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# INTERVENCIÓN DEL MINISTRO ANTE LA CONFERENCIA DE EMBAJADORES DE PAÍSES BAJOS

Minister, Ambassadors, dear friends,

It is truly an honor to participate in this Forum. I would like to wholeheartedly thank Minister Koenders for his invitation. Today I am addressing you in my capacity as Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Spain, but you all know my special ties with the Netherlands, where I served as Spanish Ambassador between 2004 and 2007.

We, Ministers, are prone to saying that we are living in special times, times of far-reaching importance. Nowadays it seems hard not to consider the times we are living as particularly special, in a context marked by Britain leaving the EU and a good number of challenges rising ahead of us.

Taking this context into account, let me try to explain Spain's role and our vision of Europe. Spain has gone through a tough period; one of the toughest in decades. We just closed a year of political uncertainty with an acting government. Today, Spain is an example of economic recovery and political stability after the huge effort undertaken by our citizens during recent times.

Against all odds, for the last two years we have been the largest EU country with the greatest economic growth (2 consecutive years with over 3% GDP growth) and the highest job creation rate. Today, Spain is a truly open economy, with exports amounting to 35 % of our GDP, and tourism reaching a record figure of almost 76 million tourists in 2016.

In a context of uncertainty, we definitively need more responsible countries. Spain is one of those reliable countries we should rely on. In recent years, we have undertaken structural reforms to overcome the crisis and we have honored our commitments.

Spain is a country of deep pro-European convictions. Fortunately, there is broad-based domestic consensus regarding our EU membership. No major nation-wide political party is Eurosceptic or proposes that we leave the EU. Without any doubt, this is a valuable asset for our foreign policy. It allows us, 30 years on, to continue being a loyal and constructive partner in the project of building an integrated Europe.

It is true that Brexit has been a blow to the integration process. But Brexit should also be regarded as an opportunity for further integration.

To us it is very clear that the European Union is, after 60 years of existence, a story of success that has guaranteed peace and prosperity for its citizens. The European project is not simply about the creation of a free trade area. It is conceived as a political project for an ever closer union between

the European peoples. Spain sincerely believes in this political project.

There is natural disparity of viewpoints among Member States regarding the level of ambition for European integration. Nevertheless, it is high time we showed unity. Together, we must respond to the specific demands of our citizens, making the best possible use of the instruments we have. Let me be clear: Spain does not favor the renationalization of competences or the reintroduction of unanimity in the EU decision-making process. In our view, the objective should be to reach consensus in such a way that we can make progress in European integration at a single speed. Nevertheless, whenever this consensus is not possible, we must consider the need to make headway in specific areas.

We want more Europe. We want a better Europe. We have to correct the weaknesses at the source of the crisis: We must reinforce the democratic legitimacy of the EU, continue to develop European citizenship, advance in solidarity policies and complete the Banking Union, with a system that also includes a deposit guarantee system. We should also work our way towards a Fiscal Union with a common budget in the Eurozone and towards an integrated framework for economic policy. The Eurozone is the foundation that will enable us to continue to progress.

We want a Europe that sticks to its values and principles and defends human rights and dignity, within its borders and beyond. We support a Europe that is open to trade and continues to boost its role as a global player. We therefore see a need to strengthen the European Foreign and Defence Policy, and consider it natural for Europe to mature and earnestly assume greater responsibility for addressing its own security.

Europe is reacting to Brexit. On 16 September 2016, at the Bratislava Summit, a reflection began and a road map was adopted, aimed at responding to the underlying issues generated by many citizens' current disillusionment with the European project.

Spain shares the goals of the Bratislava road map. We consider it a priority to complete the Economic and Monetary Union and move forward with the battle against youth unemployment. Bratislava was the beginning of a process that will culminate in the 60th Anniversary of the signing of the Treaties of Rome, in March 2017. The countries of Southern Europe met last Saturday, 28 January, in Lisbon, contributing to the debate concerning the future of the Union with a view to Rome. Our focus is clear: we must address the challenges the EU is facing as a whole: immigration, terrorism, instability in our southern neighborhood, wars in Syria and Iraq, managing relations with Turkey, economic growth and social inclusion.

A propos Brexit and Spain's position on the upcoming negotiations, I would like to share with you some reflections. Our position can be summed up in four points, which coincide with those agreed between the 27 Heads of State and of Government:

-First, it is crucial that the procedure set forth in the Treaties is followed.

-Second, we must minimize economic and political uncertainty. Thus, it would be advisable for the United Kingdom to formally declare its desire to leave the EU as soon as possible, namely, as per the schedule put forward by Ms. May, by March this year at the latest.

-Third, there will be no negotiations without notification.

-Lastly, it is essential to preserve the integrity of the internal market.



We shall therefore wait for Article 50 to be activated. Then we will begin working on a balanced accord. Spain wishes to have a framework of close relations with the United Kingdom, providing that there is a level playing field.

The UK is a key partner for Spain. Every effort must be made to preserve this in future relations. For us, it is fundamental that the interests and rights of the Spanish population in the United Kingdom are maintained, as well as those of the Spanish companies in the UK.

Allow me to briefly refer to the question of Gibraltar, to set out our position clearly. As a result of Brexit, we are facing changing circumstances, which affect Gibraltar's relations with the EU. The United Kingdom's withdrawal entails the departure of its four constituent countries: England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Furthermore, its withdrawal will also mark the end of the application of EU law to European territories under the sovereignty of the United Kingdom—including Gibraltar—as their foreign relations will no longer be the responsibility of a Member State. Spain has generously offered an arrangement of co-sovereignty of Gibraltar to the United Kingdom, of which you have all been made aware. We will keep working to reach an acceptable agreement with the UK over this contentious issue.

Over the past two years, Spain has served the international community as a member of the Security Council. Our work on the council was driven by two principles: transparency and responsibility.

- This transparency has taken the form of an ongoing effort to share the information at our disposal with other States (who are, ultimately, our electors), with a special focus on EU partners and African countries, but also on developing working methods aimed at strengthening the Council's transparency; examples of this include the Toledo Briefing and the election of the Secretary-General, efforts which were greatly appreciated by Members.

- With regard to responsibility, our understanding is that it constitutes a service to the international community, based on two pillars: the priorities set out in our program and the duties the Council assigned to us. The backdrop to this all has been a rapidly shifting international situation.

This is why we have focused on combatting terrorism, as well as non-proliferation and disarmament. It is also why we have given a strong impetus to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, and to humanitarian issues, especially those relating to the conflict in Syria. Moreover, it is why we have drawn the Council's attention to new threats, such as climate change and cybersecurity, whilst keeping the working methods in mind.

In the same vein, we have made great efforts in Syria and Yemen, but also in the Middle East. Our attention was focused on Libya and the Sahel, including Mali, Sudan and South Sudan. We have also addressed the issues of Afghanistan, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic.

Spain's experience on the Security Council has been sincerely rewarding. Now it's time to congratulate you all for your seat on the Council. I offer you our cooperation during the preparatory year, and, once on the Council, our support to coordinate multilateral policies. Lastly, I urge you to you make the very most of your seat on the Council in 2018, to raise the Netherlands' profile at the UN even further.



Finally, let me close my remarks reaffirming Spain's unwavering commitment to Europe and our country's desire to contribute to further integration in this period of uncertainty. Brexit must not mark the beginning of the disintegration of the Union. Instead, it must be an opportunity to reflect on what unites us and allow us to move forward with a project that, despite all difficulties, has been a success to date. In this undertaking you will always have Spain's support. Thank you very much.