

Transcription of the interview with Josep Borrell Fontelles (San Domenico di Fiesole, 13 July 2011)

Caption: Transcription of the interview with Josep Borrell Fontelles, Spanish Minister for Public Works (1991–1996), Member of the European Parliament (1996–2004), Member of the Convention on the Future of Europe (2002–2003) and President of the European Parliament (2004–2007), carried out by the Centre Virtuel de la Connaissance sur l'Europe (CVCE) on 13 July 2011 in San Domenico di Fiesole (Florence). The interview was conducted by Cristina Blanco Sío-López, a Researcher at the CVCE, and particularly focuses on the following subjects: the origins of his European commitment; Spain's accession to the European Communities; the EU's interinstitutional relations and, in particular, the role of the European Parliament and the Socialist Group in the European integration process; the Convention on the Future of Europe; the potential of the Treaty of Lisbon; and his experience at the head of the Joint Committee for EU Affairs, the European Parliament and the European University Institute.

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1. The origins of his European vocation

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] Good afternoon.

[Josep Borrell] Good afternoon.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] I would like to begin by thanking you for your willingness to help us with our ‘Spain and the European integration process’ project. First, I wanted to ask you how your interest in a European dimension to politics came about, particularly in relation to your professional career, your experiences abroad — Stanford, Paris — and the key turning point that made your academic and scientific (or interdisciplinary) career take a more political turn.

[Josep Borrell] Europe was part of the intellectual baggage of the generation that made the transition to democracy. We did not divert ... we did not divert our attention towards Europe because Europe was among our ambitions. We were Europeans before the term was even invented. We were Europeans without knowing it, or rather, we knew it but in a very instinctive, intuitive way, because throughout the years of the dictatorship Europe was a key point of reference for all of us. It was a very natural thing.

2. The negotiations for Spain’s accession to the European Communities

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] And how about your subsequent experience in government during the socialist era; what was your experience of Spain’s negotiations for accession to the European Communities?

[Josep Borrell] The negotiations and the subsequent implementation of European policies occupied the entire era from the beginning of the 1980s until the mid-1990s. Everything was done to comply with Europe, and much of what was done was thanks to Europe. We joined Europe in 1986, and the negotiations began in earnest with the arrival of the socialist government of 1982–1986. I remember very well that the negotiations were difficult and concerned trivial matters. Membership of Europe was delayed by a few years because of opposition from the French, who were fearful of the competition that our lettuces and tomatoes might provide. A very mundane issue, but it delayed Spain's membership of Europe for some time. Then came the Maastricht years, the ambition to be part of the euro project, the battle to achieve convergence, the implementation of the cohesion funds ... First from my position in the Ministry of Finance it was my job to apply or adjust the Spanish fiscal system to the European one by introducing VAT, which we now think of as quite normal, as if it had always been there, but at the time we had a medieval tax system comprising a multiplicity of low, indirect taxes with no rhyme or reason to them. We had to conduct a delicate piece of fiscal surgery, the outcome of which was unclear. I think it was positive. And later on, there was the implementation of the structural funds, wasn't there, the huge opportunity that they presented to a Minister for Public Works — which is what I was — to have very high reinvestment resources available, resources that, without question, helped to change Spain's skin. Spain today is a country with very modern infrastructure; it's probably among the European Union countries with the best physical infrastructure, a huge contrast to the Spain of canvas shoes and road menders throwing down tarmac for pavements that the people of my generation remember. Not yours, because you didn't experience it, but the change from road menders to the motorways and the AVE was a huge leap that was accomplished in an extremely short time, thanks undoubtedly in large measure to Spain's joining Europe.

3. His experience in the Spanish Cortes Joint Committee for European Union Affairs

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] And in relation to your particular experience on the Joint Congress–Senate Commission subsequently, what was your experience of that stage and that role?

[Josep Borrell] You mean the parliamentary dimension?

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] Yes.

