



Intervención del Sr. Ministro JOSEP PIQUÉ en el acto de apertura de la ronda de negociaciones internacionales sobre el ITER (reunión “N7”)

Barcelona, World Trade Center, 9 de diciembre de 2002, 9:00 h.

Dear ITER Negotiators,

On behalf of the Spanish Government, it is an honour to give you the warmest welcome to the European Union, to Spain and to Barcelona.

I would like to start these brief words by thanking the European Delegation for its “quick and swift” reaction to the invitation that my predecessor, Ms. Birulés, made to Commissioner Busquin with a view to organising an ITER negotiation meeting in Spain. I would like to express my gratitude as well to all delegations present for accepting this European invitation and making “N7” a reality.

They say if something illustrates our people’s character it is hospitality. Millions of visitors from all over the world enjoy our country every year. And I am happy today you have provided us with the chance of giving you a direct taste of this hospitality, even if a small one given the short period of time that you will be with us.

Our planet is going through a difficult period. More and more data indicate, almost conclusively, that global warming is having an impact in our atmosphere. And there is a well identified cause for that to happen: the exhaustive burning of fossil fuels to heat, transport and produce the electricity we all need for our daily living.

The consequences could be dramatic in the long run, as we are conducting an experiment in real-time and with actual resources but with wide-ranging implications. I would dare saying that even in the short run the consequences are visible. In order to understand the meaning of my words, one only has to look at the tragedy occurring right now on our very Atlantic coast, caused by the sinking of the “Prestige” oil tanker.



Yet, it is clear to all of us that energy is at the source of our economy, our industry and our societal well-being. Not all concerns are environmental, either. Our population has grown to more than six billion people. And what is more important, the greatest increase is occurring in China and India, which are by nature energy-intensive in consumption and use. In fact, their consumption levels represent a sixth of the world average, and the trend is increasing as improvements in the standard of living are unavoidably linked to consuming more energy per capita.

Simple arithmetics will show us that we might have to double (or even triple!) our energy production to satisfy world needs in a few decades. If we do not wish to run against a wall, it is an impeding duty of our scientifically and technologically-advanced societies to find and use ways of producing energy allowing for the sustainable growth of mankind.

In this context, it is with great satisfaction that I confess to be very impressed by the ultimate goal of ITER: to dominate “the energy of the stars” in our planet. And I am even more impressed to learn how close you are to making that dream come true.

I am not sure when Presidents Reagan and Gorbachov met for the first time in Geneva, in November 1985, and they encouraged “the widest practicable development of international co-operation to obtain this source of energy for the benefit of mankind”, I am not so sure, I insist, they realised what a tremendous scientific and technical challenge this represented for the European fusion community.

But our countries, our scientists and our engineers, working together in close co-operation are facing this challenge with success and here we are today, getting ever closer to proving the technical and scientific feasibility of fusion as a source of energy, getting closer and closer to making ITER a reality and, allow me to hope, getting closer to making ITER become a reality... perhaps in Spain!

Spain believes in Fusion. I know our bid to site ITER may have come to some of you as a surprise, but our European colleagues are certainly aware of the strong support our Government has given over the years to fusion in all European Institutions. And they are aware as well of the significant investments we have made in our domestic programme on fusion, which has experienced the greatest growth rate in the European Fusion Programme since we joined the European Union.



But I would not dare hiding that there is something else in our bid for ITER, and that is the unprecedented growth that Spain has experienced in the last decades. Growth rates that have pushed forward the role of our economy in the international arena and have reinforced a modern and versatile industrial tissue and network infrastructure.

Spain now enjoys a situation of economic stability based on a firm budgetary policy, the openness of the economy and the structural reforms that have taken place in our markets. This is good, no doubt, but we want more... and here is where ITER comes into play.

Above and beyond its potential to develop fusion for the benefit of humanity, ITER is a tremendous scientific and technology driver and we are convinced that it could be just the right engine to boost a new breakthrough to our high-tech industry and research. But of course we are also fully convinced if you decide to come to Spain, we all shall benefit. If ITER becomes a reality in Spain, it will become a reality in the European Research Area.

This is not the first “tough” international competition that Spain runs for. Neither is the case for Catalonia. Let me remind you that the Olympic Games which took place in 1992 gave Barcelona not only the recognition of international success but also provided the region with a crucial engine to boost its unprecedented economic and social transformation.

We have certainly learnt from that experience. An experience based on a solid and viable application, counting on the technical dimension but also on the framework, the human and material resources and the unconditional support of the Spanish Government. But also of the Regional Government of Catalonia and the local authorities. As is the case now.

All of this naturally with the full involvement of our industry. Catalonia is one of Europe’s most industrialised regions and forty percent of its product are generated by the strength of its industry. Services play also an increasing role in its economy, which is highly diversified. Sectors such as chemical, pharmaceutical, electronics and information technologies are at the source of Catalonia’s innovate society, which enjoys a healthy scientific community made up of universities, R&D



centres and scientific parks.

The Spanish industry is aware of the benefits and business opportunities ITER will open in short run but also in the medium and long run. These benefits will come through the enhancement of high-technology transfer, the creation of international networks and the further development of a robust knowledge-based human capital stock. And it is also eager and ready to add the necessary impetus to its investments to make ITER a reality.

We can offer you what we consider a first-rate European site. An attractive site both technically and socio-economically. Vandellós and its surrounding area have a strong nuclear and chemical tradition being one of the most R&D-prone locations in Southern Europe.

I can therefore say that Spain is fully committed to making ITER a success. We offer a solid, viable and competitive proposal, with an open environment to boost the international dimension of the project the collaboration of private and public institutions and a supportive legal framework.

Our bid includes a fifty-year long experience in nuclear issues represented by the Research Center for Energy, Environment and Technology, CIEMAT. Our institutions may not be large, true, but we strongly believe they have the necessary capability to give ITER all the backing it needs.

The Spanish Secretary of State for Science and Technology is just back from a mission to United States. He informs me that the US Administration is favourable to rejoin ITER. This is very good news that I wanted to share them with you, although unfortunately the final decision is not yet taken.

China and now Korea are also interested in joining the project, putting more than one and half billion people behind it. We have four excellent bids to site ITER, a solid design on budget and good progress in the International Agreement to regulate construction, operation and decommissioning.



We have many objective reasons for optimism but also, realistically speaking, many difficulties laying ahead of us. Difficult decisions will have to be taken in the near future but what gives me most hope is to know that everybody sitting around this table deeply wants to develop fusion as an energy source for the benefit of mankind.

Dear Delegates, let me finish my speech by wishing you a very successful meeting and an enjoyable stay in Spain.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Para más información sobre el ITER:

<http://www-fusion.ciemat.es/fusion/iter/ITER-eng.html>