

World Knowledge Forum 2012

10 October 2012, Jose Maria Aznar – Leadership on the World Stage

During the afternoon session on the second day of the 13th World Knowledge Forum in Seoul, Korea, Jose Maria Aznar, the former President of Spain, maintained a passionate defense of the past successes of his nation while engaging in a diatribe against the current leadership in Europe.

He noted that the economic woes facing his homeland are not specific to his country, and added that the problems facing the Eurozone today extend well beyond the economic realm. "I believe that all economic crises everywhere are always political crises," he said.

The former president opened his talk by sharing his views on how a leader should be defined. "Political leadership is the ability to convince others to do what is best for them," Mr. Aznar said, explaining that the risk to societies most often stems from a lack of leadership.

Touting his eight years in office from 1996 until 2004 as an example, Mr. Aznar spoke on the areas that brought economic successes in Spain. He stressed the importance of using the legal system to combat terrorism, which inspired a belief among the citizens of Spain that they could have an active role in the world.

He also discussed his use of the legal system to counter Spain's crippling unemployment. With this end in mind, Mr. Aznar highlighted several areas in which his office realized economic improvement. During his tenure, he noted, "public spending rose, taxes such as value-added tax rose, and the number of days lost to demonstrations were halved."

He justified these various economic measures implemented by his administration by noting that Spain, under his stewardship, saw an increase in per capita GDP of 64 percent, a stronger middle class, and the creation of five million jobs.

Mr. Aznar moved forward from the measures he took as former president of Spain to discuss the realities of the Eurozone today. He lamented that "many years without leadership has led us to a very serious social, political and economic crisis." A crisis, he added, that he was confident leaders have the capability to fix.

Near the end of his brief speech, Mr. Aznar highlighted three specific criticisms. Without elaborating, he blamed the dysfunctional governing body of the European Union, the lack of shared goals amongst the member states, and the Euro, which he called an "unfinished project."

Mr. Aznar did elaborate on whether the European Union should transform to a federation. "I don't believe in the creation of the United States of Europe. I believe we must respect the nations of Europe," he said.

In closing, Mr. Aznar offered his goals for the future of the Eurozone. "We must recover the fundamental ideas that forged the foundation of the European Union."