[Josep Borrell] Previously, as I said, we had had experience as a government, negotiating first and implementing afterwards. Our subsequent period in opposition was the parliamentary stage when we were lucky enough to address the major issue of treaty reform and the Convention. It allowed me to see the extent to which national parliaments follow ... from afar, from too far away, European affairs. In our parliament, for example, there is not the same level of scrutiny of European activities, or even the same level of knowledge that there is in the Danish Parliament, for example, where before sitting at the Council table, the Minister concerned attends Parliament to explain the topic of negotiation and receives instructions on the limits of the negotiation. Sometimes the Minister is even given a compulsory mandate. The Spanish Parliament, which is instinctively pro-European, pro-Europeanist, did not, at that point, have either the time or the resources to devote to European matters that properly reflected their importance. European matters were taken as ... as read. Now, though, things have changed. We look more closely, we examine matters more carefully, we pay greater attention, but, during the years of my chairmanship of the Joint Commission, the focus was not on European matters, and that was how things stayed until 2002 when the problem of the Constitution arose; at that point, greater attention was paid. But Parliament has been something of an orphan in terms of the Commission's work on Community matters, not because we didn't follow them, but because political

attention was focused well away from European matters.

4. The development of pro-European sentiment in Spain

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] In relation to Europeanist feeling, how do you assess its development in Spain over that time?

[Josep Borrell] Europeanist feeling?

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] Yes.

[Josep Borrell] Europeanist feeling, in my opinion, grew a great deal until the crisis. During the years of major European investment when there were all those posters that read ‘Financed by the European Union, by the European Regional Development Fund, ERDF, ERDF, ERDF ...’, those were the letters that stood out ... that invaded the Spanish landscape. There were ‘ERDF’ signs everywhere. I think even the youngest Spaniard knew what the ERDF was, or at least had seen the letters on a poster for some public work or other. Europe forced us to make sacrifices, to close some of our obsolete, subsidised, uncompetitive industries, imposed milk production quotas on us, for example. Not everything was wonderful. There was also an effort to adjust, but the country made that effort in good spirit because it knew that integration with Europe was, first of all, our natural destiny; we could not be an extension of North Africa. We had to be full members, scale the infamous Pyrenees, which were still there. Secondly, we knew that it would enable us to prosper more quickly because of the aid we would receive to rebalance our regions, among other things. Efforts were made, there were sacrifices, there were losers. Overall, our country came out a winner. And the feeling that Europe was the gateway to prosperity, political freedom, even the development of a social dimension, gained further currency. To the point that, when moment of accession arrived, which Spain for objective reasons ... sorry, not accession, enlargement, the enlargement to include the countries of Eastern Europe, which for objective reasons Spain should have opposed because obviously the Eastern countries would compete with us for structural funds, that ... there would be more of us sharing a cake that was not going to grow much. Therefore, the slices would be smaller for everyone, especially for those of us who had, for many years, been in receipt of the lion’s share. We should have been opposed. We should have said, ‘No, no, no, no. No more, it will be detrimental to us.’ But it wasn’t like that. Public opinion, everyone was in favour, there was no opposition, no feeling of ... selfish rejection because we thought that, just as we had been recipients in our time, it was now time for others to take part. We had the idea of a large Europe, a political Europe, a Europe that reached out, that welcomed countries that, for a long time, had been separated from us by dictatorship. Something that, in the final analysis, was our own experience. We had waited a long time because we were a dictatorship; we took a sympathetic view that other peoples who had made the same journey should become members. Then came the crisis, recently, and there’s no doubt now that the vision of Europe is not as positive as it used to be, don’t you think? The Fairy Godmother who brings presents has become a discipline-wielding stepmother, and that, naturally, is not something that is received with the same ... with the same enthusiasm. And that’s worrying. No doubt, if there were a new referendum today on a European treaty, there would not be the massive vote in favour that there was with the Constitution, the unborn Constitution, would there? Today, unquestionably, there would be greater reluctance and greater resistance because Europe is a source not only of resources but also of discipline, imposed on us, and sometimes it’s not easy to accept. We have benefited hugely from the euro. The euro has been a huge advantage to us. I believe that the transfer of credibility that the euro performed for us is more important than the transfer of financial funds that the regional policies or social policies did for us, because thanks to the euro our currency has not been devalued. Without it, we would not have been

able to experience the years of intense growth in the 1990s, since the mid-1990s. We have had very low interest rates, lower than inflation, which is hugely beneficial to investment. We probably haven't made the best use of it; we probably haven't used the euro in the way that would have best suited us in a short-term strategy. We have spent too much, taken on too much debt, done things that would not have been possible without the euro, but that's not the euro's fault, that's our fault because of the use we made of ... If you use too much or take a disproportionate amount of a medicine, the fault doesn't lie with the medicine, the fault lies with you. But that's how it's been, and now we have to make the adjustments needed to restore the margins we have lost. It won't be easy. But I repeat, it's not Europe's fault, it's our fault, but no doubt in the popular imagination the idea of Europe today, or the idea that the new generations have of it is very different from the one that we had 30 years ago.

