

## Abel Matutes, Spain in Europe (August 1996)

**Caption:** In August 1996, writing in the magazine *Política Exterior*, Abel Matutes, Spanish Foreign Minister, explains why European integration is the best antidote to combat international instability.

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## Spain in Europe

Abel Matutes

THE fact that Spain is a European country is not the result of political determinism or a decision taken on a whim. The European aspects of Spain's identity are born of its geography and have developed with its history. It is, however, quite another thing for Spain to belong to a specific political project in whose origins and initial development it was not involved.

In fact, our absence from Europe, meaning our non-involvement in that project, was as much of an anomaly as our political system. The establishment of a democratic regime was a necessary prerequisite, but it was sufficient because of the Spanish people's decisive will to become a part of Europe.

The reasons which led us to push so hard for Europe were very wide-ranging. Pre-eminent among them was the desire to overcome political rather than economic isolation. But Spain, as it was then, was also looking for a stable frame of reference, a spur to modernise its economy and society which would also fulfil the legitimate desire to be involved in the decisions of importance to the continent. Some aspects of the favourable assessment of our accession unquestionably offer room for improvement. Some economic and social sectors were particularly hard-hit by the effects of accession. In any event, I am absolutely convinced of the enormous contribution which the European project has made and is making to the prosperity of our country.

My firm belief in this stems from my personal experience as a Spanish citizen and as a politician engaged in European affairs for many years. As a citizen, I have seen how the European Union has been instrumental in the development of our infrastructure and in the measures taken by our economic operators to adjust to a more open and more competitive world. We all have day-to-day instances of the advantages of the Single Market, the free movement of persons, goods and services, the common policies, etc. As a politician, I have been lucky enough to be able to take an active role in the European project as part of the three key institutions of the Union, namely the Commission, Parliament and the Council.

Those three institutions are the basis for the final reason which leads me to continue to believe that Spain is defending its national interest when it is actively involved in drafting and implementing the European integration process. It comes down to one undeniable fact: national States are unable to tackle by themselves the issues which they face. The Union which we have successfully been building has enabled us to overcome the limitations of its component States, thereby making a decisive contribution to the defence of European citizens' interests. However, despite the many benefits which the EU has brought and is still bringing to its citizens, there are many people who wonder what Europe's purpose is today.

There was no need to answer that question forty years ago when the European Communities were founded. The pain of war was all too raw for the inhabitants of Europe, steeped as they were in the hardships of the post-war period. The need to rebuild Europe and the unbearable idea of a further conflict brought the founding countries together in a common project. The European Communities were created in order to overcome the antagonisms of the two world wars and to encourage the prosperity which the wars had destroyed. The Community also became an essential aspect for containing power blocs in the East-West conflict. Human memory, however, is a fallible thing, and, once peace and economic development had been achieved in the continent and the Berlin Wall had fallen, the memory of war was lost, and war itself became a distant, almost unthinkable notion.

### A different context

The final years at the end of the century are seeing astonishingly rapid change, not only in Europe but all over the world. The huge step forward in telecommunications is having a decisive impact on the development of human, political and economic relations. The world has shrunk, and everything is close at hand, and that means that new economies are emerging in areas of the planet which had been far away from what, hitherto, had been the centre of trade and civilisation. The countries of what we call the First World, and especially Europe, are losing their comparative advantages over countries which are becoming increasingly economically developed and are much more competitive than Europe; reasons for this include the enormous disparities between them and us in terms of social protection, something which is almost non-existent in their case. All this, along with the gradual liberalisation of trade and the need to afford those countries a genuine opportunity to develop, is changing traditional patterns of trade and giving rise to new economic power-bases.

Moreover, the gulf between Europe and the poorer or developing countries in terms of quality of life or profitability, combined with a birth rate which is much higher than ours, is a serious potential threat and is already creating strong migratory pressure from the East, Africa and Latin America; this, in turn, is often the source of social and personal safety problems which could become serious.

Furthermore, new winds have been blowing across Europe in the final decade of the 20th century. Following the downfall of power blocs, we are building a new order in the continent. The artificial division imposed after the Second World War has broken down, and the fall of the Berlin Wall has allowed the whirlwind of freedom to blow eastwards. The former Socialist republics are joining the democratic system, and the positive consequence of that is greater security for Europe.

Any new process brings with it elements of uncertainty, primarily because the new situation in the new democracies cannot yet be regarded as irreversible. We still do not know how the countries of the former Soviet Union, or Russia itself, will develop; the assessment of the political and economic development of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe is largely favourable, but their situation is still fragile, and it is not impossible that things may regress; figures on the international scene have increased in number, and ethnic and nationalist issues which, for so many years, had been swept under the carpet under Communism have come to the fore again. The security which we in Europe enjoy today therefore goes hand-in-hand with greater instability.

