

## **Speech by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Institutional Relations and Transparency, Raül Romeva**

*Brussels, 24 January 2017*

Bona tarda a tothom, gràcies per acompanyar-nos en aquest acte.

Good evening and thank you for finding the time to join us here today. We appreciate your presence and your interest in what President Puigdemont, Vice-president Junqueras and I, as Minister of Foreign Affairs, want to share with you all.

I would like to start by thanking the MEPs who host this meeting: Josep-Maria Terricabras, Ramon Tremosa and Jordi Solé.

I am aware of all the good and hard work you are doing in the European Parliament.

I think this meeting itself illustrates your success in making Catalan affairs and their aspirations a well-known issue in this Chamber.

I am also glad to see amongst you some very familiar faces, those of friends and colleagues which I don't have the chance to meet on a daily basis, as I did during my 10 years as a member of this Parliament.

Those were busy and thrilling years, since as a Catalan I was fully aware of what a great honour it is to represent my people in matters which mean so much in Catalonia as the European ones.

Europe is a beloved idea for Catalans. We have always felt part of it and have always looked at it as a source of inspiration on how to shape our own reality.

We know we belong to Europe as much as we feel close to the Mediterranean cultures and peoples. I guess this mixture is at the core of our way to read the world and to take an interest in it.

It is from this deep affection to Europe and everything it stands for that we are concerned about its present and future and that we would like to be able to get even more involved in finding new solutions for nowadays challenges.

Effectivement, aujourd'hui la construction européenne doit faire face à des épreuves qui peuvent en faire risquer la viabilité et l'avenir partagé.

Une seule chose semble être claire : l'Europe ne pourra pas se construire en sous-estimant les citoyens. Quand on le fait, la réponse aboutit en désaffection, dont le Brexit n'est qu'une des expressions.

Alors l'avenir pour l'Europe doit se construire sur la participation des citoyens et notamment en promouvant leur engagement actif.

Quand nous parlons du *dossier catalan* nous faisons référence justement à une clameur immense qui existe, qui est réelle, qui naît d'un peuple qui veut s'engager pour exprimer démocratiquement ses désirs.

Une clameur qui se manifeste de façon constante, massive et absolument pacifique, grâce à l'une des mobilisations citoyennes les plus persévérantes et intergénérationnelles que l'Europe ait connues. Je répète, ça existe, c'est réelle.

Cependant, nous ne sommes pas venus à exiger ou à réclamer. Nous sommes venus afin de nous expliquer, d'avancer nos arguments. Et ainsi le faire sans intermédiaires, sans distorsions.

Ce dossier catalan dont je viens de parler, il s'agit des droits et des conditions de vie de plus de 7,5 millions de personnes qui ont déjà la citoyenneté européenne. C'est pour ce motif que l'Europe en est une partie prenante.

Ce que les Catalans ont réitéré à plusieurs reprises comme leur objectif politique majoritaire, cela doit être vue comme une requête formulée par des citoyens européens dont le seul désir est tout simplement pouvoir voter légalement pour décider sur leur avenir. Il s'agit donc de demandes et de méthodes bien enracinées dans la pratique européenne.

La façon comme l'Europe gère les désirs d'approfondissement démocratique de ses peuples, aussi en tout ce qui concerne leurs identités, définira la crédibilité de sa défense de ses valeurs ainsi que ses principes fondateurs.

Si l'on veut, comme nous le souhaitons, que l'Europe ait la force suffisante pour rayonner à travers le monde un idéal de société inclusive et respectueuse des droits humains, c'est incontournable qu'elle n'hésite pas au moment de mettre en pratique ces valeurs.

C'est l'Europe qui doit soupeser la meilleure manière d'articuler la diversité de ses peuples, dans un contexte de liberté et de démocratie, avec un esprit et une pratique de la solidarité qui permet renforcer le projet commun de l'Union Européenne.

Une Europe qui devienne attractive et exemplifiant dans la scène mondiale doit être une Europe qui sache écouter ses citoyens et qui trouve les moyens politiques pour agir en conséquence.

Europe is now in a decisive moment. The EU needs to face its own destiny to definitively become an interesting and attractive project for the citizens.

A project which is able to manage challenging and pressing realities such as the ones I would like to point out next.