5. His experience in the Convention on the Future of Europe

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] You referred just now to the Constitutional Treaty. I also wanted to ask you about your experience of participating in the Convention as a representative of the Socialist Group. Can you describe the battles, achievements, initiatives, your overall impression?

[Josep Borrell] Well, at the Convention, I didn't represent the Socialist Group, I was ... I represented the Spanish Parliament. The Convention, as you know, was organised by representatives of governments, parliaments and European institutions, and I had the honour of representing the Spanish Parliament. And it was unquestionably a huge opportunity for me personally. That year and a half of the Convention was a fantastic year in terms of political apprenticeship. We were shaping the future. We were producing the texts that were to define tomorrow's Europe. We undoubtedly committed the sin of over-enthusiasm, especially the Spaniards among us. We Spaniards went there to ... with a feeling that we had to do something more than merely streamline the treaties, which is what we were officially asked to do. We felt we had to go further, beyond the mandate, and produce a draft European Constitution because we thought that the word 'constitution' would spark a latent enthusiasm among the European public and that, having seen that this was the road to political union, there would be widespread public support. In reality, the opposite occurred. The word 'constitution' provoked more resentment than enthusiasm, sparked fears of plans for a supranational state that would restrict the freedoms of the Member States. Economic difficulties arose, and the project stalled. It stalled, no doubt, because we rose before the dawn and, as we all know, the sun is not hurried by early risers. After that, we had to turn it into a window-dressing exercise, of symbolic significance only, of what we had wanted to put in the text of the Constitution. But the years of the Convention, the 18 months of the Convention, were a great experience but also somewhat disappointing, to be honest, because a text containing a political definition of Europe was blocked by its rejection on the part of a significant number of countries' peoples. I don't think they rejected the blueprint of the Europe proposed; instead, they were rejecting, well, they felt, they felt fear at the prospect of liberalisation. It foreshadowed what we are seeing now. Now we can see more clearly European peoples' fear of globalisation, liberalisation, too much freedom, the loss of identity, the feeling of being invaded, that we are no longer ourselves, that our space is being taken up by others, that others don't integrate with us, that we are losing jobs to international competition, the feeling that is widespread today — a resurgence of national feeling, a homecoming, that borders are returning. That feeling already existed on a smaller scale and had a great deal to do with the rejection of the draft Constitution.

6. The Treaty of Lisbon, the economic crisis and the European Union's foreign relations

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] And what potential do you think the [current] Treaty of Lisbon has with regard to finding a place in this world of changing power bases?

[Josep Borrell] A great deal, a great deal, but in some respects not enough. Where economic governance is concerned, the Constitutional Treaty offers few innovations; there was no will for it, leaving aside the Economic Commission and the insistence on providing Europe with a mechanism for, let's call it 'economic policy coordination', namely the idea that further integration was needed in the form of not only a uniform centralised monetary policy but also coordinated budgetary and fiscal policies, otherwise the euro would encounter difficulties in the event of a major crisis such as the one we are currently experiencing. The matter was raised, and there was no will to take any notice of it. The Treaty of Lisbon does not include the instruments needed to tackle the crisis. It has been proven that, when faced with a crisis, the only thing that the treaty has to offer is prohibitions: 'x is prohibited, y is prohibited'. In other words, Europe did not have the instruments needed to tackle a profound crisis such as the one we have been experiencing, and that is attributable to the lack of ambition in the drafting of the Treaty of Lisbon. There was innovation on some aspects, but it was much greater in terms of international relations than in terms of economic governance, and now we need to amend the treaty quickly, even after doing things that some people think have no place in treaties. In short, whether they have a place or not, the treaty fell short when the crisis came. I was going to say 'it needs reform'. But there is no will to undertake another reform of the treaties because everyone has learned the cost of formulating a treaty, all the resistance and difficulties that have to be overcome. And now, another treaty, a very significant treaty, a reforming and transformative treaty would encounter much greater resistance than that met by the Constitution or the Treaty of Lisbon, even in Spain, even in Spain.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] You were talking just now about the international relations aspects developed by the Treaty of Lisbon. What is your opinion of the establishment of an External Service and all the developments that go with it?

