

**SPEECH OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE GOVERNMENT, MR JOSÉ  
LUIS RODRIGUEZ ZAPATERO, AT THE PLENARY SESSION OF THE  
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT TO PRESENT THE PRIORITIES OF THE  
SPANISH PRESIDENCY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**

**Strasbourg, 20 January 2010**

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Mr President of the Parliament, Mr President of the Commission, right honourable members of Parliament,

Allow me to say a few words about a country that is suffering great pain and tragedy, Haiti. I know that I share with you all the consternation, solidarity and commitment that the European Union and all of its institutions – starting with the rotating Presidency – feel for a country that is suffering death, destruction and violence after a past of both poverty and conflict.

On few occasions will we have the chance to demonstrate our standing as Europeans before a tragedy, like the one besetting Haiti, to show our commitment to what happens in the world and the countries undergoing most suffering.

We have, from the very first moment, attempted to provide a response to the tragedy affecting Haiti from this rotating Presidency and in co-ordination with the Commission and with the High Representative. The Council of Development Aid Ministers met last Monday and the Council of Foreign Ministers will do so next Monday to set out a plan, a rapid response, of humanitarian aid and co-operation covering all fronts to ensure Haiti's future.

I am fully convinced that the International Community is providing a strong response full of solidarity and that the European Union will rise up to the task. In the face of a tragedy like the one being suffered by Haiti, the spotlight should fall squarely on the people suffering in Haiti and I hope and trust that we all will make an effort to foster a thoroughgoing recovery. European society and our most deeply held convictions demand it of us.

Mr President of the Parliament,

It is an honour for me to appear before this Chamber in order to explain the main priorities of Spain's rotating Presidency during these six months. What is more, it is also a great honour, because I am speaking on behalf of a country that will shortly celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of its accession to what was then called European Community. I am referring to a European country, a pro-European country, a country that has undergone a great transformation as regards progress and well-being over the last twenty-five years, which was due, to a great extent, to the European Union.

The European Union, Europe, was a dream cherished by many generations of Spaniards. It was a dream of openness, openness to the world, progress, well-being, the welfare state and freedom. We saw that in Europe; that is what Europe has given us and what we have provided to Europe.

Twenty-five years later we feel ourselves to be a country loyal to Europe, committed to the Union, and there is no better way of showing that loyalty than being committed to Europe, exercising responsibility and putting forward initiatives and proposals. That is what we want to do during these six months, a time of change, because we assume the rotating Presidency in times of change: of economic change as a result of the serious financial crisis we had not seen the like of for eighty years; of political change because of the Treaty of Lisbon changes the governance of the European Union; of change in foreign affairs

because the phenomenon of globalisation is growing apace and because there are new emerging countries; and of change in the relationships the Union establishes with European citizens to add value to everything the new Lisbon Treaty contains.

These then are times of change, and for two specific reasons: the serious economic crises we are going through, and the Treaty of Lisbon and the new institutional relationships.

The economic crisis is the most serious crisis we have suffered for eighty years. We know that, during that time, the world's production levels and international trade have never fallen so much. We are also very aware of the serious effects it has caused in the world and in the European Union: eight million more people without jobs, many of them, as a matter of fact, in my own country; an effect on public accounts, and therefore from the standpoint of financial stability, which has forced us and is forcing us to take urgent measures in a co-operative fashion and which places changes in the European economy on the horizon as far as production capacity and improvements in competitiveness across the Union are concerned.

We have to keep maintaining the fiscal stimuli in place until the recovery becomes a reality. We have to commit ourselves to maintaining the Stability Pact and comply with the Commission's indications for 2013, and we have to tackle an economic strategy with a view to 2020, which the Commission is drawing up and which, in the Spanish Presidency's opinion, will be a key issue in these six months.

We are well aware of the European Union's weaknesses and strengths. We are aware that we have been losing our capacity for economic growth since the 1990s. We know that we have been losing out in terms of relative productivity against the large economies with which we compete. And we know that we are

suffering from difficulties in some specific areas that are key to our future growth, competitiveness and capacity to innovate in a globalised world.

But we also have some strengths and it is convenient now to recall them: we account for almost a third of the world's GDP; we are, without any doubt whatsoever, the world's main exporting power; we are ranked second behind the USA in terms of Research, Development and Innovation; we account for almost 60 per cent of the world's development aid, and this is a great strength for the European Union.