In these new circumstances, the EU, in contrast to what some people think, has not only not lost its meaning, it is now more necessary than ever, if that is possible. Admittedly, the issues which we face today are very different from those which led at the time to the foundation of the European Community. But it is no less true that the EU continues to be the best response to those issues.

### **New challenges**

Against that promising but uncertain background, the EU continues to be the principal factor for peace and stability in the continent and the only thing which has given Europe forty war-free years. The Union is, moreover, the only genuine prospect for prosperity and democracy for the new republics in Eastern Europe. And it comprises an enormous market which will have four hundred million consumers and great international clout as an economic bloc; outside that bloc, the Member States will have little opportunity to survive on their own in an increasingly competitive global economy.

In those circumstances, the only possible response to the changes that we are experiencing in Europe and the world is to continue to drive forward the European common project. There are no national answers to the challenges posed by the new international political and economic situation.

What, briefly, are those new challenges? Internally, the principal issue faced by the EU is to succeed in making the integration project an undertaking for the people, whose interests and concerns are at the heart of Community activity; that is the main objective of the plan. The EU must respond appropriately to the issues raised by its citizens: employment, personal safety, damage to the environment, the institutional complexity of the Union or its democratic deficit. We must give the people back their leading role in the history of European integration so as to bridge the gap which has opened up in recent years between the governors and the governed in all the Member States of the Union, between Europeans and the common project for coexistence. A united Europe cannot be constructed from above. It must be firmly grounded in the fabric of society so that it can stand firm without fear of collapse.

The external aspect comprises all the changes referred to above. They are bringing about a major change of direction in world history: political instability in Europe after the end of the Cold War, the starkest example of which is the conflict in Yugoslavia; the globalisation of the economy and the increasing pressure of competition; the management of increasingly scarce natural resources (energy, fisheries, desertification); strong migratory pressures, or the revision of European defence structures. All of these require new approaches and new responses from the EU.

That is the European context in which Spain must do its bit and put forward its ideas, its proposals to defend our interests and the common values and interests of all Europeans. The fact that the world has become a 'global village' means that there is very little that we or any other country around us can do individually outside the Union.

## **Responses**

As we move towards the new century, the EU has drawn up a strategy which will enable it to face these new challenges with assurances of success. That strategy, which aims to guarantee the peace and prosperity of European nations, can be summarised in a brief list of events drawn up at the Madrid Summit:

- the Intergovernmental Conference to revise the EU Treaty which began in Turin on 29 March;
- the move to the single currency in line with the timetable and the conditions laid down in the Treaty;
- negotiations on enlargement of the Union to include associated countries such as Cyprus and Malta;
- negotiation of the new financial perspective which will govern the Community economy from the year 2000; and
- the establishment of a new European security structure which will strengthen a European defence identity.

To safeguard our interests more effectively, Spain must play an active role in the drawing up of all the Union's responses to the new challenges.

*The Intergovernmental Conference.* The Union's fundamental objectives at this Conference, so far as the challenges to which I referred above are concerned, can be summarised in three points: bringing the Union closer to the people; increasing the effectiveness and democracy of the institutions of the EU; and making the Union more capable of taking external action.

In order to bring the Union closer to the people, we must try to strengthen common European values and respond to the principal demands of our society. Where Spain is concerned, the defence of European citizens' interests is based essentially on two elements: security of employment and internal security. As regards the former, we cannot deny that job creation is and will continue to be a basic responsibility of the Member States and economic operators. But it is no less true that the EU can bring added value in the fight against unemployment by increasing competitiveness and fostering the growth of national economies, making a contribution to monetary stability and developing common policies guided by the principle of job creation. Moreover, the Spanish Government would like to have a Title on employment inserted into the Treaty, one which would enable the European Council to draw up strategies to coordinate national policies. Admittedly, this will not be sufficient to resolve the issue, but the EU cannot shrug off people's concerns in this field and must do its utmost to alleviate it, using all the measures available to it.

As for personal safety, the problems at issue, such as crime, terrorism, drugs trafficking, and organised crime, go far beyond the limits of Nation States. Organised crime cuts across borders, and appropriate transnational instruments need to be drawn up to combat it. Today, we can say that Spanish awareness of the fight against terrorism has struck a chord among our partners. The strong personal commitment of the Prime Minister was evident in a noteworthy success at the Florence European Council. Our objective is to achieve a genuine common judicial and policing area in which criminals will find no refuge or shelter. That objective is even more clear-cut with regard to criminals who attack the system of values shared by all the States of the Union. The progress made in Europol and the Extradition Convention are a move in the right direction.