[Josep Borrell] Yes, the External Service is the tool that Europe wants to have in order to develop the common policy it says it wants, but tools are useful only if there is the will to use them; in other words, if there is the political will to use them. Without political will, we won't get very far, however long the tools sit there. But anyway, having them is a necessary prerequisite. And yes, where foreign policy is concerned, there are now tools, procedures, functions in place that were not in place before. We might wonder what good they have been to date. None, really. For example, take Libya: we cannot be very satisfied with our capacity to act as a global player. I would be content to be a local player in the Mediterranean, a regional, local area close to us; here, at least, we should have acted with a single voice. And the disagreement was almost as great as during the Iraq war. So we cannot be satisfied with the use we have made of the tools made available to Europe under the Lisbon Treaty to advance its foreign policy.

7. His experience as President of the European Parliament — challenges, influences and future prospects

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] Okay. Changing the subject slightly, I wanted to talk a little about your time as President of the European Parliament, to hear about the plans and expectations you had when you took office, the greatest difficulties you came across and your overall assessment of the experience.

[Josep Borrell] My assessment could not be more positive. Being President of the European Parliament is not only a great honour because it means representing the peoples of Europe at the highest level within the institution, but it is also a fantastic opportunity to learn about the world. It is a political watchtower of the first order, perhaps without equal. For me, it was unquestionably a huge opportunity to be able to perform the role for two and a half years. Probably too short a time to do it well. You experience it against the clock, in a rush and hurry, because during that time you have to visit all the countries of the Union, establish relations with the national parliaments, make the voice of Parliament heard in meetings with the Council and the Commission. You have to conduct ‘parliamentary diplomacy’ with third countries. My term was notable, first, for the rejection of the draft Constitution and the formulation of a replacement treaty that was actually signed when I was no longer President of the Parliament. The Treaty of Lisbon was signed a few months after I had left the Presidency, but it was no longer a matter for me. I had to tend the wounds that had opened up after the ‘no’ to the Constitution, to make another plan. Then came the crisis of social Europe, in the sense that there was a realisation that the rejection of the Constitution had profound social roots. There was a discontentment with social Europe, an issue that was later overtaken by the issue of combating terrorism, which ultimately ... ended up as the distinguishing feature of the period. But overall, for me, of all the political experiences in my life it was unquestionably the most enriching.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] Which people impressed you most during that time? Which people, European or Spanish, whom you met as President of the European Parliament, have left the deepest impression on you?

[Josep Borrell] Well, at that time, we had the British Presidency, we had Tony Blair as President of the European Council, who proved to be a great orator in Parliament, a snake charmer: when he arrived in parliaments that were hostile to him, he achieved empathy and emotional communication to perfection ... Juncker, the current Chairman of the Eurogroup, as he was at the time, someone from the European right but more social democrat in his approach. I remember ... from the President’s seat, you have a very good view of the chamber; when Blair was there during the British Presidency, the right-hand side of the chamber applauded him much more than the left-hand side. The previous day, Juncker had been there, and the left-hand side of the chamber had applauded him much more than the right-hand side. Things were a bit topsy-turvy. Another figure was Verhofstadt, he’s an MEP now but he was Prime Minister of Belgium at the time. They are the people who played an important role at the time. There were many others, but I can’t list them all. I had the opportunity to meet foreign dignitaries, and the ones who made the greatest impression were the Chinese Prime Minister and the President of the Chinese Republic, two people who showed through their savoir-faire what China represents in today’s world. I also had the chance to see a part of the world that, until then, had been relatively remote to me: South-East Asia. We Europeans don’t have any idea of how small we are compared with the colossi who are becoming part of international life, like new actors eager to play their role to the full. We Europeans will soon account for only 5 % of the world’s population. I wouldn’t say we’re a species heading for extinction, but our weight in demographic terms is very small, and our average age is very high. We will not only be few in number, but we are also beginning to get very old, and that means that our position in the world depends, essentially, on our ability to unite so that our small size can at least withstand fragmentation into even smaller parts. Our capacity to absorb immigrants would seem to be the only way to handle our demography. When you open your eyes to the world and take in its size and complexity, you realise the importance of the European integration process. In other words, you realise the extent to which we need more Europe, and how much we have to fight the natural tendency, the tendency that the crisis has revived, to want less Europe so that we can go back to our separate roots, our small world, which is indeed very small, very small compared to the world emerging around us.

