

**The Prime Minister's Speech  
at the Plenary Session of the Conference  
with the President of the European Parliament and the  
Presidents of the European Parliamentary Groups**

**Palacio de El Pardo, 3 December 2009**

Mr President, Presidents of the Parliamentary Groups,

It is a pleasure to receive you here today in Madrid and to do so in the new light of the Treaty of Lisbon, which came into effect in the Portuguese capital on Tuesday.

It is a new beginning for Europe, and also for that noble ideal of 27 countries and 500 million people united around a common project.

It is a project built on great European ideals: peace, democracy, freedom, pluralism, dialogue, tolerance, openness, solidarity, equality.

A project which has brought the sixty most peaceful and prosperous years of its history to a continent so many times ravaged by war.

A project which has also worked outside Europe.

It has been the greatest engine for the democratisation of a continent in history.

It has also been the greatest engine for International solidarity: we dedicate more resources than anyone to the fight against poverty in the world.

And the greatest engine for multilateralism, for building a new world order of peace and understanding. We know from our own experience that only dialogue and negotiation can resolve conflicts in a fundamental and lasting way.

Europe has been and continues to be a successful project. We must not forget it; and those who, because they are still young, have not experience its history, must learn it.

But we are not satisfied; we want more. We want to build a stronger Europe, more united and of more use to its citizens.

To achieve this we now have the Treaty of Lisbon. With it coming into effect, Europe recovers the form, the energy, the vision for a new European era and leaves behind it a long and difficult institutional debate.

The treaty strengthens all of the Union's institutions. But especially one: the European Parliament, which, from now on, is going to be an even more central institution in this process of construction.

This especially pleases me. Because, with the expansion of codecision and its supervision and control work, the new Parliament is going to make the Union even more democratic and responsible.

Because, without impinging upon national parliaments, with a stronger European Parliament, the voice of the people of Europe is going to be stronger and clearer.

I am pleased, therefore, to have the opportunity to receive you here today and to be able to pass on to you all my enthusiasm and also my commitment to collaborating with you in the work which you are going to do in this new phase.

From 1 January, my country is going to hold the six-month Presidency of the Council of the European Union, in complete cooperation with and loyalty to the new posts, the President of the European Council and the High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, and, naturally, with the European Commission as a whole and with the European Parliament.

We want it to be, as Spanish presidencies have always been, a Presidency which gives decisive impetus to the construction of Europe. The moment requires it.

Mr President, Presidents of the Parliamentary Groups,

The Spanish Presidency of the European Union comes at a key time for the Union, for Spain and, I would go so far as to say, for the world.

Firstly, because, although still tentatively, signs are beginning to appear that we are coming out of the worst financial and economic crisis in decades, and we must do so in a coordinated way and with a new and sustainable model for growth.

Secondly, because, with the Treaty of Lisbon now in effect, it is up to Spain to take the lead in applying it and putting into practice.

Thirdly, because the Treaty must also mark a turning point in the development of social Europe and European citizenship. We must give the people a real say in the affairs of the Union.

And fourthly, because Europe has to reaffirm its role as a world leader, in order to continue being a beacon of democracy, rights and social progress in the world, and to defend our interests, increasingly presented not as national interests, but rather as European interests. We must strengthen our unity of action, our visibility, our capacity for mediating in conflicts and our commitment to the fight against poverty and marginalisation.

The responsibility which Spain assumes from January entails being able to rise to these challenges; a responsibility which is reflected in the four priorities which we have set ourselves for our Presidency.

The first and most important is going to be to give impetus to economic recovery and job creation.

An endeavour which will require us to work in three complementary ways: to promote greater economic coordination between EU member states

and with the Union itself, to lay the foundations for a new, more sustainable model for economic growth and to improve the supervision of the financial sector.

Just over a year ago, thought seems more like a decade on account of its intensity, we were faced with the worst economic crisis since the 1930s. The decisive and coordinated action of governments, both within the European Union and the G-20, succeeded in stopping the economic free fall and stabilising the financial markets. In Europe, support for the financial sector and the coordination of fiscal stimulus measures through the European Economic Recovery Plan has allowed our economies to return to growth.

If the crisis has taught us anything, it is the need for coordination to respond to the challenges of a globalised economy. If within the Union we have a common market and a common currency, we must also have common economic governance.

Coming out of the crisis requires coordination. The Treaty of Lisbon gives us the means to bring about true coordination of our economic policies and we must make use of it.

