy and we need to be able to implement a system to survey the results obtained by the governments of the different Member States and the Commission.

In February, an informal Council meeting will be held to review the economic situation during which the New Strategy will be examined, prior to approval by the European Council in the spring.

The third priority established for the Presidency, is the goal of reinforcing the European Union's role in the new international arena, as a dynamic partner in the promotion of stability and progress.

The new Treaty and the figures of the President of the Council and the High Representative will enable us to strengthen the image of unity the European Union projects outside beyond its borders, but it is up to all of us to take the decisive step towards an authentic common foreign and defence policy.

Spain accepts this challenge and during our Presidency we will make every effort to ensure that Europe gives out political signals in all areas of its foreign actions that lead to a more extensive and significant presence and greater coherence in its positioning.

We will hold the scheduled multilateral summits with Latin America and the Caribbean and the Union for the Mediterranean, and the bilateral summits with the United States, Russia, Canada, Chile, Egypt, Japan, Morocco, Mexico and Pakistan.

It is essential that relations between Europe and Latin America are given greater political weight and more content. Spain has the role of leading this qualitative advance in the Union's relations with Latin America and we will take advantage of our Presidency to promote the signing of the European Union Association Agreement with Central America and Multipartite Commercial Agreements with countries such as Colombia and Peru, though without renouncing the reactivation of negotiations between the European Union and MERCOSUR.

We are also going to encourage dialogue and co-operation with South Mediterranean countries, the stability and prosperity of which constitute a priority for Europe. The structure of the Union for the Mediterranean needs to be configured and its General Secretariat set up in Barcelona.

Likewise we propose to contribute towards taking European relations with the United States to the highest level we can hope to within the current historical context. We have in our favour factors such as the improved attitude of the new American government, collaboration with the US in the current economic crisis and a common perception of global challenges.

Additionally, in our opinion, the United States needs to promote a more stable and closer relationship with Russia, through a series of agreements that create confidence and improve the integration of this country as a constructive and reliable partner in the international structure. We will endeavour to achieve significant progress during the summit with Russia on key issues such as energy, security and facilitating mobility.

In Asia, during Spain's Presidency, the summit with Japan will take place. This country is an essential partner for the European Union and a key country for the continent's stability.

Furthermore, our Presidency will develop the Oriental Partnership with countries on the eastern border and will promote stability in the Western Balkans and the perspective of integration into the European Union.

Likewise, we will give special attention to the ongoing accession processes, fostering the progress of negotiation with Turkey and the other candidates. Croatia is expected to finalise its negotiations shortly.

Europe's foreign actions can not be understood without a profound exercise of solidarity with underprivileged peoples and countries. In accordance with the line followed by the Spanish government over the last few years, few will be surprised to see Spain ensuring the fulfilment, throughout its Presidency, of all the international commitments in the fight against hunger and poverty on the way to reaching the Millennium Development Objectives.

Our fourth challenge will be the policies for citizens, the policies promoting rights.

We aspire to have a European Union in which the values of freedom, justice, solidarity and equality become positive rights for our citizens and in which, day by day, they are exercised more extensively, more in line with the new social contexts and more efficient in providing guarantees.

We want Europeans to feel that the Union is a positive benchmark for their daily lives and for them to participate actively in this common project.

To this end, the Presidency will promote initiatives that strengthen and guarantee the exercising of the rights contained in the Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Likewise, our Presidency will encourage the adoption of a proposal to regulate the Citizens' Initiative, envisaged by the Treaty, and will open a new channel for citizens to participate in the Union's legislative process.

Effective equality between men and women is one of our internal priorities and it will also be a priority during our Presidency. For this purpose we will support the preparation of a Plan for Equal Opportunities for Men and Women for the 2011-2015 period, with special emphasis on labour issues.

Another key objective will be to continue the fight in favour of eradicating all forms of gender-based violence. We will propose two initiatives: the creation of a European Gender-Based Violence Monitoring Centre and the promulgation of a European Protection Order, which will extend the security measures adopted by the judicial entities in any Member State to the entire European territory.

We will also initiate the process for the European Union's accession to the Convention on Human Rights, and we will approve the Stockholm Programme Action Plan for the European Area of Freedom, Security

and Justice, with measures that will have a considerable positive effect on the security of our citizens.

We know that dealing with immigration is one of Europe's greatest challenges. We, who have contributed to the content of European policy on immigration over the last few years, are well aware of the situation.

Now we will deal with it in its different aspects, from integration and cooperation with the countries of origin and transit, to the tireless fight against the mafias that exploit the desperation of the less fortunate.

These will be the four pillars of the Spain's Presidency: faithful and determined application of the new Treaty; greater coordination of economic policy to reinforce recovery and establish the basis for sustainable European growth; strengthening of the Union as a decisive political partner in globalisation, and continuous attention to European citizens and their rights in all the new initiatives.

These four aspirations that are undoubtedly demanding, but no more demanding than the moment the Union itself is going through.