From Spain's perspective, what then are the essential priorities to achieve European economic strength in order to attain a sustainable economy from the standpoint of competitiveness, as well as from a social and environmental viewpoint? I will refer to four large issues that we wish to drive forward and which should be clearly recognised in the 2020 Strategy.

I will sum them up by saying that the European Union, in economic terms, should place a wager on itself. The European Union should advance toward economic union and co-operation, starting off from a sense of the Member States' responsibility, but also by ensuring that the community's institutions and the Commission have new powers to lead and attain objectives.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I will now refer to one of the issues about which we should take action and make changes. Over the last ten years, our energy dependence has risen nine percentage points from 44% to 53% for the European Union as a whole. Those nine percentage points can be accurately translated to the 67 billion euros the European Union transfers to other countries each year. Are you aware of what such an amount means? It accounts for practically the same amount all European Union countries earmark to public investment in R&D and innovation. We

necessarily have to change our energy dependence and reduce it. If we do not, our economic weakness will increase.

What then should we do in the field of energy? Advances have been made, but they are not what we had wished for. We definitely have to set up a common energy market that will strengthen the Union as a whole, as well as its economy. In order to do so, two issues are essential: energy interconnections have not met the expectations held in 2002 -- and a common regulatory framework to consolidate a common energy market.

If we manage to implement energy interconnections in the south, east and north of Europe; if we move forward by giving them priority and granting the Commission powers, we will see how our energy dependence falls and we will foster renewable energies which, by their very nature, require versatility when distributing energy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Europe will not gain leadership in the field of economic competitiveness unless it tackles energy interconnections in a decisive manner in all of their important facets and within a common market.

The second large objective: what kind of modern society provides for more growth and innovation? Investment in the Information Society, in the new technologies that have changed almost everything in the world.

40% of the European economy's productivity gains are due to Information and Communications Technologies, the so-called ICT. In this field, we European are leaders, as we have leading firms. However, we are lacking an internal digital market. We wish to take steps to set up a digital market. What does this involve? It involves doing away with obstacles, placing a wager on new generation

networks, facilitating e-commerce which is increasing on a daily basis in each country, but which does not move forward when it has to be done across borders.

If we move forward to a digital market, we will facilitate the creation of contents, strengthen intellectual property and ensure productivity increases in the short-term due to the innovation provided to all sectors of the economy by Information and Communications Technologies. Allow me to remind you that this is currently the sector having the greatest capacity for innovation, as well as to increase productivity and create stable employment.

The third sphere, the economy or sustainable industry. I will only put forward one example of what we feel is a development priority within the context of the fight against climate change. We would like to foster, along with the Commission, a development plan for electric vehicles. The automobile industry is going to undergo great changes and it is already immersed in that great transformation.

If we place a decided wager on this industrial area as Europeans with a joint, shared vision and with a common strategy for electric vehicles, we will contribute to reducing our energy dependence. We will also contribute to the fight against climate change and to the technological innovation that will, without doubt, be opened up by the electric vehicle, which will, moreover, be directly linked to Information and Communications Technologies.

The fourth main element of this sustainable economy and the economic renovation needed by the European Union is education, especially university education, the research environment *par excellence*.

Over the last 10 years, we have not made any advances regarding the number of universities in the ranking of the world's top one hundred universities. We have to culminate the Bologna process by fostering, facilitating and opening up the expectations for increasingly European universities, as well as for increasingly

European research, as there can be no doubt that they are great resources for the future.

Our sphere of competence in the world is longer on a country-to-country basis, it is as Europeans and as Europe, because the main players today have the size of China, India and the United States, along with other emerging countries. If we do not take advantage of the synergies provided by 500 million citizens in the economic sphere, which means tens of thousands of companies having great capacity and millions of workers who need increasingly better training, we will not become true protagonists of the future in the scene set by globalisation and as regards economic prosperity, innovation and technology. We will become mere spectators, not protagonists.

The path to follow is union, increased common economic policies, greater integration, more shared design and more Europe. Not placing new barriers, but doing away with barriers; not dividing but adding up; having the vision of a Union favouring competitiveness, integration and innovation.

We have placed our trust on the Commission to design the 2020 Strategy, which should also incorporate a reflection on the Common Agricultural Policy as a key instrument to defend the environment, the security of food supplies and the income of many European Union citizens. We are convinced that the debate that will arise in the European Council, the Commission and the dialogue, of course, with the European Parliament should give rise to a 2020 Strategy that will contain a serious, demanding governance mechanism as regards objectives that focus on the topics I have just mentioned.