8. The eastward enlargement of the European Union and the borders of the European project

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] During your time as President of the European Parliament, you also experienced the challenges of the enlargement to include the countries of Eastern Europe that we referred to earlier. What do you think the frontiers, the ultimate frontier of the process of European integration should be?

[Josep Borrell] Yes, it fell to me in the last days of my term of office to welcome to Parliament the new MEPs from Romania and Bulgaria, who arrived at the eleventh hour in an uncertain process [where] there was no knowing until the final moment if it would end in allowing them to join or if they would have to go through another waiting period. They didn't; they joined, for good or ill. We can argue about whether it was a good decision. The decision was unquestionably motivated more by political criteria than by objective circumstances, but it fell to me to welcome Romania and Bulgaria and [...] to assimilate the new member countries. In other words, it fell to me to manage the change in the size of the European Parliament. A Parliament that I presided over, a much larger Parliament than under previous presidents, because there were many more MEPs, many more countries, many more languages. It was much more complex. There was some doubt as to Parliament's capacity to continue to operate in all its complexity with more people, more countries, more languages, and this complicates everything much more, not only from the material point of view of getting more translations and more interpretation, but also in terms of the culture shock of having more countries that are more different: the political cultures of a Frenchman and a German are different, but the difference is unquestionably less so than that between the cultures of a Spaniard and a Lithuanian, or between those of a Brit and a Romanian. But it worked well; we overcame, I believe comfortably, Parliament's increase in numbers. There was also much greater increase in the number of buildings used. Today it's a mini Tower of Babel, isn't it? But it is still the institution from which we can expect the greatest drive towards European integration.

9. The contribution made by the Socialist Group in the European Parliament

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] What is your analysis of the contributions of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament?

[Josep Borrell] The Socialist Group today is a slightly more uniform group than it was a few years ago. It's even had to change its name to incorporate the Members from the Italian Democratic Party who didn't want to call themselves socialists, so they've had to call it the 'Socialists and Democrats Group' as if the socialists weren't democrats, a name which is a bit ... a bit misleading. You can be a democrat without being a socialist, but these days you cannot conceive of being a socialist without being a democrat. Naturally, democrats ... we European socialists describe ourselves as democrats first. It's a party that acts as an umbrella for a huge range of approaches from British labour to Spanish socialism, via the French version or German social democracy. And it is no easy task to get them to work together. It's unquestionably been the major defender of Europe's social dimension. It's been the voice that's continually raised the ... the response to the crisis, for example. The other day in Paris ... or in Aix-en-Provence, in France, the current President of the socialists, Poul Rasmussen, said that a response to the crisis based solely on austerity is not a good response. It's not an adequate response. So it's the party that defends positions that are at a remove from the traditional orthodoxy. And it's a role that someone has to play. And it's very important that the Socialist Party plays it.

10. Relations between the European Parliament and national parliaments

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] What is your view of the relationship, especially with reference to Spain, between the European Parliament, the national parliaments and the parliaments of the Autonomous Communities? How do you think the relationship would work in terms of development?

[Josep Borrell] The Treaty of Lisbon provides the means for this task. It provides for new mechanisms for participation by national parliaments in European legislative work. Each country, in line with its internal order, has to organise the manner in which it participates, as do regional parliaments — they have different functions and powers in each country. But the role of the national parliaments has unquestionably been greatly increased. There are even some people who think the role of parliaments has increased too much because it further complicates a European legislative process that is already complex enough. But you can't allow more institutions to participate without taking on greater complexity. The mechanism was established because it was felt that the European Parliament still has a tendency to encroach on national powers, proper respect for the principle of subsidiarity is lacking and there is a will to stay on high alert. We will have to wait and see how it works; on paper, it covers everything, but we'll have to see how it works in practice.