The Brexit, for instance, makes us rethink what unity really means. In which way do we want and are we able to work together?

British citizens had the chance to speak their minds and now it is up to their government to find the best way to implement that decision.

Consequently, Scotland will have to decide and be listened to as far as its European vocation is concerned.

There are also other challenges to face: the economic crisis in Greece makes us recalibrate our ideas on solidarity and address the claims for equity and social justice within the Union.

The economic crisis unveiled the worst face of Europe and Greece reminds us our duty to make Europe better again, especially there where it was born, in the Athenian civilization.

In addition, Europe has to prove its ability to show humanity. The crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean, with thousands of refugees fleeing from a terrible war, has made it obvious that Europe can fail, that it knows how to fail.

To help people in need was our duty 25 years ago in Bosnia just as much as it is now in our European borders.

If we fail to address this humanitarian crisis, this will never be the Europe we would be proud of.

Finally, the last example I would like to share with you, let me refer again to Catalonia, my country.

As you know, Catalan citizens are leading a pacific process to win their freedom and to be able to rule their own country, just as any other free nation in the world.

Our roadmap is founded on voting, polls and democracy. Our claim is fair, is democratic and is pacific, and is based on the respect to the will of the citizens.

Catalonia has always been pro-European and it will always be. However, Europe cannot close its eyes face to these realities, because it is its own credibility which is at stake.

That is why Europe is laying its own future on the line when dealing with Catalonia. Eventually, Europe will have to take sides and it is unthinkable it doesn't choose democracy. If it didn't, Europe would be acting against itself and its fundamental values.

In other words, Brussels needs to show that the citizens' claims across the Union are being heard and understood, that their opinions are important and that the European Union is the right forum to address them.

Otherwise, the EU will be seen as part of the problem and not the solution, which eventually would weaken the European Union itself.

I have no doubt that we will learn how to make this Europe together and that we will be able to make it better than ever: solidarity-oriented and fair, united and diverse, plural and deeply democratic.

Thank you / Merci beaucoup / Moltes gràcies.

I hope we will learn something today and we will build a better Europe together.

**Raül Romeva i Rueda**

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Institutional Relations and Transparency of the Government of Catalonia

## **Speech by the Vice President of the Catalan Government, Oriol Junqueras**

*Brussels, 24 January 2017*

Thanks Mr. Romeva, Foreign Affairs Minister. As Vice President and Minister of Economy, now I would like to focus the next minutes on the economic situation of Europe and Catalonia:

Europe ventures into 2017 in the context of moderate growth. In spite of the monetary policy measures, triggered by the European Central Bank, euro area economies are making slow progress. There are some exceptions, and Catalonia is one of them. According to the latest macroeconomic forecasts by the Catalan Government, released last November, GDP growth in 2016 stands at 3.4%, the same as in 2015. Looking ahead to 2017, the outlook is for a 2.7% increase -below that of 2016, but still remarkable. However, these positive developments in the Catalan economy are set against the backdrop of international economic uncertainty. Concerns about a sharp downturn in the Chinese economy, lower prospects for growth in the United States and doubts about Europe's resilience to overcome new challenges – Brexit, migration policy, you name it...- show that some risks remain and that we can not take economic recovery for granted.

Let me make a quick overview of Catalonia's economic performance:

First of all let me talk about our exports, which have been one of the drivers of Catalonia's solid growth in the last years. In particular, high-tech exports are at the forefront of the increase in foreign sales since 2014. Actually, our export per capita figure is the 9th higher in the EU, more than in Sweden, France or Italy.

Regarding our industry: Catalonia has a long-standing industrial tradition dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, evolving over centuries and bringing about a solid and varied industry, with a huge capacity for adaptation to fluctuations in the economy. Thus, despite strong setbacks during the recent crisis, the Catalan industry is currently growing above the European average. However, competitiveness of our industry is being limited, for instance, by the high cost of electricity in Spain or by shameful delays in the Mediterranean railway corridor.

One of our biggest concerns, unemployment continues to decline quarter after quarter, and the employment rate in Catalonia is on the way to reach levels similar to those of the euro area. As an actor in this complex and changing scenario, Catalonia aims to consolidate an increasingly competitive and innovative economic model based on higher productivity.

