



TRANSCRIPCIÓN

**DEBATE Y DIÁLOGO CON CIUDADANOS DEL PRESIDENTE DEL
GOBIERNO EN EL *BERLIN FOREIGN POLICY FORUM* DE LA
*KÖRBER STIFTUNG***

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We have to be brave and smart, and I really liked that and I wanted us to start on the question of European recovery really and look towards the next year already. The Economist just wrote a couple of days ago and here I am quoting “In 2021 EU-politicians will learn that agreeing to borrow the money was the easy bit, but agreeing to spend it will be much harder”. Of course they have been talking of the next generation EU-Plan. So do you agree with and that the real litmus test for the EU is still ahead?

Absolutely. I think that the challenge that we have to absorb the resources and to use these resources efficiently in a manner that we increase our economic potentiality, productivity and all these economic figures that indicates the stronger recovery in our country and in the continent is crucial. I do believe that this pandemic has accelerated many transformations, transitions that we were imagining in the midterm and that nowadays became very urgent in the short term. Let me explain, for instance the ecological transition, the digital transition. I do believe that this pandemic has accelerated the big change that we are facing and because of that it is really important what we achieved last July to create a common response at the level because it's true that this crisis, that this pandemic in the economical-social side challenge the idea of the single market and because we need to strength the single market, one of the biggest achievements in the integration it is crucial to have, of course, a common response.

So we have this physical policy, that we are aligning our policies in each member state on ecological transition, digital transition...it is also true that the unprecedented response on monetary policy from the ECP side and also it is very interesting the dynamic that we, the leaders of the different member states, we were implementing since the beginning of the pandemic. I remember that in the beginning of the pandemic each country gave a singular response to the pandemic. We closed our frontiers, we managed or we decided to give a national, so to say, response...

...not much solidarity there, right?...

Absolutely, but nowadays it is true that we are cooperating, we are having councils every two weeks only focussing on the pandemic, how can we give a common response on the health side of this emergency, of this pandemic, for instance with the joint [inaudible] of health material and equipment, on developing and implementing rapid tests, on recognitions and assistance to use those tests on joint approaches to maxims... So, my impression is that the reality is that we are integrating not only the decision making process at the European level, but also sharing knowledge and of course policies in order to response effectively to this pandemic on this three dimensions.



Right...If I may interrupt you, Mr. Prime Minister, I guess that's the good news. At the same time at the dynamics and the Hungarian and the Polish veto that's not necessarily a great testimony of solidarity in the European Union. What does that mean for Spain, and what does that mean for the EU in total?

Well, I think that this issue of rule of law has been debated in the EU Parliament and in the EU Council and also in different governments in different parliaments in different member states since 2016. So this is a long debate, that we have been promoting, discussing this dialog and of course if you have rights, you have also duties and it is indeed very [inaudible] to defend and rule of law, which is of course one of the key principles and is in the heart of the European Union project. So, I do believe that we are going to reach an agreement and deep lock, so to say, the current situation that we are facing regarding the MFF, of course the Recovery Plan approved by different member states.

So you are not concerned that it will end up in a situation of total blockade and no money will be able to released?

I hope that we are going to, and I am confident that we are going to reach that agreement. I don't see any other option and I really think that the situation is dramatic on the health side, of course on the economic and social side, across Europe, especially in those countries. I remember that all that different trade union organizations had stated the urgency for having resources, approve the plan and I am sure, I am confident, that we are going to reach that agreement before the end of the year.

Fingers crossed. Money is always a tough issue at the EU and so is foreign policy, prime minister. I wanted to move to another issue. Last week we witnessed this little spat between the French president Macron and the German minister of defense, who just spoke at the forum earlier on, about the definition of European sovereignty and what European sovereignty actually means, and the German minister of defense says European sovereignty without the US is actually an illusion and president Macron says this is a historic misinterpretation. So my question to you is: are you with the German minister of defense or are you with the French president?

Well, I think that this pandemic has many lessons to learn, especially in the European Union. First of all that we are stronger together, secondly that we have a great opportunity after the US elections to reestablish a very positive agenda with the US Administration. I always stated before the US elections that it is a pity that the Trump Administration considered the European Union as an enemy and not as an ally. So I think that this is a great opportunity in order to change and to reestablish the very

important transatlantic relation. And finally I agree supportive to the idea of multilateralism I do believe that the EU itself is an expression of multilateralism because in the end, in the European Council or in the European Parliament, there are many many countries or many many governments, representing different political options and different national interests. So I think that we need to strengthen multilateralism. This pandemic has shown us the importance of, and the need to, strengthen multilateralism. And for that I think it is crucial, it is key to have, let's say, the understanding between two big actors in international relations such as the EU and the US administration.

Thank you. So are you with the German minister of Defence or with the French president?

(Laughs). I would say that I am with this German vision of international relations.

OK, duly noted. PM, we have promised our viewers as always to also take in as many questions from the audience as possible so I will start with another question that really pertains to the whole field of the EU's external relations. And I read it out to you: Is the UE able to become a capable actor in foreign and security policy with unanimity?

It is very difficult, very difficult. I think that when we speak about the enlargement... We have had very important and very tough discussions in the European Council regarding the enlargement... It is also true the French vision: if we enlarge the UE to a higher number of Member States, it is also true that we need to review the way we decide and the decision-making process. And for that if we want to go further and move on in this idea of federalism, which of course I'm open and I've always advocated. I that we need (inaudible: to leap) from unanimity to a majority in many of these decisions.

And do you see this happening in our lifetime, moving from unanimity to a qualified majority system?

