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AN ARDUOUS AND ESSENTIAL TASK: COEXISTENCE AND INTEGRATION

*Mr President,
Authorities,
Academicians, Professors,
Ladies and Gentlemen*

We find ourselves in this small and beautiful country named Montenegro. In the Adriatic Sea. In Europe. But also, in the Mediterranean. Just like my country — Spain.

In a conference I gave in March 2006 at University of Tunis, I spoke about Fernand Braudel, considered by academics as the best historian of the 20th century, who, in his most renowned work, *La Méditerranée et le Monde méditerranéen*, asserts the importance of the sea's geography in shaping the civilisations that surround it. The Mediterranean is one whole entity. The sea, a great bridge.

One shall take individuals into account when studying the history of our sea. Naturally, this includes what we now call economic and social history.

On the other hand, the German philosopher Hegel, who lived during the last quarter of the 18th century and the first quarter of the 19th century, devised the last and most perfected philosophical system in western philosophy.

He claimed the Mediterranean did not unite nor was it a bridge. Rather, it divided. It was a barrier between the northern and southern shores.

However, today, here and now, the catalyst in the Mediterranean in the economic, cultural, social, and scientific framework is, no doubt, the

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European Union. It wants to extend its area of influence and progress not only to its 28 member states, but also to the Balkan countries who have already expressed, one way or another, their desire to achieve full integration.

The time taken by Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Macedonia to achieve this may vary, but the way has been paved.

Others, on the eastern and southern shores of the Mediterranean, enjoy preferential agreements. Turkey, Israel, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco. Israel dictates the upper limit — ‘everything but institutions’.

The truth is that, in recent years, the north bank of the Mediterranean finds itself under growing pressure caused by the unprecedented migratory flow from Africa and the Middle East.

Great efforts will have to be made — are being made — to ensure a correct cohabitation of millions of people of different origins who have established themselves in Europe or intend to do so.

In this regard, Spain is a prime example, Barcelona in particular.

In the Euro-Mediterranean Conference held in 1995, the so-called Barcelona Declaration was signed.

Thirteen years later, in July 2008, the EU set up the Union for the Mediterranean, with its general secretariat located in Barcelona, with the aim to tighten the relationships between EU member states and others surrounding the Mediterranean.

Extensive and relentless work has been conducted to look into the adaptation and integration issues resulting from the great migrations of the last 30 years.

Teaching the local language, looking into the issues regarding the co-existence of different cultures and religions and so many other aspects should bring about mutual acceptance and the adoption of people from other origins.

We cannot ignore the formidable contributions in science, the arts, and culture made by the Arab World, the expansion of which from the year 1453 spans from the Ottoman border to the gates of Vienna.

Greek classics and their philosophy have not generally reached us in their original text form, but rather in Arabic translations. It was the Arabs who delved deeper into the study of the early Middle Ages.

Their contributions in the worlds of mathematics, astronomy, and architecture, have shaped scientific progress across the world through the Mediterranean followed by Europe.

Let us also say that a generation of western Muslims is appearing before us. ‘Western Muslims’ — that is what the British, French, and Dutch have

called this phenomenon, which focusses on the second and third generations after the original immigrants.

Many of them have followed the Christian tradition of keeping their religion as a private matter. '*Laïcité*', the French secularisation, establishes that religion must be kept within private boundaries.

Millions of French Muslims have followed this premise for the last half century. While not always easy to follow, it is essential to keep harmonic coexistence.

Naturally, this process, both human and social, is far from easy. The challenges, restrictions, and preconceptions are frequent.

However, political unrest in the Middle East and the North of Africa has overwhelmed all political structures and good will.

Chaos in Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia caused by questionable policy stimulated by the last two Presidents of the United States has made assimilation and acceptance of mass migration difficult.

The demographic and wealth imbalance within the Mediterranean and European regions have stimulated said indigestible migration.

We must, however, add to that the European demographic crisis. In order to keep the current population numbers, a fertility rate of 2.2 is required. The average rate in the EU is 1.38. In Holland and Belgium, 50% of newborns are Muslim.

Europe is an ageing continent showing no signs of improvement. The massive entry of women into the labour market has brought a great increase in wealth. At the same time, it has caused a drastic fall in births, further stimulated by abortion and gender policies.

This leads to most European countries needing an influx of young, working- and childbearing-age migrants.

Controllable and controlled migration would be ideal. Selective, allow me to add. The arrival of qualified migrants, willing to learn the local language and to integrate within the receiving society would surely be welcome. This is, alas, wishful thinking.

The massive influx of sub-Saharan immigrants, lacking formal education, bears the question of 'what to do with them?', given their dubious adaptation and integration capacity.

Hence, the emergence of populist movements who proclaim the loss of cultural and national identity.

The difficulty of human and social progress is obvious. Challenges, restrictions, and preconceptions are frequent and growing.

The need for common and coherent migration policies within the EU appears to be obvious. Reality is different though. The dichotomy between

globalisation and nationalism is something that we cannot ignore and that is difficult to solve. Though difficult to admit, the future of the Europe we have grown up in is in crisis.

We must all make an effort to find solutions to the current situation. Solutions that have thus far eluded our politicians.

Three approaches are possible: confrontation, collaboration, and disregard. We must go for maximum collaboration. Coexistence in the world we live in is at stake.