



PRESIDENCIA  
DEL GOBIERNO

SECRETARÍA DE ESTADO DE COMUNICACIÓN

# TRANSCRIPCIÓN

**DISCURSO DEL PRESIDENTE DEL GOBIERNO, PEDRO  
SÁNCHEZ, EN LA UNIVERSIDAD DE COLUMBIA, CON MOTIVO  
DEL FORO DE LÍDERES MUNDIALES**

Nueva York, 22 de septiembre de 2025

## **INTERVENCIÓN DEL PRESIDENTE DEL GOBIERNO, PEDRO SÁNCHEZ**

President Shipman, Professor Tooze,

Dear students and faculty,

Thank you very much for your warm welcome. It is an honor to speak here today and share my vision of what a progressive response to current global challenges should be.

I am especially pleased to be at Columbia University, an institution that welcomed Spanish and European exiles from wars and totalitarian regimes during the 20th century. Let their stories serve as inspiration to all of us in this critical time we are living.

A hundred years later, our world is witnessing a similar erosion of many of its pillars. A questioning of principles that were shared across party lines. A regression of values that had made our societies free, prosperous and peaceful for decades.

There are three core principles currently under fire that I would like to defend today.

First, that a just and open economy is capable of creating development and prosperity for all.

Second, that international relations should be governed by rules, not by brute force.

And finally, that open societies can keep fanaticism at bay.

We must stand up for these values because the truths we hold to be self-evident may cease to be so.

The United States of America has been instrumental in defining these three principles, often leading the way.

In 1776, the American Revolution brought about a crucial idea: that the equality of citizens stands above the whims of rulers. The genesis of this nation was a revolution against oppression and shined a light on the “rule by the people for the people,” as President Lincoln beautifully put it in his Gettysburg Address.

Almost a century ago, the New Deal also showed us how an ambitious program of public investments, credit access reform, and union strengthening allowed the United States to emerge from the Great Depression. Perhaps the most valuable lesson was that free political life is incompatible with deep inequalities.

The international order that emerged after 1945 rested on three pillars: openness, fairness and rules. It affirmed that nations would be great to the extent that they were free. The United States, as its leading architect, promoted this vision—and benefited from it profoundly.

I know that many Americans still embrace these principles. And I believe that your society still has a big role to play in their defense. We must not forget where we come from if we are to pave the way for future generations.



Most importantly, the present shows that those three core values continue to work. And I do believe that Spain is a good proof of this.

First of all, we know first-hand that economic openness and social justice boost growth and attract talent.

Economics is not a zero-sum game. International trade helps us grow the pie.

But what is the point if only a few lucky ones get all the slices? Our responsibility as governments is to help redistribute the benefits of economic growth and trade, ensuring everyone wins. We can do it domestically and also we can do it at the same time globally.

Let me share with you three facts about Spain, my country:

First, Spain's economy is the best performing among advanced countries.

We are achieving impressive growth figures while reducing inequality and strengthening our social protection system. Since 2018, the year I came into office, the average real net household income has grown almost 10%. At the same time, the capitalization of large companies has grown by 58%. And we are doing it through an open economy, with a growing, increasingly competitive external sector.

Second, Spain has shown that decarbonization and competitiveness can go hand in hand. We are the fastest-growing large advanced economy and we do it while reducing emissions. Close to 60% of our electricity already comes from renewable sources, reducing electricity prices by 50% since 2017 and being 30% cheaper than the European Union average. That is what I call intergenerational solidarity.

And third, our economic model has combined an influx of talent from abroad with a reduction in unemployment. Over the past 7 years, our country has received over two million immigrants while the unemployment rate has been reduced by almost 40%. Migrants have integrated well in our country, and contributed around 20% of Spain's per capita economic growth in the last three years. For us, migration is not a source of fear and threat, but of hope and opportunity.

In fact, Columbia and other American universities evidence how openness is an engine of knowledge creation. This university, with almost a hundred Nobel Prize winners, hosts students and academics from all over the world. You are living proof that human bridges, rather than physical barriers, help build a better world.

Now, openness should not be confused with naivety, nor with temerity. Of course, we need to fight against smugglers, we need to fight against illegal migration and the mafias benefitting from it, favoring legal pathways for migrants to come to our countries in a safe and orderly manner. But let us never lose sight of the fact that every migrant, legal or illegal, is a human being in search of a better life. So, let us never lose sight of the need to honor and uphold the most basic human rights.

In the same vein, our openness to international trade is also a sensible one, especially in light of an increasingly uncertain and volatile international context. That is why my country defends a model of open strategic autonomy. What do I mean by this? Open strategic autonomy. What I mean is the capacity to take advantage of the benefits of economic openness, foreign investments and free trade, while ensuring our autonomy in certain sectors that are critical for our security and economic resilience.

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As you can see, being progressive is not a matter of candid idealism, but rather of responsible pragmatism.

That pragmatism is precisely what has led me to emphasize that rules must always prevail over the law of the strongest. When raw power replaces rules, instability follows, uncertainty grows, costs rise and conflicts multiply. Rules are what make cooperation possible: defending them is not only the fair thing to do, but also the only way to avoid chaos.

