

# ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL REFORMS 'IRREVERSIBLE' - AZNAR

***Brussels, March 20, 2002***

This afternoon, José Maria AZNAR, Spanish PM and President of EU Council, and Commission President Romano PRODI addressed the plenary on the results of the European Council in Barcelona (15-16 March). At noon, Aznar attends an EPP-ED group meeting for an exchange of views.

'Each of us has made an effort to strike a compromise that enables us to move forward' in the economic and social reforms agreed upon in Lisbon, stressed Aznar.

The President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, described the foundations laid in Barcelona as "excellent" and announced that the Commission is to draw up a Report on the coordination of the economies of the 15 Member States for the Spring Council of 2003.

Among the undertakings adopted at Barcelona is an agreement on taxation on energy which will be introduced in tandem with the liberalisation of energy markets by 2004. Moreover, in what was described as a "crucial step" by Aznar, the EU 15 agreed to open electricity and gas markets for non-household consumers by 2004. As a result, at least 60% of these two markets will be liberalised by then.

On social issues, the Barcelona European Council adopted the European Health Insurance Card, together with a declaration condemning violence against women. On employment, the 15 set a target of 20 million new jobs for this decade and adopted a programme for access to crèche facilities.