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## A transatlantic conversation

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*Speech by Emilio Lamo de Espinosa, Chairman of the Elcano Royal Institute, at the conference of experts on security and transatlantic relations<sup>1</sup> held on 16 September 2015 in Washington D.C and organised by the Wilson Center and the Elcano Royal Institute.*

It is a great pleasure to be at the Woodrow Wilson Center and to have the opportunity to engage in a transatlantic conversation.

Washington is the world capital of many things, among others of think-tanks, of which the Wilson Center is a leading institution, if not the leader. It is therefore a great honour for the Elcano Royal Institute to be a partner with the Wilson Centre in hosting this event. I hope this will be the first of more to come, both in Madrid and here.

Allow me to start with some short self-publicity, a brief presentation of the Elcano Royal Institute.

Obviously, we are an international-relations think-tank; relatively small, at least by Washington standards; and also quite young: Elcano was set up in 2001<sup>2</sup>, largely as a consequence of the opening up of not only Spain's economy but also of its society as a whole to the outside world.

Over the past decade, we have especially focused on Europe, Latin America, the Maghreb and transatlantic relations. We have also developed particularly strong programmes in defence and security affairs, global terrorism, energy and international political economy.<sup>3</sup>

We have always been strong defenders, and I must include myself here, of the Atlantic alliance, in a complex country and through difficult times. After all, Spain was the first European country to become Atlantic. One has only to mention the Latin American Community, including the large Latino community in the US, to realise how true that is. Although we are relative newcomers to the think-tank community, I am happy to say that we are gradually making a name for ourselves. Last year, the University of Pennsylvania's Think-Tanks and Civil Society Program placed two of our papers (both

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<sup>1</sup>

[http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/web/rielcano\\_es/actividad?WCM\\_GLOBAL\\_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano\\_es/calendario/actividades/transatlantic-conversation-confronting-common-security-challenges](http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/web/rielcano_es/actividad?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/calendario/actividades/transatlantic-conversation-confronting-common-security-challenges)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/web/rielcano\\_en/about-elcano/presentation/](http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/web/rielcano_en/about-elcano/presentation/)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/web/rielcano\\_en/](http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/web/rielcano_en/)

prepared in cooperation with other European think-tanks, Chatham House included) among the best three published worldwide<sup>4</sup>.

Finally, we are a ROYAL Institute. His Majesty King Felipe –who is very much interested in international relations, having gained an MA from Georgetown– has been our Honorary President since 2001, when he was still heir to the throne. It goes without saying that we are particularly proud of this and furthermore very grateful to His Majesty for having found the time to join us later this morning.

Finally, in case you are wondering about our name, Elcano, allow me to elaborate a little. Juan Sebastián Elcano, not a composer as perhaps one might think, was a Basque sailor who accompanied Ferdinand Magellan on his last voyage. As you may recall, in 1520 they discovered what is now known as the Strait of Magellan, crossed the Pacific for the first recorded time, and when Magellan was killed in an ambush in the Philippines, Elcano took over as commander of the fleet, finally returning to Spain in 1522 after much hardship. It was the first physical endeavour of globalisation and the first recorded circumnavigation of the world.

Today, five centuries later, globalisation is an everyday reality that we experience in our smartphones and cars, in world trade, investment flows and, as we shall see later, in global terrorism and refugee flows.

But now let us turn to the issue that bring us here today: transatlantic dialogue.

Auguste Comte, the founding father of sociology, believed that ‘demography is destiny’. So I shall start with some basic demographic figures.

At the time of my father’s birth, at the beginning of the 20th century, Europe accounted for 25% of the world’s population. When I was born, in the middle of that same century, 20% of the world’s population was still European. Today, the figure is down to only 7%. There is currently only one European country –Germany– among the world’s 20 most heavily populated countries. Meanwhile, Asia accounts for 60% of the world’s inhabitants and Africa will soon have a population of 1,000 million, as much as Europe and the Americas combined or, in other words, as much as the whole of the Western world.

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Moreover, the diffusion of technology, both hard and soft, is fuelling the economic growth of the rising demographic powers. In April 2014 the FT announced on its cover that China was already the world’s largest economy measured in Purchasing Power Parity.

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[http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano\\_en/NewsletterView?WCM\\_GLOBAL\\_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano\\_es/alertas/alerta47](http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_en/NewsletterView?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/alertas/alerta47)

Meanwhile, India has overtaken Japan and Brazil's economy is now larger than those of both the UK and France.

Naturally, the new economic powers are also rapidly becoming major political players. July provides an abundance of fresh evidence of the fact: another BRICS summit; a summit of the Eurasian Economic Union; a summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation; and the formal constitution of both the BRICS' new Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

Inevitably, sooner or later, political powers become military powers. Although the US continues to spend far more on defence than any other nation on earth, the gap is narrowing. And, of course, the willingness to project force is as important as the ability to do so.