Regarding university: all the international rankings place the Catalan University and Research system among the leading ones in Europe. The main challenge faced by the Government in this field is to keep the quality of the system and to strengthen knowledge transfer mechanisms from the academic to the business world –and especially to Small and medium-sized enterprises, the backbone of our business network.

And last but not least let me talk about tourism: for us a strategic sector. While the number of foreign visitors increased by 3.9% already in 2015, it rose dramatically in the first quarter of 2016, to over 8.3%. Catalonia is the main destination for tourism in Spain with over 17 M people.

Let me focus now on our specific performance as a government:

Regarding the debt we made a huge effort in the past few years in order to slow down the debt growth rate, which went to pre-crisis levels in 2016. Controlling and reducing public debt is certainly one of the biggest challenges of our administration and a huge responsibility towards future generations. To achieve this, we need to keep the current high and sustainable economic growth.

And, we have to bear in mind that this remarkable performance is achieved under an enormous fiscal deficit with the Spanish central administration: which stands above 7% of the Catalan GDP.

We are also working on one of the main inefficiencies of the Spanish tax system: its fiscal benefits. In Spain, all main taxes include important tax exemptions that for the most part do not foster equity. On the contrary, they erode tax collection and greatly hinder tax administration. This is one of the reasons why we are developing the Catalan Tax Collection Agency to levels of competence as never before, with the goal of being able to collect all taxes in Catalonia within months.

But we don't have only positive news and figures to be proud of. We are also worried...

In spite of our performance, we are worried about the Spanish reserve pension's fund. That reserve fund has been repeatedly used by the Spanish government to pay current expenses. And if this continues like that we will probably see the resource depletion of that fund.

We are also worried, and probably our greatest concern is the level of the Spanish debt, which amounts to 100% of the GDP. And this is not a trivial matter, because the Spanish deficit is still growing over the growth of the Spanish GDP. On the other hand, our economy, our economy, the Catalan economy, is growing faster than our deficit, closing last year deficit at -1% of our GDP, a figure that speaks of our deep commitment to budgetary stability.

Si me permiten unes reflexiones finales...

El Estado español y en particular su gobierno, y los partidos que lo sustentan o han permitido su investidura se enfrentan a muchos retos que podríamos agrupar en ámbito la ineficiencia económica, injusticia social e insuficiencia democrática. Ineficiencia económica porque siguen tomando decisiones económicas en función de criterios políticos, invirtiendo en trenes de alta velocidad sin pasajeros y sin retorno económico, o protegiendo inversiones como el proyecto Castor o rescatando proyectos de inversión privada que estaban condenados desde el inicio al fracaso. Ineficiencia económica que se arrastra desde hace mucho tiempo. De hecho, España es el Estado que ha protagonizado más quiebras en toda la historia de la humanidad.

Estas ineficiencias económicas comportan también altos niveles de injusticia social, de protección de los intereses de unos pocos en contra de las necesidades de la mayoría. Lo vemos cada día cuando el Gobierno se reserva para sí mismo la mayor parte de la recaudación fiscal y también cuando se reserva para sí mismo la mayor parte del techo de déficit que Europa le concede, condenando a enormes dificultades aquellas

administraciones públicas que hacen un mayor esfuerzo no sólo de control, sino de servicios públicos fundamentales como la educación o la salud, que son responsabilidad de administraciones locales en el caso de España. Todo esto es posible, esta ineficiencia económica e injusticia social, por un sistema democrático con claras insuficiencias. Nuestro objetivo es al final muy sencillo, más democracia. La posibilidad de que los ciudadanos puedan decidir con su voto su futuro, la posibilidad de que los ciudadanos se hagan plenamente responsables de todas sus decisiones. Somos tan responsables que nos gustaría asumir toda la responsabilidad. Somos tan responsables que nos gustaría asumir el mismo nivel de responsabilidad que el de cualquier otro Estado, convencidos como estamos de que precisamente la democracia y la posibilidad de que los ciudadanos decidan sobre su futuro a través de sus votos es la mejor garantía de políticas económicas eficientes y de mayor justicia social.