11. The role of the European Parliament in structuring institutional relations in the European Union

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] What are the role and potential of the European Parliament when it comes to coordinating interinstitutional relations in the European Union?

[Josep Borrell] An interinstitutional agreement is reached at the beginning of each legislative term where the three institutions — Parliament, Council and Commission — undertake that the relations between them will best ensure that their joint work can be performed efficiently and in a cooperative manner. And each year, there's some hard bargaining to reach an agreement on how the relations will work. Alongside the Commission, Parliament is the institution that stands most for European integration, the European dimension of the process. Not the Council. The Council is the intergovernmental side. Therefore, Parliament's natural ally should be the Commission because both bodies represent the European general interest versus the Council, which represents the particular interests of the Member States. But that natural alliance is checked by the fact that, at the end of the day, Parliament is also the scrutineer of the Commission. So there's a certain ambivalence. Parliament must scrutinise the Commission but, in theory, should ally itself with it, and they should maintain a joint position vis-à-vis the Council. That's not always the case. Parliament and the Commission are not always on the same side. Often, the Commission is more on the Council's side than Parliament's, meaning that what I refer to as the 'natural alliance' is diluted, whereas it should, in fact, be developed because the intergovernmental dimension is going to grow stronger. The crisis clearly illustrates this. The crisis has strengthened the Council's role. The response to it was drafted in intergovernmental circles rather than being a result of Commission initiatives. To a certain point, it was only natural for it to be like that because the Council had its first permanent president, and the permanent president was going to play an important role, and it was only natural in a crisis such as this that the Council would be the place for direct inter-state negotiations on the application of policies not covered in the treaties. The things that have been done to tackle the crisis are outside the parameters of the treaties, they've been forcing them through among themselves, and that's something Parliament has criticised a great deal. Parliament has criticised the intergovernmental drift of the response to the crisis. The major parliamentary spokesmen, including Martin Schulz and Guy Verhofstadt, have been very critical of the governments' intergovernmentalising of the response. I don't know if another approach

would have been possible, but it's clear that, today, you can see it; it's clear that there's a force, a dynamism, a greater capacity to propose on the part of the Commission ... the Council, than on the part of the Commission.

12. The challenge of communicating about the European project

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] How about the issue of getting closer to the citizens, the institutions? How can that aspiration be realised?

[Josep Borrell] That's the major question we've been pondering for a long time and can't find an answer to. How to make European politics more attractive to national citizens, who continue to act like national citizens and not like European citizens. It's a difficult one, I admit, there's no easy solution because, to some extent, we're going against the grain. At elections, there are national lists, and the major political parties are still not able to 'Europeanise' the election by proposing a candidate from each party for the presidency of the Commission, for example. Pursuit of national interests, weak European political parties and linguistic fragmentation make it difficult to conduct European politics that is perceived as just that, and, in fact, European elections are often a rehash of national elections. As issues closer to the citizen become more discussed in Europe, the European dimension of national politics will increase. But we're still a long way off that point. I think that the first thing would have to be to provide European politics with greater perceptibility, make it easier to understand. Here at the Institute [European University Institute], we are implementing a very interesting project called The Puzzles of Politics, which tries to respond to the concerns of a European citizen who is confused by European politics and doesn't understand it. So if you're confused by European politics, we'll try to explain things to you in The Puzzles of Politics. But it takes time, it takes some effort. If you want to teach a child to count, the child has to make some effort. If you want to explain European politics to a citizen, the citizen has to make an effort because knowledge cannot be passed on by osmosis. It requires a degree of attention, commitment, willingness, a desire to understand. And we Europeans already have things firmly lodged in our brains; we have an automatic understanding of the Montesquieu model. We all understand that there's a government, a parliament and a judicial system. We elect a parliament, which elects a government, and the judiciary is independent of both, etc. We've got a clear understanding of that. It's taken us 600 years to get there, or 500, because so far it's taken us 500 years to get to the stage where it's such an ingrained part of us that we find anything else difficult to understand and accept. But European integration has nothing to do with Montesquieu's system. There is no executive, legislature and judiciary. The Commission is partly an executive, partly a legislature and partly a judicial body. It's something of each at once. The European Council is not an executive; well, it is in part, but in part it acts like a senate. The European Parliament is more like a congress in a federal country, it's part of the parliamentary representation, only part; it's similar to the United States Senate, and it doesn't have all the powers that a national parliament has and it doesn't elect a government. And in a national parliament, there's a battle between government and opposition, but there's no such battle in the European Parliament because there's no government and no opposition. The European Parliament's all about achieving consensus, reaching agreements, whereas in national parliaments agreement is the exception to the rule: the norm is confrontation. The European Parliament is the other way round: agreement is the norm and confrontation occurs when there're really no alternative and, even then, it's usually sterile because the institutions were not designed to be political battlefields but political agreement camps, and that's much less sexy, don't you agree? Consensus is less attractive than combat; the European Parliament occupied European society's full attention when we rejected the Buttiglione Commission, when there was a drama, a drama followed by a 'death', a political assassination. 'Ah, they've thrown him out, they're bringing someone else in, conflict, they say no to Barroso.' That attracts attention and