Well, let me put this in this, let's say, domestic vision: In Spain, as in Germany, we have regional governments. We have to, in order to face this pandemic, we need to get majorities among regional governments. We have seventeen regional governments plus two autonomous cities in the north of Africa, and with unanimity it would be impossible, absolutely impossible to react in an efficient manner to this pandemic. So I do believe that we need to get to go to this qualified majority, and of course I will always advocate for this vision of European Union integration.



We learned you call yourself a militant pro-European. So, in that vein, here is another question, Prime Minister, from I think a German viewer (that sounds pretty much like a German question), and it has to do, again, with the issue of the Recovery Fund. I'll read it out to you: Is the EU Recovery Fund a first step towards a transfer union and how would you convince sceptical Germans of the value and need of common debt in the EU?

First of all, I think that this pandemic gives a great opportunity to the European Union to, let's say, reaffirm its values. For instance, if we speak with all the leaders of the regions outside the European Union, they don't have the welfare state, they don't have public health. So this welfare state that we have in Spain, in Europe, this let's say redistribution policies that we have in many issues –education, health system and so on and so forth– is crucial in order to, let's say, face this huge challenge of the pandemic.

When we speak about transitions –ecological transition, digital transition– it is also true that the importance is to give an inclusive approach and perspective to this transition, because these transitions are going to happen with or without the engagement of public institutions. So therefore the political willingness is crucial in order to give this inclusive perspective to this huge transitions that are going to touch dramatically our labour market, regions, opportunities in different regions and so on and so forth. So I think that in this new international relations scenario where we have, let's say, great actors such as China, the U.S., India, Africa, Russia and others, it is really, really important to have a stronger European Union. And this stronger European Union means to face these transitions in an inclusive manner, to be the leaders on this ecological transition and digital transition and of course, in order to do so and to achieve this, to have a common response. And for that it is important to remember that this Recovery Fund means investments: public investments and therefore private investments, but also reforms. And we need to face and achieve those reforms on labour market, on the energy sector, on the educational system, on the vocational training system and so on and so forth, (and) of course on the public administration. And these are the biggest challenges that we have in the European Union.

Of course it is difficult. Why? Because if you (look at) the different governments among the member states, we have coalitions, very fragmented national parliaments in every single country of the European Union. But this is democracy. We have to open dialogues with different political parties, to sum up and build up majorities in order to face those reforms. And I'm confident that in the next five to six years we are going to be able to make this big step in order to, let's say, achieve those challenges that we have on the economic and social dimension of the future.

Ok! I think the next question, which comes from your own country, from Spain, fits in nicely here. And again, I'll read it out to you, Prime Minister: Hi, President of the Government Sánchez. I am a Spanish student, very concerned about the future of work and rising unemployment in Spain. How can Spain best utilize the Next Generation EU funds to prepare our youth and mid-career workers for the future of work and what investments and policy changes will be needed to be ready for a digital future?

I won't respond because it is indeed a very extensive question, but I will focus on education, especially on vocational training. I would answer this student that if you see or are going to be the jobs that the market is going to ask (for) to our youngest generations, our, let's say, medium technical qualified, and in this specific, let's say, profile of qualification, Spain is not doing very well. We have many students in the university, which of course is very good, very positive. But on the intermediate, let's say, qualification we are behind the European average. And that is why the Spanish Government is going to pass a new law on vocational training in order to give importance to, let's say, this part of our educational system.

Thank you very much for being so concise. I think we have time for probably one more question and I think we cannot end this interesting conversation without touching on the issue of migration. And here is a question from NAME, one of our viewers, and he asks what are key shortfalls and perspectives for migration and solutions in that respect, how can the EU deal with this very difficult problem?

It is a very, very difficult problem and it is going to be one of the biggest questions and challenges, especially after the pandemic, because of the economic consequences in Africa, Latin America and other countries around the EU. I would say that my impression when we speak about this on the European Council is that on many occasions we only see the perspective of the security dimension of migration. Which of course it is necessary, it is important. Because we have to send a clear message to smugglers that we are going to go against them. But it is also important to have the international dimension, that is why I have always stated that it is really important to have the best dialogue with the countries of origin and the countries of transit. So the international dimension is crucial in order to face effectively this challenge of migration. Secondly, I think that it is important to have not only responsibility but also solidarity among Member States, and this is of course one of the biggest questions to answer in the European Council. We didn't manage to solve this equilibrium between responsibility and solidarity, but I of course think that it is important to say, OK, we are not going to accept irregular, illegal migration but we are open and eager to create legal, let's say, migration policies in order to respond, of course, to this reality that we are witnessing in Africa and other parts of the world. So



I think this is one of the biggest challenges that we have inside the EU and of course it is going to be one of the biggest debates around the world especially after the pandemic. But of course this humanistic approach to migration is crucial in order also to vindicate the European values which are aligned of course with the, let's say, the French Revolution and the humanitarian perspective that have always defined our common project, which is the EU.

It certainly is, Prime Minister. I have a very last question for you. It is a very serious one. Last week Spain defeated Germany 6-0 in soccer. I think that was the worst defeat in human memory. Don't you think that 3-0 would have been enough and I wanted to ask you if you could comment on this issue.

Well, I think that it was really, really tough. I was watching the match and I thought 3-0 was enough, it was ok, more was... but anyway, we will have other matches, Germany and Spain and well soccer it's of the best sports, very popular among Germans and among Spaniards and well, we'll see what happens in the future

Let's see what happens in the future. Prime Minister, thank you very much, this was extremely interesting. It was great to have you on the Berlin Foreign Policy Forum. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for joining this Körber Global Leaders Dialogue (...).

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(Intervención original en inglés)*