

Draft speech of the Ambassador of Spain
H.E. Mr. Juan José Urtasun Erro
at the opening ceremony of the "Aula Cervantes"
(University of Cyprus, Nicosia, 16th February 2011)

Rector, Ambassadors, Dean, Director, Dear Friends

Today is a day long awaited by many. After two and a half years of negotiations between the Instituto Cervantes and the University of Cyprus, which culminated with the signing of an agreement at the end of the Spanish Presidency of the EU, we proceed today with the opening of the Aula Cervantes, center of diffusion of the Spanish language and culture. And we do it in these magnificent facilities, as you can all see, of the brand new campus of the University of Cyprus.

Today I cannot but express gratitude to the University for its absolute determination to complete this project. Gratitude to Rector Christofides who has supported it since its inception and seen it through its completion. And appreciation to his predecessor, Professor Stavros Zenios, my partner for over two years of negotiation and the person who signed the agreement, together with the Director of the Instituto Cervantes, Mrs Carmen Caffarel.

The birth of the Aula, which we hope will be the prelude to the arrival in Cyprus in a few years of a great "Instituto Cervantes", responds to a global reality, a phenomenon that has the Spanish language as its main protagonist. Spanish has become the third most used language of the world, with 500 million speakers, and is the second mother tongue language, only surpassed by the Chinese. There are 22 countries with Spanish as their primary language. Spain is outnumbered by Mexico in the number of Spanish speakers -90 million- , and by the United States -more than 50 million-. The demand for the Spanish language is unstoppable and its learning is facilitated by the uniformity in the countries where it is spoken, thanks to the commendable work of the Association of the Ibero-American Language Academies.

But contrary to what some could think, the Aula Cervantes will not be merely a language academy. It will also, and primarily, be a

center for teachers training, on-line courses, and the examinations of Spanish as a foreign language. It will also have a dynamic cultural dimension, for which we hope to work together with the University of Cyprus and the major cultural institutions of the country. We will be able to enjoy exhibitions, conferences, cinema and theater, workshops and much more. The location of the Aula in this prestigious University facilitates access to a young and educated public, in other words to the country's future protagonists. It's a magnificent opportunity, and at the same time a great responsibility, for which we will be guided by the Head of the Aula, Javier Diaz Gervassini, who has an extensive experience heading the Aula Cervantes in Seattle (U.S.)

I invite all those interested to embark on the Spanish adventure, to get to know a culture shared by so many countries, a culture of great international prestige. Last year we had the opportunity to enjoy a wonderful exhibition in Nicosia, "Miró of Mallorca", which was opened by Her Majesty Queen Sofia of Spain. And I would like to remind you that during her stay in the island, the Queen expressed a keen interest in the opening of the Aula Cervantes, which was at the time in its final stages of negotiation. As from today the relations between Spain and Cyprus have a powerful tool which will bring even closer our peoples and will help us to get to know each other better. It is really a great moment that we should all celebrate.

I would like to conclude, esteemed Rector Christofides, reiterating to you personally and to the University Council and Senate, my appreciation for your stance in facilitating the arrival of the Aula Cervantes to the island. Your persistence throughout the negotiations, which have not been always easy, has enabled the University of Cyprus to offer today to its students and the Cypriot society as a whole, a new and prestigious institution of linguistic and cultural diffusion.

A valuable tool which will enrich multiculturalism in Cyprus and will promote access of the people of Cyprus to a language and a culture originating in the Mediterranean extended to the "new world" and which today demonstrate an extraordinary vitality in the entire world.

Thank you all very much for your presence here.