

## **Pedro Sánchez: We must protect Europe, so Europe can protect its citizens**

**The EU needs to be defended in the face of new challenges and against those who want to destroy it, said Pedro Sánchez on Wednesday to the European Parliament.**

In a plenary debate on the future of the EU, the President of the Spanish Government underlined that “we must protect Europe, so Europe can protect its citizens”. This should be done through a rights-based Union that gives shelter to the most vulnerable, offers opportunities to youth and the unemployed, ensures citizens’ safety, reaffirms its commitment against climate change and completes the Economic and Monetary Union.

Ahead of the European elections in May, Mr Sánchez said that the main priority should be harnessing globalisation to guarantee the survival of the European social model. He demanded an end to the austerity approach adopted after the financial crisis that caused a split in the European Union. “It is time to close that phase”, and make Europe valid again to Europeans. He refused, in that context, to cut the EU budget, because it would imply accepting the idea of a “retreating Europe”.

Speaking about extremist and anti-European discourses, he warned that “peace, democracy and freedom can never be taken for granted” and insisted we should all defend EU values. In this context, Sánchez emphasized that his main concern is “not the far-right itself, but how the far-right is shaping the agenda and discourse of political parties that previously had a strong commitment to the European project”.

### **Brexit**

The Spanish Prime Minister noted that the deal rejected by the UK Parliament was “the best deal possible”, offering the highest level of protection to both sides, including citizens’ rights and economic actors, and aimed at an orderly exit. Brexit is a “disgrace” in which everyone loses, he said, hoping there will be a compromise for the closest relationship possible.

### **Women’s rights**

Noting that his government has the highest number of women in the world, Mr Sánchez called on the EU to adopt a binding strategy for gender equality, focused on reducing the gender gap and the higher rate of unemployment and lack of security that affects women. He also proposed

establishing a children's guarantee to prevent social exclusion from early stages.

### Global challenges

The EU should move towards creating a truly European army and become a credible power on the world stage, advocating a global order based on the rule of law and common rules, said Mr Sánchez. We must show the world the European Union “is a soft power by choice, not due to weakness”.

Regarding migration, the President of the Spanish Government called for cooperation with countries of origin (particularly in Africa), transit and destination, while supporting the global approach developed within the UN. Responsibility and solidarity should be the guiding principles in the reform of the asylum system, he added.

### Catalonia

Replying to MEPs, Sánchez explained that in Catalonia, despite the parliamentary majority enjoyed by pro-independence forces, there is no social majority supporting independence. “They cannot impose a political project on a majority that has repeatedly stated that it does not share that direction”. He urged the pro-independence forces to open up a process of dialogue within Catalan society, with the support of the Spanish government, which is determined to solve the situation through dialogue and respect to the Constitution.

“In Catalonia, the problem is not independence, but coexistence”, he concluded.

You can watch the plenary debate [via EP Live and EbS+](#).

***Speakers' interventions are available by clicking on the links below.***

Statement by [Antonio TAJANI](#), EP President

Statement by [Pedro SANCHEZ](#), Spanish Prime Minister

Statement by [Frans TIMMERMANS](#), First Vice-President of the EC

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Laura FERRARA (EFDD, IT)

Nicolas BAY (ENF, FR)

Answers by Pedro SANCHEZ, Spanish Prime Minister

## Further information

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[Press conference by Antonio TAJANI, EP President and by Pedro SANCHEZ, Prime Minister of Spain](#)


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