I will now move on to discuss political matters concerning the Union's governance. The Treaty of Lisbon sets up new institutions: the permanent Presidency of the Council, the High Representative for foreign policy, it strengthens this Parliament – the very heart of European democracy – as well as the Commission.

I can undertake before this Parliament, which represents all European citizens, that the Spanish Presidency will be loyal to and collaborative with the new institutions. We wish them to have the value the Treaty sets forth for them; the European Union's need to have the permanent President and the High Representative to represent it and comply with their functions. We are well aware that these six months will constitute the first test on how the new institutional architecture works. Likewise, we will back the new strengthened Commission and the Parliament, ever more at the political heart of the European Union. This we will do because our commitment is very strong, and we hope we will be judged in a satisfactory fashion at the end of this period.

The European Union's governance is comprised of various powers and such governance should be linked together through loyalty and co-operation. That is how we will work.

Mr President, right honourable members of the European Parliament,

We are also undergoing changes in the sphere of foreign affairs, not only because of the figure of the High Representative and the setting up of the Union's Foreign Service, which will be a fundamental milestone, but also because we have set a six-month agenda in the context of globalisation and changes.

Allow me to set out the objectives in the field of foreign affairs that we have set out for the all summits we have scheduled: first, shared security; second, energy; third, the promotion and extension of open trade and of technology transfers; lastly, development aid, a field where the European Union has gained and should maintain ethical leadership in the world.

In order to attain these objectives during these six months, we will maintain dialogues with the Americas, North and South, with the Mediterranean, also with Africa and Asia, and with the European countries that do not form part of the

Union. We will do so with practically all the continents and latitudes through an intense agenda of international summits in which, of course, we will work hand-in-hand with the President of the Council and of the Commission, because we have reached important agreements for these six months, as well as with this Parliament.

These economic and political changes, as well as in the way in which we view the world are a result of the emergence of new players in the scene set by globalisation. Like I mentioned just a few minutes ago as regards the economy, Europe should also place a wager on itself in the sphere of foreign policy and, in this sphere, European interests and their defence should be present. The defence of European interests has a priority which is constituted by neighbouring countries. In my opinion, it is in this field where we should set more ambitious objectives and establish more intense relationships because it is precisely there where a good part of Europe's interests will be determined.

These changes we are undergoing and which we wish to drive forward through reforms and renovations will also have an impact on European citizens. The Treaty of Lisbon, which expresses the will of Europeans, wants citizens to feel closer to European institutions; it wants them to view the Union as their Union and to see Europe as a government that is closer to them. In order to do so, will put into place and promote some instruments during these six months. The first of these is the popular legislative initiative, which is highly important to this Parliament. Secondly, in collaboration with the Commission we wish to move forward in advancing equality between men and women as a priority, one of the European Union's most important rights of citizenship.

The societies that have attained the greatest equality between men and women are also the most advanced societies where Human Rights and prosperity are guaranteed. They are the most active societies in the fight against gender violence and what it represents for women, which cannot be tolerated in a society as advanced as the European Union.

That is why we are proposing to put new protection mechanisms into place in the legal sphere through the Euro Protection Order in order to extend protection against gender violence, which most European societies suffer.

European citizens should also learn about and hear our deliberations, proposals and initiatives on social cohesion as an inalienable aspect in the fight against poverty in Europe and that social cohesion and well-being are one of its signs of identity, along with democracy. As I said before, that is why the 2020 Economic Strategy should be sustainable in economic, social and environmental terms.

In order to attain this social sustainability, permit me propose before you a renovation of a European social agreement with workers and companies, a great social pact to develop the 2020 Strategy. Social dialogue and agreements are what have made Europe strong from the moment of its inception and in periods of weakness. And now, in this period of renovation, a social agreement can become a catalyst to bring about the objectives we have set for ourselves through efficient governance.

Mr President, right honourable members of the European Parliament,

I would now like to reiterate Spain's thanks to all countries of the European Union, and especially those that promoted our integration and contributed to our development.

I once again state our commitment to Europe, our commitment to the European Union and our commitment to a way of life, but also to a way of thinking and feeling; of thinking in favour of democracy, equality, human rights and peace; and of the feeling of living in peace with our neighbours, which unites our people, our aspirations, our history, thereby allowing us to live in peace with ourselves and enabling us to become and in the future remain being the great region of prosperity, well-being and of ideals.

Many thanks.