In brief, a new world order is taking shape. The bipolar world is long behind us, the unipolar moment came and went and we seem to be in a transition towards a brave new world, a kind of neo-Westphalian international society. A world full of opportunities but also of risks and uncertainties. A world where the Atlantic alliance is suffering under the strain. Some think that Europe is a question of the past; some that the US might be more a liability than an asset. Euro-bashing and anti-Americanism may have faded away with the Obama Administration, but they still linger on here and there.

The latest US National Security Strategy describes Europe as an 'indispensable partner' and the EU officially classifies the US as a key 'strategic partner'. Frankly speaking, I would like to see much stronger language on both sides: in my view, this is really the ONLY relationship that is truly 'indispensable' and 'strategic' for both of us.

Our most significant joint effort today is the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). An ambitious TTIP could significantly boost our economies and, more importantly, provide us with a unique opportunity to advance global economic governance in a manner that ensures that our preferences and values remain influential for decades to come.

Of course, we continue to rely on each other on a vast array of issues, ranging from conventional defence, counter-terrorism, climate change, energy security and so on. In many ways, NATO remains the bedrock of the transatlantic relationship and can thus be seen as THE bedrock of overall international security.

Certainly, we need a stronger EU. More union in Europe and more Europe in the Union, as Jean Claude Juncker recently said. Let me add immediately that at Elcano we are convinced there is no alternative to a United States of Europe, even though we are fully aware of the difficulties such a thing would entail. Significantly, the Spanish government itself has included this goal in the Foreign Policy Strategy it adopted last year. Spain is now leading the project for a much closer union.

Finally, I shall turn to the specifics of this seminar: the security challenges facing us. And that means physically facing us.

Historians and intellectuals, mainly French, have frequently considered the Mediterranean as the Romans did, an area of communication, a kind of inland sea, the *Mare Nostrum*. However, more frequently, the Mediterranean has been a frontier, a border, one of the two barriers that have shielded Europe and helped give rise to a specific European civilisation. On this occasion I shall say nothing about the other border, the Eastern one.

But what I want to convey to you is that Europe's Southern border is, probably, the world's most deeply marked, contrasting frontier, separating two completely different social worlds. There are two major religions, two cultures, two main language groups and distinct histories.

The cultural divide overlaps what is also the world's deepest socio-economic divide: GDP per capita in Spain and Italy is around US\$35,000; Morocco's is around US\$5,000 dollars; Egypt's is just above US\$6,000 and Algeria's over US\$7,000. That is a difference in wealth of one to seven, exactly twice the gap between the US and Mexico.

And, once again, add demography: Africa's median age is 20, while the median<sup>5</sup> age in the EU is 42.

To compound matters, there are Islamic terrorist groups freely roaming throughout the huge and desolate lands of the Sahara and the Sahel, from Mauritania to South Sudan, pressing northwards and southwards, destabilising the MENA countries –some of them failed States– and also penetrating to the Mediterranean through the Libyan corridor and to the Atlantic towards West Africa and the Gulf of Guinea. And just be aware of some data: terrorist attacks in the Maghreb countries (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya) multiplied by 47 between 2011 and 2014. There were 15 terrorist attacks in the region in 2011, 90 in 2012, 302 in 2013 and 698 in 2014.

This goes a long way to explaining the dramatic flow of refugees and immigrants. A few years ago they were moving from Eastern Africa to the Canary Islands and Spain. Later, mainly due to a successful containment policy implemented by Spain with countries such as Morocco and Mauritania, they began moving from North of Africa to Italy. And now they are moving from the Middle East to Turkey, Greece, Hungary and, finally, to who knows where. This human tide of huge proportions is putting the Schengen Treaty and even European democracy itself to the test.

But this is not just a European frontier. It is a world frontier, a frontier of the Western World. Probably more the revenge of geography than a clash of civilisations, to make a couple of references that everyone will recognise.

Spain is attempting to show the reality of NATO's Southern border as a major problem. This is not an easy task because problems to the East seem more tangible and urgent. Spain needs US support to increase NATO's interest in the South, translating the token expression of support agreed at the Wales Summit into actual specific measures. When

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<sup>5</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Median>

NATO's Secretary General came to visit the Elcano Royal Institute a few months ago we tried to convince him of this priority.

To conclude, the US may not be the *hyper-puissance* it once was, as Hubert Védrine said a few years ago, but it is still an 'indispensable nation' in Madeleine Albright's oft-quoted expression. However, big countries always try to take their place in history. This already occurred at the turn of the 19th century when the US, Germany and Japan emerged as world powers. The process, making room in the world for new powers, cost us two world wars.

So it is to be hoped that we might manage things better now.

As President Obama has acknowledged, no single country in the world, however powerful, is capable of dealing with all these challenges on its own. That is why we Europeans are trying to build an ever-closer Union, a Union that should bridge the Atlantic and be linked to another union: *e pluribus unum*.

There is no alternative to a strong and healthy transatlantic relationship for the 21st century.

Thank you very much.