The EU has clearly affirmed the need to improve the performance of the institutions. That need has become more acute in view of the forthcoming enlargement to encompass thirty Member States. It is essential for the Community institutions to be able to act more effectively and with greater freedom, and that, in Spain's view, means that the current balances between institutions and Member States must be maintained while making such adjustments as may be necessary to ensure the democratic representativeness of all European countries and the necessary support of the people for any decision taken in Council. This involves revising the weighting of votes so as to ensure the legitimacy of the decision-making process and analysing the organisation of the Commission, the Troika and the Council Presidency.

As regards improving the ability to take external action, one of the priorities of the Spanish Government at this conference is for the Union to be given the means to enable it to have an influence on the world order commensurate with its economic and political weight. To that end, it is essential to establish a Joint Unit for the Analysis and Planning of External Policy which can establish clear objectives and common actions. We also consider it necessary to increase qualified majority voting in the implementation of European external policy. Only if the Union manages to speak with one voice on the international scene will it be able to ensure that it can defend its interests and its values and thereby achieve greater consistency and visibility for its external action.

*The Single Currency.* The move to the third phase of Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) is another of the central factors in the immediate future of the process of European integration. We are in favour of keeping to the timescales and convergence criteria laid down in the Treaty, because what is required is not only compliance with the Maastricht requirements but also consolidation of a healthy, balanced economy in our country. We cannot think about ensuring economic growth, investment and job creation on the basis of an inflationist economy which is in deficit and has a level of debt and interest rates which are much higher than the average. Spain must be in the leading group when it joins the single currency.

*Enlargement of the EU.* Enlargement to include the countries of Central and Eastern Europe,

Cyprus and Malta is a project which Spain has taken on and supported because we are of the view that the future stability and prosperity of the continent depend on it to a great extent. But it is a sensitive, complex operation, and, in order to bring it to a successful conclusion, the Government will champion the strengthening of the Community structures and the Community *acquis*. We shall have to use the occasion of the Intergovernmental Conference to make the amendments necessary to ensure support for the institutional structure of the Community. Furthermore, detailed analysis will have to be made of the economic measures which will enable the new States to join the Union without causing financial harm either to them or to any of the Member States or groups within the EU.

*New financial perspective.* The negotiation of the financial perspective and the Union's system of own resources from 2000 will be tough and will be related to the cost of enlargement. The Spanish Government believes that the EU must have sufficient resources to cover its ambitious programme. It is either naive or intolerable to try to make Europeans believe that enlargement can be done for nothing. Let us not forget that the average wealth of the new democracies in Eastern Europe is well below the average in the Community. But the Union has sufficient mechanisms to bring about the integration of those countries in a way which does not endanger the Community *acquis*, a delicate structure which we have been crafting for many years and whose destruction would pose very serious risks to the future of the EU.

*New security structure.* The changes which have occurred in Europe and in the world since the end of the Cold War have transformed the security and defence structures in our continent. We should note in that regard the importance of the decisions recently taken by NATO to drive forward changes in its structures and the development within it of a European security and defence identity. That will undoubtedly entail strengthening the role of the Western European Union (WEU) and, therefore, the role of Europeans in carrying out peace-keeping, humanitarian and crisis-management missions. This implies the urgent need to develop within the Union the security and defence identity provided for in Maastricht, especially the relationship at institutional level between the Union and the WEU, which is currently the subject of debate at the Intergovernmental Conference. To that end, Spain, in accordance with the provisions of the Treaty, is continuing to champion the gradual absorption of the WEU, when it comes to an end, into the Union, while taking account of the positions on defence taken by the various members. Alongside those developments, it is essential that the construction of a new security structure for the continent produces a genuine common security area based on cooperation which takes account of the legitimate interests of all European countries and especially of Russia and Ukraine. That is why Spain attaches such importance to increasing the power of the OSCE and drawing up a common comprehensive security model for the 21st century which confers an important role on cooperative relations and equality between the various existing security organisations.

Those are the major issues which Europe, including Spain, must confront during the years which will take us into the 21st century. It is a decisive stage for the future of the EU. In a very short time, a broad programme will crystallise which will include several rounds of tough, difficult negotiations. But, at the same time, the years between now and the end of the century will constitute one of the most interesting stages in the entire history of the European construction process.

Spain must actively contribute to shaping the future of the Union with the aim of increasing the added value which Europe brings to the defence of its citizens' interests. The success of the Union as it currently stands is no guarantee of our future. That is all the more true when one considers the challenges that we face. We shall therefore need imagination and diligence and the firm conviction that Europe is necessary.

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