
Keynote address by His Majesty the King of Spain. Transatlantic Conversation: Confronting Common Security Challenges

Text of the keynote address by His Majesty the King at the conference of experts on security and transatlantic relations¹ held on 16 September 2015 in Washington D.C, organised by the Wilson Center and the Elcano Royal Institute.

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

Let me tell you how pleased I am to be here today for this ‘transatlantic conversation’ on our common security challenges, jointly organized by the Wilson Center and the Elcano Royal Institute.

I would like to start by thanking the honorable Jane Harman and her staff here at the Wilson Center for making this event possible. As you all know, she has had a very distinguished career in the legislative branch, and is the first woman to lead this venerable institution, something that both she and the Center should be very proud of. Let me also thank the chairman of the Elcano Royal Institute, Professor Emilio Lamo de Espinosa, for his enthusiastic support in this initiative. Professor Lamo de Espinosa is one of Spain’s leading public intellectuals, and strong believer in the importance of the transatlantic relationship. As you may know, I hold the honorary presidency of Elcano since its foundation (close to 15 Years ago), and I’m happy to publicly thank him for his effective and inspiring leadership of an institution I value very highly.

I am particularly pleased to see both our institutions coming together to host this event. As I understand it, the major goal of the Wilson Center, a living memorial to one of the greatest US presidents of all time, is to honor him by providing a bridge between the world of ideas and the world of policy so as to better serve the public interest.

I think it is fair to say that this reasoning is very similar to that which led us to establish the Elcano Royal Institute back in 2001, when I was still the heir to the throne. Ultimately, both our institutions aim to understand the world better, and to share that knowledge with decision-makers and our citizenry at large to help make the world a better place.

Given our common aims and interests, I very much hope that today’s meeting will be the first of many joint ventures between the Wilson Center and the Elcano Royal Institute.

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http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/web/rielcano_en/event?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_in/calendar/activities/transatlantic-conversation-confronting-common-security-challenges

As well as contributing to our understanding of complex, challenging issues such as those you have been discussing this morning, it would also help us strengthen what is already a very rich and fruitful bilateral relationship between our two countries.

Relations between states and government officials will always be essential. In this framework, we must acknowledge the positive contribution of prestigious think tanks, such as Wilson Center or Real Instituto Elcano, regarding a better understanding of the current challenges, as well as the better ways to face and overcome them.

We are here today to participate in what we have described as a ‘transatlantic conversation’, and I would like to make a few remarks about how Spain views the transatlantic relationship. Anyone who has ever looked at a map of the world, or has read a bit of history, will immediately understand why the transatlantic relationship is specifically crucial to Spain.

The main reason is that, in a very real sense, Spain is an American nation. As I argued in a talk I gave at Harvard University a couple of years ago, we are an American nation in the sense that, for well-known historical and cultural reasons, we have a very substantial American identity.

I raise this because we all have a tendency to forget about Spain's centuries-long presence in a large part of North America; initially in the south and south-west of what is today the United States, and eventually in the entire territory to the west of the Mississippi river. Similarly, the entire Pacific coast from California to Alaska, including present-day Canadian territories, were explored and incorporated into Spain's dominions some 250 years ago. The first town founded in U.S. soil was San Agustín by Pedro Menéndez de Avilés. This month we are all commemorating its 450th anniversary.

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In many ways, of course, this not only makes Spain an American nation; it also means that the US is deeply ‘hispanic’, there are more than 50 million people from hispanic origin in this country. Two Spaniards, Junípero Serra and Bernardo de Gálvez, are a part of your history as well as ours. And there are many others that helped to strengthen ties between our two countries.

Today’s transatlantic relationship is about our common interests in such key areas as trade and security. Regarding security, let me remind you that in just the last few years the U.S. and Spain have signed two new protocols amending our Defense Agreement. Under these two new protocols, four American destroyers are currently deployed at Rota Naval Base and a Marine task force is operating from Moron Air Base.

Above all, today’s transatlantic relationship is about values, values which are deeply embedded in our respective national cultures. Most importantly, it is premised on our

shared faith in freedom, democracy, equality of opportunity, and a rules-based international order.

I think it is important to remember all this given the many challenges we currently face. Many of these —climate change, nuclear proliferation, global terrorism— are of a magnitude such that no single nation, however powerful, can tackle them on its own. More than ever, what is at stake leaves us no other way than to work together. Global threats need global solutions. The best way to guarantee our safety is to find a way to close tight alliances. Today I would like to reiterate that, from a Spanish and a European perspective, the United States is our indispensable partner in dealing with these challenges.

The Eurozone, one of the most developed and prosperous regions in the world, has been affected by economic difficulties. Spain, as a part of it, has experienced a six year-long double-dip recession which has taken a very heavy toll. Fortunately, the recession is finally over, and although we still face some daunting problems, including —most importantly— an unacceptably high unemployment rate, the worst is finally behind us. In fact, Spain currently enjoys one of the highest growth rates in Europe.

These problems, serious though they are, have not prevented Europe from being a responsible, active partner in the transatlantic relationship. When it comes to the key issues —whether it is the struggle against climate change, the fight against jihadist terrorism, the future of Afghanistan, or attempts to create a fairer, more inclusive system of global economic governance— the U.S. can rest assured in the knowledge that Europeans remain committed to what we continue to see as one of the cornerstones of the international system.

Finally, I would like to mention a pressing issue for Europe but also for other regions of the world including the U.S. I am referring to the flow of refugees fleeing from countries at war. It is indeed a complex matter that must be addressed from many perspectives but always inspired by a greater sense of humanity and the protection of Human Rights.

Today we have only had time to address some of these key issues. I very much hope that we will be able to meet again soon, perhaps in Madrid, and continue to live up to the Wilsonian ideal of generating knowledge in the public interest.

Thank you very much.