

# Spain's EU presidency to be 'eminently Euro-Mediterranean'

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**By Juan Carlos Gafo, Spain's Ambassador in Lebanon. Published in The Daily Star newspaper.**

On January 1, 2010, Spain will assume, for the fourth time, the Presidency of the European Union. It is a key moment, not only for Europe but for the whole international society. For six months, Spain will be in charge of the political leadership of the Union in a global environment marked by many challenges: the financial and economic crisis we have been experiencing; the need to manage the outcome of the recent Copenhagen conference to combat climate change; the updating of the transatlantic agenda to lay the foundations of a stronger and more effective cooperation with the US administration and address, jointly, the global challenges of the 21st century; a European Commission and a reformed European Parliament; and finally, the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, which was approved by a large majority in the Irish referendum on October 3rd.

The Council of Ministers and the Spanish Parliament agreed, with a broad consensus, upon the following priorities for the Spanish presidency:

1. Economic recovery and the momentum of a model of sustainable growth and quality job creation, stated in the definition of post-Lisbon Strategy 2010.
2. European citizenship of the 21st century and gender equality.
3. The promotion of Europe as a global player, the defense of human rights and the eradication of poverty in the world.
4. The implementation of the Lisbon Treaty and the corresponding political and institutional reforms.

In turn, these objectives are directed by two main principles: the development of innovation in all its facets and the defense and promotion of equality.

1. Regarding the first goal &ndash; the economic and financial recovery and sustainable growth momentum &ndash; action will be taken in the financial field: the establishment of a European financial supervision scheme; increased transparency in regulations; the introduction of legislative counter-cyclical elements; the promotion of capital markets infrastructure; the definition of a crisis management system; the inclusion of a harmonized mechanism of early intervention and resolution of banking crises; the

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deepening of financial services in the Single European Market; the establishment of international cooperation at G-20 level to develop a new international financial order under the principles of transparency, sound banking, responsibility and integrity; and the so called 'real economy'.

Particular attention will be paid to the launching of the post-Lisbon Strategy 2010, based on three pillars: the economic pillar, which permits long-term growth through innovation; the social pillar, based on the necessary generation of quality employment in Europe; and the environmental pillar, which aims to achieve an economy low in carbon. In this context, the Spanish presidency will include among its objectives the impetus to European Energy Policy (it is intended that the European Council of Spring 2010 will adopt the Second European Energy Action Plan 2010-2014 and the initiative of combating climate change after the Copenhagen Conference in December this year).

Finally, regarding the social dimension of growth, during the first half of 2010, the second Forum of the Social Agenda whose results will be instrumental in developing the new European Social Agenda will be held. It is the process for which the presidency shall take into account guidance from the Commission, the view of other Member States and the sensitivities of the various social partners.

2. The concept of European citizenship has been filled with content slowly and progressively since its inclusion in the treaties based on Spain initiative. It builds on the elements of equality between men and women – which will be a priority of the Spanish presidency, as well as freedom and solidarity.

Our presidency will seek to consolidate a strong and advanced status of European citizens. In particular, it will promote equality and combat gender violence (momentum of a European Observatory, a European protective order and a new Plan 2011-2015), fight against child abuse and work to achieve an agreement on the latest proposal for a directive of nondiscrimination.

In addition, it will concentrate its efforts on the implementation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of European Citizens, promote the Union's accession to the European Convention on Human Rights and develop the European Citizens' Initiative, in line with the concept of citizenship as a support to fundamental rights and freedoms.

3. The third major priority in the agenda of the Spanish presidency will be the promotion of the Union as a global player within the international society of the 21st century. The Union's capacity to speak with one voice will be crucial not only to resolve the many conflicts that make international news – from the Middle-East to the Caucasus – but also to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms, which are considered essential values of the Union, in order to eradicate poverty build strategic partnerships with regions and stakeholders who have a key interest for Europe. In this key area involving the Union's external relations, the Spanish presidency will be primarily Euro-Mediterranean and Euro-American.