Nosotros confiamos en Europa y nos explicamos en Europa porque estamos convencidos de que Europa o gran parte de ella comparte nuestros objetivos. Necesitamos una Europa más democrática, más fuerte, más unida, con instituciones comunes más relevantes, porque necesitamos ser más eficientes desde el punto de vista económico y necesitamos instrumentos para realizar una política más justa.

Por lo tanto, y en definitiva, lo que nosotros queremos es votar. Votar y decidir con nuestros votos cuál es nuestro futuro y contribuir con nuestra responsabilidad a construir una Europa y comunidad internacional mucho mejores.

Moltes gràcies, thank you very much

**Oriol Junqueras i Vies**

Vicepresident del Govern de la Generalitat de Catalunya

## **Speech by the President of the Government of Catalonia, Carles Puigdemont**

*Brussels, 24 January 2017*

Just as Minister Romeva and Vice-President Junqueras have done, I would like to thank you for being here with us today after a full day of work.

M'agradaria començar la meva intervenció en català –la llengua pròpia de Catalunya, i oficial juntament amb el castellà- felicitant al nou president del Parlament europeu, el senyor Antonio Tajani, escollit la setmana passada. Li desitgem sort i molts encerts per a aquesta nova tasca tan rellevant que li ha estat encomanada. També esperem que doni compliment al compromís que va adquirir per carta amb la majoria d'eurodiputats del nostre país per tal que el català pugui ser llengua oficial del Parlament europeu.

Last September, in a solemn session of the Parliament of Catalonia, I explicitly stated the clear political commitment the Government and the political majority supporting it already had at the time: to hold a binding referendum in Catalonia in 2017 in order to decide whether it wants to become an independent state. Today we are in Brussels, the capital of Europe, and at the headquarters of the institution entrusted with the democratic representation of all EU citizens, therefore also of those in Catalonia, to reaffirm our commitment to call for the aforesaid referendum, as it is the best possible democratic tool to know the will of our people.

You are probably wondering why we have got this far, and why the majority of Catalans do not wish to remain part of Spain anymore. The answer is clear. One reason is because Catalonia is a nation with a strong and clear-cut identity, culture and language; it is a nation that has had its own institutions for centuries □ I am actually the 130th President of an institution that dates back to 1359. It is a nation that has always aspired to be officially recognised. However, this is not enough to fully explain what has happened at the political level in Catalonia over recent years.

The other reason goes back to June 2010 when the Constitutional Court of Spain repealed the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia, which had been approved by Catalans via a referendum four years earlier, and which had previously been agreed upon with Spanish institutions, not without sacrifices and renunciations. Such an achievement was intended as a minimal bilateral political agreement between Catalonia and Spain establishing the scope of Catalonia's self-government □ a scope that was also agreed upon with Spain and subjected to a referendum. However, most of the key aspects of said agreement were annulled by a Court which should theoretically serve as a neutral arbitrator in constitutional litigations in Spain, but which in reality is just a biased and politicised entity. A Constitutional Court that is currently chaired by a former activist of the People's Party who has increasingly leaned towards the ideas of the People's Party and has blatantly chosen sides.

That ruling from the Constitutional Court in 2010 was of paramount significance. It was a turning point, the end of an era and the moment in which the need to open a new path became clear to the majority of Catalans. Catalonia could absolutely not be part of Spain, and we therefore only had two options: give up on our identity and dilute our nation with Spain as a mere region deprived of individuality and political power, or start

a new path as a new State within the framework of the European Union in order to ensure the progress and welfare of all Catalan citizens. That ruling undoubtedly led many Catalans to no longer see the rationale underlying the union with Spain, and many others have gradually come to the same conclusion over time.

It is worth highlighting that historically, over the last one-hundred years, and particularly since Spain got free of Franco's regime, Catalan Nationalist Parties have always shown great responsibility in dealing with key issues for the Spanish State as well as for the whole of Europe. We had always been on the side of the Spanish Government even when the main Spanish opposition party was not upon the accession of Spain to the European Economic Community, during the integration into the single currency area, when the political stability of Spain was shaken, by the fight against terrorism, as well as during the recent financial crisis, when tough decisions had to be taken to prevent Spain from being rescued... It is evident that our actions were driven by a sense of responsibility and statehood, a stronger one than that of the political party that was at the opposition at the time. What is really painful is that, after almost forty years, all of this support has been matched by such a bitter and disappointing attitude from the State towards Catalonia.