That brings me to the second value I want to defend today: the need to uphold a rules-based international order and strengthen multilateralism.

In February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. Much of the international community, including the U.S. and the European Union, rightly condemned this aggression. We also approved sanctions against the invader, and provided support to the victim.

Well, then, I keep wondering what double standard prevents us from condemning with the same determination the murder of over 60,000 Palestinians in Gaza.

Spain firmly recognizes the right of the State of Israel to exist and to stand up for its own security. We have also condemned in the strongest possible way the brutal terrorist attacks perpetrated by Hamas on October 7, 2023, and called for the immediate and unconditional release of all the hostages.

But protecting your country is one thing and killing over 60,000 civilians, displacing two million people, bombing hospitals, and starving innocent children to death is quite another. I do believe that we are witnessing one of the darkest and most terrible events of the 21st century unfold right before our eyes, and, simply, the international community remains silent and paralyzed.

One of the most important lessons we learnt in the 20th century is that perpetrating genocide is the worst possible crime against humanity. But the other lesson was that looking the other way is completely unforgivable. What moral leadership can we play in the new global order if we abandon Palestinians?

Spain announced two weeks ago nine robust measures to contribute to put an end to this tragedy, to this catastrophe, and we continue to stand ready to do everything in our hands.

Coherence and consistency are necessary in times of turbulence.

Because, let me be clear, we are witnessing turbulent times in which the most essential principles, such as the ones enshrined in the United Nations Charter, are being constantly challenged, if not systematically violated. This is a time in which raw, hard power, and not international law, is gaining ground. A time when international relations are increasingly based on short-term interests and tactical deals, rather than the respect of long-term principles that guide our behavior. And that is really bad news.

We must stop the spiral of warmongering that risks taking us to a world of blocs and areas of influence. Let us not fall into this trap. We did so in the past. And we know that it does not end well.

Europe must double its efforts to reach out to the world and forge partnerships that are both anchored in its long-standing defence of a rules-based international order and that bring



tangible benefits for our people, like the EU agreements with, I hope so, with MERCOSUR or, in the coming future, India.

Potential green shoots against the dark clouds that surround us, and a clear message that cooperation, and not coercion, should set the terms of global exchange.

I know of course that our world is not that of 1945. But rather than seeing it crumble, we should reimagine and reform our international system with the same determination that those who endured World War II dared to have. We must adapt and transform our global governance to the needs of today and tomorrow.

And this message we sent to the world by recently hosting the United Nations Finance for Development Conference in Seville was the one that, from Spain, we wanted to send to the rest of the world: while others withdraw from multilateral institutions and reduce their commitment to international aid and development, Spain redoubles its efforts. In this spirit, we are launching a Platform to Reform Multilateralism, which is an initiative aimed at driving a far-reaching political process to renew both the architecture of global governance and the multilateral system as a whole.

Finally, I would like to talk about the third core value I mentioned: the virtues of an open society. And let me stress that this is probably the most important one: because when the free voice of a society is silenced, that society is destined to die.

In an open society, the protection of individual rights is not just a principle—it is a foundation. Freedom of speech, freedom of belief, and the right to participate in public life empower citizens to shape their own destinies. These freedoms are not privileges; they are essential safeguards against tyranny and silence. This is why we must protect these freedoms and avoid their manipulation into weapons for spreading disinformation, inciting hatred or undermining democratic institutions.

That is why defending free speech today means ensuring that open debate strengthens democracy rather than weakens it. Treasure free speech. Mark my words. Open societies can only thrive under true democratic governments. Because if we lose our freedom to disagree with power, we will be sowing the seeds of tyranny.

So again, mark my words: open societies can only thrive under true democratic governance.

And for that, power cannot be concentrated in the hands of a few, but distributed throughout institutions that are transparent, accountable, and responsive. In our democracies, leaders serve the people, not the other way around. This accountability fosters trust, and trust is the lifeblood of any stable and prosperous society.

And also, openness fuels innovation. When ideas can flow freely, when dissent is not punished but welcomed, societies become laboratories of progress. Open societies are not only more humane—they are more dynamic, more resilient, and better equipped to meet the challenges of a changing world.

So, let me conclude.

We must not indulge in nostalgia, but rather become pioneers of the progress that lies ahead. Millions of people still believe today that life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are inalienable rights. Rights worth fighting for.

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Those millions of people are looking for leaders who affirm that democracy is founded in the value of the everyday: that any young person can finish their studies without becoming indebted for life; that anyone can live free from fear regardless of his or her background, gender or orientation; that a worker is not treated like a criminal because of their skin color.

I am sure that some of those leaders are in this room today. You are those leaders of tomorrow. And that makes you our best hope.

Let me leave you with a final thought: even if the present may look grim, I know that a brilliant future awaits humanity if young people like you raise your voices and give purpose to your lives, defending with conviction the principles and values that define humankind.

Thank you very much.

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*(Intervención original en inglés)*