Today, furthermore, coordination makes complete sense, for promoting, in the Union as whole, a new model for more sustainable growth, in social, economic and environmental terms, as the Treaty also asks us to do.

We must renew the Lisbon Agenda. Looking to 2020, the new European Strategy for Growth and Jobs, which will have to be agreed on during the Spanish Presidency, must make Europe into an economy which is increasingly based on investment in R&D and innovation, on education and on competitiveness.

But it is not enough only to make progress in the area of the economy. It will be useless if we do not also achieve environmental sustainability. That is, we hope the people of Europe will allow us to continue to lead in the fight against climate change, the fight to save energy and the development of renewable sources.

We are the front line, as we demonstrated in Kyoto. And we will demonstrate it again in Copenhagen, where European leadership will be necessary but not sufficient, as the other major economies have to be involved.

It must also be an economic development which is also sustainable socially. Because there can not be long-term, sustainable economic development without a cohesive society; and because a strong and up-to-date welfare state which assures the wellbeing and security of its citizens is also an engine for economic growth.

The Spanish Presidency will advocate strengthening the role of the Union as a generator of rights and social protection, giving impetus to the European Social Agenda, which must be an essential component of the new European Growth and Employment Strategy.

This new model for sustainable growth will allow us to respond to the major challenges which could jeopardise our future well-being, such as globalisation, climate change or our aging populations.

The economic recovery also makes it essential to improve financial supervision in Europe.

The excesses of the financial sector were largely responsible for the crisis, revealing a clear lack of supervision. The Union must make definite progress in this area and to achieve this, during our Presidency, will give impetus to the necessary measures to guarantee the full functioning of

the two new institutions created for this purpose, the European Systemic Risk Council and the European System of Financial Supervisors.

But if anything defines our Presidency, it will be the implementation of the Treaty of Lisbon.

Putting it into practice will be our second major priority. It is not a task which can be completed in just one Presidency, but we must make a start. The longest journey begins with the first step.

Spain is a grateful country and loyal to Europe, to its principles, aims and institutions. And we are going to be loyal to and enthusiastic about the Union in applying the Treaty.

We will therefore place all of our political ability, all of our enthusiasm for Europe, and all of our dynamism at the disposal of the Union's new institutions, respecting the new institutional balance. From the very beginning, we want the President, Mr Van Rompuy, and the High Representative, Mrs Ashton, to be able to carry out their functions to the full. They have our complete support. In this regard, we are going to push for the fastest possible launch of the European External Action Service, which will give visibility and coherence to our external action.

But if the application of the Treaty has one aim, it is to bring the Union closer to its citizens. And this is going to be our third major priority.

Spain was the forerunner of the idea of European citizenship, and now it will continue to strengthen it in practice.

We want the people of Europe to truly feel that the European Union is relevant to their daily life, that belonging to this new Europe leads to tangible advantages, to feel they are involved in this project because it adds to their rights, it gives them security, it makes mobility and

exchanges possible for them, and it represents their values and their solidarity to the world.

In short, we want the European Union to be a factory of rights and a guarantee of freedoms; and we want the people of Europe to see it as such.

To this end, the Presidency is going to promote initiatives which reinforce and guarantee the exercise of rights included in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which comes into effect with the approval of the Treaty of Lisbon.

A charter which, for the first time, gives legally binding recognition to the rights and freedoms of European citizens, against the institutions of the Union and its member states, in the application of Community legislation.

It is a huge step towards the consolidation of the Union as what it really is: not just an economic union, but also a political and social union.

Our Presidency will also propose to the European Parliament and to the Council the approval of regulations for setting in motion the procedure for the European Popular Legislative Initiative; an instrument which will give the people a real say in the legislative process of the Union through the Commission.

Equality between men and women is one of our priorities as a country and for the Union. So we will support the formulation of the plan for equal opportunities for men and women for the period 2011-2015, with special emphasis on employment matters.

Violence against women is a blight on society. We must cooperate more to eradicate all forms of gender violence. We will therefore propose the setting up of a European Monitoring Centre for Gender-Based Violence and the adoption of a European Protection Order, which will extend the

security measures adopted by a judicial body in one member state to all of the Union's territory.

We will also begin the process for the European Union's accession to the European Convention on Human Rights, which will mean an additional guarantee for our citizens.

