



New Year's Message from the President of Catalonia

My fellow Catalans:

It is my pleasure to address you this holiday season, as I do traditionally every year, to send you a message of encouragement and confidence in our country and to wish you happy Christmas. These are pleasant days, when we get to spend time with loved ones and friends in celebration together. These are days for community, for memories, and for good proposals for the future. These are also days in which we particularly note the loss of family and friends who have left us or who are far away.

To all those families who find themselves in these circumstances, or who are facing difficult and adverse situations, of suffering or sickness, I would like to especially send words of encouragement as well as the commitment that we are working as hard as we can so that all of the people in our country can lead a life of dignity.

The year we are about to begin, 2014, will be a year filled with symbolism. We will mark the three hundredth anniversary of the end of the War of Succession. In 1714, the moment when Catalonia lost its privileges, its Constitutions, its institutions, and its liberties. Three centuries later, we celebrate almost a miracle: a people who might just as easily have disappeared not only continues to exist but is planning more forcefully than ever to win a great democratic and completely peaceful battle: that of freely deciding its future as a country, as a nation, and as a people.

Catalonia is a diverse and multicultural country, because of the origin of the people who live here, because of the languages that are spoken here, because of the myriad ways of thinking, because of the multitude of political and ideological options.

A diverse and multicultural country, which at the same time is capable of weaving great consensus like that which was demonstrated just a few weeks ago with the widely supported agreement on the referendum to be celebrated on November 9th of this coming New Year.

I know that there will not be unanimity around this great challenge. There are political forces who are opposed and above all, people, our fellow citizens, who look on the process with worry, fear, and, indeed, opposition.

These are legitimate and respectable positions, as legitimate and respectable as those that see in this whole process the best way to construct a country worth

having: for its modernity, its wellbeing, its sense of social justice, its civic responsibility, and its democratic quality.

Each and every position must be defended with respect and in a spirit of getting along together. To the extent that that depends on me, that will be so.

And beyond the individual position of each of us, it will be the votes at the polls that will have to decide and determine the proportions and the magnitude of the country's majorities and minorities.

There is nothing more democratic than doing it this way. Catalonia is a country with a long and deep democratic vocation, and therefore we must do it this way. Resolving big issues at the polls should provoke neither consternation nor fear, and it is obvious that our future and the relationship that we should have with Spain and with Europe is the very biggest of issues.

I want to take advantage of this New Year's message to ask the Spanish State to let us vote. That they listen to the voice of the Catalan People, and that they don't erect walls in order to silence us. That they let decide those who feel the need to decide.

Every nation implicitly has the right to decide its future. But for those who reject even this obvious fact, I will say that Catalonia has earned its right to decide. Catalans from yesterday and today have earned the right to decide their future because they have known how to maintain their identity, their culture, their language, and their rights alive, very often in the face of unjust laws and norms; they have earned the right to decide because they have known how to welcome and integrate millions of people from other territories of Spain and from farther off countries, demonstrating that Catalonia is a land where what is really important is the destiny that one seeks and not the origin from which one comes; and above all, that Catalans have earned the right to decide their future because they have known how to and indeed have insisted on keeping alive their will to govern themselves, in the face of all of the historical circumstances that tried to stop them and that now try to limit or lessen them.

In a word, the Catalan people prefers to govern itself and not be governed. And it wants to do so in a stronger, more united, more federal Europe.

We ask, therefore, that we be allowed to vote. And that the Spanish government doesn't see us as an adversary, and much less an enemy. We have been when we've been able, and we want to be now and in the future an ally, a good ally. But from a stance of freedom. Of our own free will. By being able to answer the question to which we have agreed on the date that we have agreed upon.

2014 will be, therefore, a year to remember history, people, and roots; but it will also be a year to decide the future and expand horizons.

The year that is now closing was the sixth of an economic recession that has caused real havoc. At the same time, it seems like we are finally on the come back. I trust that it will be so, and we will do all we can and all that we know in order to take advantage of the positive trend that we have gotten a glimpse of. The wounds created by the recession are very deep and therefore we cannot hope for instant miraculous cures. We will need time, perseverance, talent, and courage to recover and especially to look toward the future with a more solid foundation. The crisis has revealed many supposed truths by showing them to be mistakes, and even falsehoods, and much behaviour from before is now rightly criticized and recriminated.

Many things are changing for the better. And many others must still change. I am confident that between us all, we will find the way to amend the errors that have been committed and to transform what we've learned into collective strengths and successes. Successes that should be shared as they occur with all of those people, fellow citizens, who have suffered from the blows and injustices of these last years.

We can't ever forget that the State that many demand for Catalonia, like any other State, is nothing more than an instrument at the service of the people and the country. That is, of the citizens.

I raise a toast symbolically to all of you for a 2014 full of light, opportunities, and hope.

Long live Catalonia!

Artur Mas i Gavarró
President of Catalonia