Regarding the Euro-American dimension, our presidency will cover the Union's relations with the entire American continent – from the Arctic to Tierra del Fuego – by organizing summits

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## **Spain's EU presidency to be 'eminently Euro-Mediterranean'**

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with Canada, USA, Mexico and a bi-regional summit between the Union, Latin America and the Caribbean (in the margin of the Troikas EU-MERCOSUR, EU-Andean Community, EU-CARIFORUM, EU-Central America and EU-Chile).

In all of these summits, we will illustrate a strong ambition because of their particular significance for the external relations of the European Union and Spain. The summit with the United States will help us advance in the pragmatic but ambitious update of the transatlantic agenda, identifying new areas for cooperation. The summits with the two other North American hemisphere countries are also vital. In the case of Mexico, it will be the first bilateral summit between the Union and this crucial partner in the region, following the adoption of the EU-Mexico Strategic Partnership last year. Mexico became, after Brazil, the second Latin American country with which the Union maintains this type of strategic relationship.

Finally, the summit with Canada must be held in a promising context for progress in the framework of the process of global trade agreement negotiations and would coincide with the Canadian presidency of the G8.

The Spanish presidency will also have an eminently Euro-Mediterranean character. At the end of our mandate, we will hold the second Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Union for the Mediterranean, which must analyze the performance of six major projects approved in Paris and launch other new initiatives. The aim of Spain is to attend this summit with the permanent secretariat of Barcelona already in function. The summit shall set the first biennial plan of the Union for the Mediterranean that will substitute the five-year plan 2005-2010 adopted at the Barcelona Summit in November 2005.

At the bilateral level, we are particularly pleased that the first EU-Morocco summit will be held under our presidency; a Summit that will adopt new improvements within the advanced status of EU-Morocco relations. Spain will also work within the European Union to enable the organization of an EU-Egypt summit.

Another priority of the external relations of the European Union during the Spanish presidency shall be the impetus for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

There is a consensus within the Union, and increasingly in the international community as a whole, on the urgency to adopt and implement, without any delay, the solution of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

This solution should be accompanied by peace between Israel and its other Arab neighbors, including Lebanon, and a new relationship between Israelis and the Arab and Muslim world. Spain and the European Union, in coordination with other Quartet members and Arab partners, will make every possible effort to facilitate a breakthrough in this direction.

Spain will aid this task by providing the needed experience and the capacity for dialogue. Subsequently,

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## **Spain's EU presidency to be 'eminently Euro-Mediterranean'**

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it will try to expedite the resumption of the political process between the parties, helping to build mutual confidence and avoid anything that might take us backward, as the expansion of settlements or the outbreak of a new crisis in Gaza. Spain and the European Union will stand firm in defense of a solution based on international law and on mutual agreement between the parties.

During the Spanish mandate two summits will be held with important partners such as Japan and Russia. We hope, in this eventual case, to promote the achievement of substantial progress in the strategic relationship that the Union maintains with its primary neighbor in all fields, and especially in the ongoing negotiation of the new EU-Russia agreement. Our work could lead to the conclusion of an EU-Pakistan summit, particularly relevant in the current regional situation.

We shall not neglect the focus on key geographic areas like the Oriental Neighborhood, Asia, Africa and the Persian Gulf. During our mandate, we will adopt the revision of the Cotonou Agreement and participate in the preparation of the EU-Africa summit and EU-ASEM, which will be held under the Belgian presidency, as part of our trio of presidencies. Similarly, we will organize the Joint Council EU-Gulf Cooperation Council where we will try to actively endorse negotiations on the Free Trade Agreement.

In turn, the Spanish presidency will pay particular attention to the enlargement of the Union, taking as its starting point the consensus of the European Council in December 2006 (consolidation principles, conditionality and communication). We are optimistic about the candidacy of Croatia and we hope that in the coming months – and especially during our presidency – we would manage to give this country the decisive push required for its membership negotiations. We will also have to follow the development of Iceland's candidacy.