everyone stares. Why? Because there's a conflict, because ... if instead there's an agreement and we don't get to that point, we're simply not news. So doing politics without making political news is difficult. It's perhaps more constructive, it's perhaps more important, but it draws less attention to itself.

13. Future plans

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] There are two strands to your experience: your political career and your academic career. You referred to the interesting project being conducted at the European University Institute. I wanted to ask you what your plans and vision are for the new post you have as President of the European University Institute in Florence.

[Josep Borrell] I would like to make this institution, already a major academic institution, a major centre of intellectual support for European integration, a major centre for debate, a place for discussion at the highest political level on the idea of Europe. That's why it was created. Since then, however, it's lost something of its initial vocation because we're probably producing more senior university lecturers today who do not make an intellectual contribution to the process of European integration. We have contributed a great deal, but not enough to my liking. Therefore, my ambition and the challenge I have set myself is for this institution, which European citizens pay for, to become a major centre for intellectual debate on the process of European integration and the problems facing European societies, which are no trivial matter: immigration, demographic ageing, economic integration, monetary policy, Europe's role in the world, the building of a supranational political Europe that is above national political parties, above national policy visions. Those are things that need major intellectual support, and this institution should be capable of providing that. That's why it was brought into being.

14. Spain's contribution to the European integration process

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] Yes. Finally, I would just like to ask you, what do you believe Spain's most important contributions to the process of European integration have been, and what has Spain got out of Europe?

[Josep Borrell] Spain has got a lot out of Europe. We've got economic and financial credibility. We've got international solvency. We've got money, funding, but that's not the most important thing. We've regained a role in the world that we didn't have under the dictatorship. We have had a significant influence on European integration, but European integration has given us the opportunity to exist in the world, to modernise in material and psychological terms. Today, Europe accepts us because we are probably one of the most open, most developed societies in the intellectual and psychological meaning of the term, from the point of view of customs, from the point of view of political freedoms, from the point of view of the concept of citizenship, respect for human rights ... And we've also contributed a great deal to the building of a Europe of citizens and of rights. The concept of European citizenship is a Spanish concept. We've done a great deal to ensure that Europe is not just a market, not just a market, a place where supply and demand meet, motivated by the anticipated benefit of economic trade. We have done a great deal to ensure that Europe is also a place where social cohesion is achieved at different levels, where solidarity is practised, in other words the concept of social cohesion, not just territorial cohesion. That's very much our thing. We've

contributed a non-merchant view of Europe and have striven to ensure that Europe plays a role in the world, starting with Latin America, which is our area of reference. Although with little success, I must confess, because Europe's still not very interested in what's going on in the South Atlantic. It's got enough on its plate with what's going on on our doorstep in the Mediterranean and slightly further away. But yes, we've been a respected benchmark. We've contributed a great deal to the dimension of a Europe that is not strictly associated with currency, or trade, and we're still the country with the greatest Europeanist vocation.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] Very good. Thank you very much.

[Josep Borrell] Thank you.

[Cristina Blanco Sío-López] Thank you for this discursive, analytical interview about what European integration means in the eyes of someone who has tried to move the process forward. Thank you again.

[Josep Borrell] Thank you very much.