

Official Statement by the President of the Government of Catalonia: National Day of Catalonia 2014

Dear compatriots,

This year we celebrate a National Day of Catalonia that is both special and different. It is special because it marks the three-hundred year anniversary of the events of 1714, and different because it will be the last of our National Days to occur before the upcoming referendum on November 9th.

On this year during which we commemorate the Tercentennial, I have chosen to speak to you from Saint George's Hall inside the Palace of the Government of Catalonia. This is a space of truly significant historical importance: in 1706, the last Catalan Courts assembled by Archduke Charles met in this very hall. The formation of the Catalan Courts [as heirs to the earlier Peace and Truth assemblies] in the 13th century is considered the birth of the first parliamentary political system in Europe. Indeed, our spirit of democracy has been in the making for hundreds of years.

It was also here, in the Hall of St. George, that the decision was made in 1713 to defend the Catalan Constitutions and bravely resist the Bourbon forces during the siege of Barcelona until their troops finally entered the city on September 11th, 1714.

One must be familiar with our history in order to remember the profound depth of the Catalan people's democratic convictions. During times when some seek to undermine, distort or even deny our past as a country, it is more necessary than ever to commemorate what we have been and to remember that the heroic defence of Barcelona, and all of Catalonia, three centuries ago sought to defend some of the most advanced laws of that age against absolute power exercised absolutely. And it was precisely that homogenizing absolutism, the victor of the war, which aimed to annihilate our identity, our language, and our parliamentary constitutional regime.

To commemorate these things is also to remember that we are a country that wants to do things well, that wants to debate things, sharing contrasting ideas and opinions, and making decisions in true democratic fashion: by voting. This is what we can learn from the Catalan society of three hundred years ago, and this is what some would now prefer that we forget.

Three centuries have come and gone. A lot has happened. But today we are still navigating through a turbulent sea filled with great difficulties which affect many people, our compatriots. These difficulties have been, and remain, so great, and the obstacles so powerful, that we very well could have been erased from the landscape of European nations. But that has not been the case: the Catalan nation is very much alive; we have a country and we are democratically, civically, and peacefully preparing ourselves to determine our own collective future, which belongs to seven and a half million Catalans.

Native Catalans, adopted Catalans, and new Catalans coming from other places – whatever the case – are all protagonists in the present and future of Catalonia. When the hour to decide our future arrives, all Catalans will have the same power: the power of their vote.

I have said from the very beginning that the political process alive in Catalonia today has been supported by two great pillars: the social majority that has made it possible and the political consensus that has buttressed it. Tomorrow, a significant number of our people will again show the world how Catalans understand the meaning of freedom and democracy. And like last year, the demonstrations this year will make it clear that the social majority that has made this process possible is not weakening but, to the contrary, is becoming stronger and more alive than ever. All should take note of this.

My commitment to calling the consultation, once the Parliament of Catalonia has approved the legal means by which to hold it, remains firm. We have come this far with a political majority which, from the great ideological diversity that we have in Catalonia, has made all the necessary decisions to get us to where we are today. I hope that this consensus will not only remain strong and unbroken, but will become even larger in order to continue responding to the aspirations and the will of the majority of our society.

I would also like to take a moment to be explicitly clear with the central government and the institutions of the Spanish State: there is still time to listen to the Catalan people's peaceful and democratic outcry. Silencing the voice of a people who want to talk is an error; to deny the right to vote to those who see the ballot box as the solution rather than the problem is a double error. The Catalan people do not wish to impose any decision; we want to be heard, we want to talk, we want to vote, and we want to find an arrangement that is good for everyone.

Catalans want to vote. We want to vote in order to be in control of our own future and to be able to decide how to best respond to the needs of our fellow citizens. We are not moved by the desire to be better than others, but by the desire that we may become better ourselves. We aspire, as all rightly do, to a better future – a future in which we can live side-by-side in harmony with the other peoples of Spain and Europe. We aspire to be treated like the other nations of the world so that we have the power to make our own decisions about our economy, our welfare, our public services, our identity and the form of our relationships with other nations of the world. We aspire to strengthen our ancient ties with Europe, which as a political entity also continues to grow and evolve as it moves into the future.

We now have the opportunity, one of those rare occurrences that arises from time to time in history, to lay the foundation for a better Catalonia; to overcome our faults, our weaknesses, and our flaws; to put aside our occasionally excessive internal divisions; to build the country of our future on more solid ground, with greater transparency and a higher quality of democracy. Our ambition for that quality of democracy should be equal to the centuries-long trajectory of democratic convictions in our country. Having one

of the oldest Parliaments in Europe should be a powerful stimulus for aspiring to have one of the best democracies in Europe. And yet we are still far from that noble and necessary objective.

During this important time for Catalonia, as we find ourselves once again under the attentive and curious watch of a world, I call upon all Catalans to show the very best of what our country truly is: a Catalonia that is convivial, civic, well-mannered, respectful, tolerant and inclusive; a Catalonia committed to social justice, faithful to its traditions of dynamism, entrepreneurship, and creativity; and a Catalonia that loves freedom and liberty.

Long live Catalonia!