Finally, it will be up to us to debate and approve the action plan for the Stockholm Programme on the European Area of Freedom, Security and Justice, with measures which will have a great impact on the protection and security of our citizens.

Furthermore, our Presidency will make managing immigration a strategic priority for Europe.

The immigration phenomenon constitutes a new model of society; it creates wealth and diversity, but also gives rise to tensions in the fabric of our society and puts our values of inclusion, plurality and tolerance to the test.

Therefore, our aim is to continue to promote the European Immigration Policy, with complete conviction, in all of its dimensions: in the drive towards integration and in cooperation with countries of origin and transit, but also in the determined fight against illegal immigration and against those who vilely deal in the desperation of those who have nothing and hope to reach our continent in search of a better life.

The human drama of illegal immigration which ceaselessly reaches the Union is the best proof that there cannot be a prosperous and sustainable Europe in an insecure, unfair and under-governed world.

For this reason, our fourth priority is going to be to strengthen Europe's role as a global player in the new multi-polar order, such that it acts as a

force for cooperation and progress in the world. Today we are still less than the sum of our parts. We must succeed in being more.

Our great ambition is to ensure, from Europe, that this multi-polar world becomes multilateral, with complete respect for international law. It is not just a question of values, but also of necessity, for the Union and for the world.

The Spanish Presidency will encourage the Union to give out political signals to this effect in all of its spheres of external action. The figures of the President of the European Council and the High Representative will allow us, I am certain, to project an image of European unity, to speak with one voice and to better contribute to the necessary reconfiguration of world political, economic and financial governance.

On this basis we will hold the 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.

The values and history of our society are close to those of Latin America and the Caribbean, such that we cannot enter the new structure of globalisation separately or with a weak and poorly coordinated relationship.

During our Presidency we are going to make a special effort to consolidate the Union for the Mediterranean as a forum for political dialogue and cooperation between the European Union and the countries of the southern shore.

We are aware of the difficulties which may occur as a result of the Middle East Conflict, but we are going to try to handle them in an appropriate way and, as far as possible, push for the reopening of a peace process between Israelis and Palestinians.

As regards the United States, the time is right to give greater substance to transatlantic relations. This is favoured by positive factors such as the greater willingness of the new American government, the Treaty of Lisbon coming into effect, the importance of cooperating with the United States in the current economic and financial crisis and the awareness of common, global challenges.

Likewise in the case of Russia, the European Union must establish a network of agreements which build trust and contribute to better integrating Russia as a constructive and reliable player in the international structure. Our external action would not be credible without a deep and stable relationship with Russia, which naturally includes energy.

Furthermore, our Presidency will continue to promote relations with neighbouring countries, developing the Eastern Partnership with the countries along the eastern border of the Union, promoting stability in the Western Balkans and their future integration into the European Union. And we will pay special attention to the accession processes which are ongoing.

I wish to assure you that our Presidency will establish the most open channels of communication possible with the President of the Council and the High Representative to respond to crises which may arise in sensitive areas such as the Near East, Iran and Afghanistan.

But the external action of the European Union would not make sense today without demonstrating profound solidarity with the most disadvantaged countries. The European Development Cooperation Policy is therefore a statement of principles regarding our way of understanding the world. It is also a policy to which the Spanish and my government feel profoundly committed.

For this reason our Presidency will be especially active in pushing for the fulfilment of international commitments to fight against hunger and poverty, on food security and aid quality, in line with the Millennium Development Goals, the purpose of the next United Nations General Assembly which we will have to prepare.

Mr President, Presidents of the Parliamentary Groups. Europe is back.

These are the essential points of our Presidency programme; a programme which we are going to promote along with the Belgian and Hungarian presidencies, with whom, as a 'trio', we have prepared the joint 18-month programme, a unique undertaking in the history of the Union, to give consistency and continuity to the handling of the Union's affairs.

With the Treaty of Lisbon coming into effect a new era has begun for Europe. The people of Europe expect, demand successes of this new stage. They hope to have Europe as an ally in the defence of their rights, in the protection and strengthening of the welfare state and in the representation to the world of the values of progress and solidarity with which they identify.

We cannot disappoint them. It is fundamental that the first steps of the Treaty coming into effect mark a visible turning point for our citizens and also outside the Union, and allow trust in the Union's capacity for action to be rebuilt. I ask you for your collaboration to achieve this and to continue working towards a prosperous, united and peaceful Union.

Thank you.