In July 2010, after that tough ruling from the Constitutional Court, and from 2012 on, every 11th of September, on the National Day of Catalonia, over a million and a half people have taken to the streets to demand dignity, decision-making power and eventually to be allowed to decide on their future at the polls. We are talking about very important figures, about one and a half million people in a country of 7.5 million inhabitants.

This has not just taken place once but five times. Such demonstrations have never occurred elsewhere in Europe, not to mention the fact that they have recurred year after year.

This entire mobilisation would not be sufficient or consistent enough if it had not been endorsed at the polls. This is the democratic mandate that we are now delivering. On the 27th of September 2015, elections to the Parliament of Catalonia recorded the highest participation rate in history (almost 75%), and those in favour of independence won 72 out of the 135 seats (48% of votes), which is three seats above the absolute majority, while those opposing independence only got 52 seats (39% of votes). Finally, 11 seats were granted to a party that was neither in favour nor against independence, but that favours calling for a referendum. It is worth noting that in 2010 the Parliament only had 14 members that would have presented a programme for independence.

From 14 to 72 in just five years. I believe that such a substantial growth in this short period of time would require Spain to ask itself what has happened, what it did wrong, for the composition of the Parliament □which reflects what citizens think and want□ to change so significantly in such a short time. This seems like quite a natural question for Spain to pose itself. Europe should equally ask itself, or ask Spain, this same question. The results of the 2015 election show that in Catalonia there is a majority of citizens who want to build a new State that is able to meet their needs, requirements and ambitions for the future, and the Government and the Parliament have been unequivocally assigned the task to make this happen. Henceforth, the work required for Catalonia to become a State has been started and is currently being undertaken. This includes preparing the structures and legislation necessary for a State to act as an independent country which is part of the European Union and the international community since the very first day of its existence. Our purpose is for this transition to take place in an orderly manner, with legal certainty and with the maximum guarantees.

Ours is a quiet revolution which aims at conveying confidence, and whose steps are always firm, reliable and safe.

At the EU level, this entails an internal enlargement process without discontinuities, in particular with regard to the Economic and Monetary Union and the functioning of the Internal Market as well as the freedoms that come with them.

It is clear that in order to be complete this process will require a democratic validation from the citizens. In Catalonia there is a broad consensus that the best way to obtain this validation is through a binding referendum. The demographic data, which is published on a regular basis, invariably show that about 80% of Catalans are in favour of calling a referendum, regardless of what their vote would be. Moreover, it should be noted that 83 out of the 135 Members of Parliament elected in 2015 favour calling the referendum; they represent 61.5% of the chamber, against the 38.5% who oppose it.

The request to hold a referendum in order to determine whether or not Catalonia chooses to become a state is nothing new. It has been a constant request by our country over the recent years. We have repeatedly called for it, and we solemnly submitted a request to the Spanish Parliament in April 2014. They did not even deign to study the application made by a group representing the Parliament of Catalonia. They swept it away within hours without contemplating processing it.

We have defended and will continue to defend that the referendum is legally viable. Thus, the problem lies in the lack of political will. At that time, a team of experts had already proposed five possible legal paths leading to a consultation to be agreed upon with Spain.

We are convinced that a referendum is the most clear, powerful and internationally accepted mechanism to measure the will of a population regarding a decision which is not trivial, but historical. We believe that the best way to know which project would be the most widely supported (Catalonia remaining within Spain, or the creation of a Catalan state) is voting. We are facing a peaceful political conflict between Catalonia and Spain. In this context, it is best that the citizens of Catalonia state their position so that we are able to predict where the majority and the minority stand. This is the democratic way to address differences. This mechanism, of course, is nothing new. It is simply what Scotland peacefully did two and a half years ago and will probably repeat in the future, and the same applies to Quebec.

In this scenario, it should be highlighted that the sole reason of being afraid of voting is being afraid of getting to know the result and not being able to accept it. In this regard, it is significant that those who are in favour of independence are asking everyone to vote and to express their position, while the Spanish State does not defend the no position, but rather argues that there should be no voting and that this should not even be discussed. The conflict is patently clear.

