

**His Excellency Ambassador Marcos Gómez Martínez of Spain
Short intervention at EU event for the Opening of NZ Parliament,
9 February 2010**

Buenas tardes, distinguished guests.

Spain is the current holder of the Presidency of the European Council. As the Spanish Ambassador to your wonderful country, it is my pleasure to welcome you to the Backbencher for our special EU event this evening. We are all very honoured by your presence on the day the New Zealand Parliament opens its doors for business for 2010.

This year is a very special one for our relationship. It is the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the European Union and New Zealand. It will also see the Lisbon Treaty take full effect. This will have an impact on Europe, and on the world.

Until now, an EU Member State held the presidency for six months before it rotated to another Member. This is set to become a thing of the past in countries outside the European Union, as the Lisbon Treaty comes into being.

But we are not sad at this passing. It takes a stronger and more united Europe into a new era.

The Lisbon Treaty is transforming the European Union in four ways:

1. A more democratic and transparent Europe – a strengthened role for the European Parliament; greater involvement of national parliaments; and the introduction of citizens' initiatives.

2. A more efficient Europe - simplified working methods and voting rules; and the new posts of President of the European Union and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.
3. A Charter of Fundamental Rights where EU citizens' rights and values are enshrined. Member States will act increasingly in solidarity in areas like fighting terrorism, disaster relief and energy security.
4. The substantial reinforcement of the European Union's role as a global actor.

Key among these changes is the appointment of Mr Herman van Rompuy as the first President of the European Union. As a former Prime Minister of Belgium, he is an experienced negotiator perfectly suited to encourage the EU's 27 countries to take common positions on policies.

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for your attention. It is now George's turn to speak on behalf of the Delegation of the European Union, itself recently born of the new Lisbon Treaty.

As we say in Spanish, "que dis fruten de esta velada" - may you enjoy your evening.

Thank you.