Our presidency will encourage the conditions that permit Turkey to achieve sustained and visible progress in its membership negotiations.

In the Western Balkans, Spain considers that the implementation of the "European horizon" is an essential element for reconciliation and the future of the region. Therefore, we will encourage the development of the Stabilization Process and Association of the Thessaloniki Agenda, with a view to its future membership of the European Union.

The fight against poverty and social exclusion is another common goal, especially symbolic because it coincides with the European year of combating poverty and social exclusion.

The Spanish presidency will pay particular attention to the neediest countries, giving priority to the cooperation for development on the European Union agenda for external relations. It will strive to increase coherence in development policies and aid effectiveness, and shall work hard in order to comply with European Union commitments in relation to levels of development aid.

Equally important will be the implementation of the commitments of the Copenhagen conference on climate change in developing countries and the effectiveness of the mechanisms adopted to mitigate the effects of the current financial and economic crisis in these countries, as well as issues related to food

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safety and preparation of the European position in relation to the Millennium Development Goals. A successful conclusion of the Doha Round would undoubtedly have a positive effect in terms of development.

As a final point, it is inevitable to make reference to the European Security and Defense Policy, which, in recent years has become one of the most distinctive elements of European Union's external actions.

The security and defense policy is an essential tool that enables the Union to fulfill its ambition by contributing to peace, security and stability in the world and in its neighborhood.

The Spanish presidency will continue working for the development of civilian and military capabilities of the Union – with particular attention to enhancing the work of the European Defense Agency – and shall ensure that the European Union is in a position to contribute, through operations on civilian and military crisis management, to the stabilization and conflict resolution.

The Spanish presidency will strive to consolidate and intensify the cooperation of the European Union, in terms of crisis management, with United Nations as well as with organizations such as NATO, OSCE and the African Union.

Following the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, its effective implementation will be a clear priority of the Spanish presidency of the Council of the European Union.

The breakthroughs that the Treaty set up are well known: new institutions such as the Permanent presidency of the European Council and the new High Representative who is the Vice-President of the Commission; a strengthened Parliament; the regulative intervention by national parliaments in terms of subsidies; new powers granted to the Union (education, research, energy, human health, protection from disasters, intellectual property protection, climate change, administrative cooperation); the development of the clause of ‘solidarity’ and ‘general interest’ of the Union; the binding character of the Charter of Fundamental Rights; the single legal personality of the Union and the creation and implementation of the mentioned European External Action Service of the Union.

An analysis of the Spanish presidency program would be incomplete without a reference to the principles of equality and innovation, which are intertwined priorities that guided the actions of the government toward the achievement of those objectives.

The term ‘innovation’ does not only mean technological innovation but also economical, institutional and political innovation. Hence, it is not only an essential precondition for the European Union to overcome the crisis situation, but also to prevent future recessions and strengthen a viable and sustainable social model.

As for equality, Europe has traditionally been a leader in the quest for equal opportunity and solidarity between social groups, regions and states – both among its members (Cohesion Funds and

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## **Spain's EU presidency to be 'eminently Euro-Mediterranean'**

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Regional Funds) or externally (Generalized System of Preferences and Cooperative Agreements). The European Union also integrated into this perspective the struggle for gender equality.

Ultimately, the Spanish presidency of the European Union in 2010 is considered, without any doubt, the most complex and determining presidency that Spain has assumed to date. The success we have brought during these 24 years and the three previous Spanish presidencies, enables us to clearly make a positive assessment of our participation in the common European process, but above all, must encourage us to continue building the modern and united Europe of the future.

This is required by the very spirit of the European Union and its dictum 'united in diversity.' As the Spanish philosopher Ortega and Gasset wrote in his piece 'Meditation of Europe': 'European unity is a homogeneity that is not stranger to diversity. It is a swarm of European people, called to deal with a common historical space whose fate makes them, progressively homogeneous and gradually divers.'