I would like to make it clear that what we want is a referendum to be agreed upon with the Spanish Government, since this is the most acceptable option for everyone. On our side, this proposal for dialogue and search for consensus will be open until the last day. We are willing to discuss everything: the question, the date, the eligibility requirements, and the necessary percentage of the winning option... We are sat at the negotiating table and we will not leave it even if the Spanish Government stands its ground and refuses to negotiate. Our proposal for dialogue is always valid. However, we also want to make clear that we will not give in, should the Spanish government obstinately keep its current position and refuse any negotiations. As I promised to the Parliament last September, in September 2017 at the latest, Catalonia will hold a binding independence referendum. Should this be agreed upon, we will welcome it as that is

what we would like. Should this not be the case, we will hold it anyway. Intransigence cannot prevail. This year, the citizens of Catalonia will have the opportunity to finally decide their future. I am convinced that it is precisely the citizens that will allow the referendum to be valid, as in all referenda throughout the world. It is the citizens that through their participation authorise it. If the citizens take ownership of the referendum, both the referendum itself and its result will be valid.

I would like to insist on the fact that, up to now, the Spanish Government has categorically refused any negotiations regarding the referendum. This means a total refusal, on every side. They refuse to listen. This fact shall be taken seriously. It is irresponsible. But it is even more serious that the only decisions that have been taken thus far are about judicial proceedings on the process, judicializing politics, using part of the judiciary and of the Constitutional Court, in a clear attack on the separation of powers and getting farther away every day from the democratic quality standards of the European Union. A full-fledged persecution of those who do not think like them, to teach them and each of us a lesson. Within two weeks, the former president of the Government of Catalonia, Artur Mas, and two councilors of his Government, Joana Ortega and Irene Rigau, will be judged for having allowed a non-binding consultation on whether or not Catalonia should become an independent state, which was held on 9 November 2014. They face sentences ranging from 9 to 10 years of disqualification from employment in the civil service, which stem from a complaint made by the State Attorney General. Another councilor within Artur Mas's Government, Francesc Homs, will also be judged soon for the same reason; he is equally facing a tough disqualification to hold any office. They are facing this for having allowed ballot boxes to be put up and for having made it possible for more than 2.3 million Catalans to express their opinion.

We believe that day, 9th of November 2014, was exemplary, clearly showing the way we do things in Catalonia, with complete civic involvement. This is something we are very proud of. Unfortunately the scandal does not end here. The President of the Parliament of Catalonia, Carme Forcadell, may be judged soon as well, for having allowed the discussion and vote of the conclusions of a study commission in a plenary session. Clearly, the notion of conventional democracy, which is comparable with the best democracies in the world, and the European Union in particular, and the notion of democracy that Spain appears to have are thus very different. Judge for yourselves if the attitude of the Spanish Government is normal, if it is acceptable, if it belongs to a serious and truly democratic state.

I want to emphasise that the issue at stake here is not independence but democracy, and it does not merely affect those in favour of a state of their own, but every citizen who believes in freedom. I would like to make this point crystal clear here: this is a European problem. And Europe cannot look the other way. Europe should be part of the solution. For the sake of being consistent with the democratic values and principles it is inspired by as well as in order to be pragmatic as it has always been when deep geopolitical changes have occurred: by adapting itself, with the help of political dialogue first, and then with the support of a legal framework.

As mentioned earlier, claiming the right to decide freely to determine our future as a country through voting is something which is extensively spread throughout Catalan society. The proof is that more than 4, 200 economic, cultural, social and civic organisations in the country have expressed their explicit support. To this end, at the end of last year and at the initiative of the government, eighty of these organizations – the most important in the country– together with institutional representatives, drew up the National Pact for the Referendum. That meeting also led to some agreements and to the impetus to promote a signatures campaign to call for a referendum, both

internationally and at the Spanish State level. We want to have a say, we want to express our position and we want to make our concerns heard.

In brief, I would like to emphasise that the Catalan proposal for a referendum follows a firmly Europeanist inspiration. First, because if Catalonia becomes a new state, it will do so in the framework of the European Union. The first steps of the Catalan Republic will be taken according to the European rules. We do not consider any other scenario. Political Catalanism, since its inception, more than 100 years ago, has held Europeanism as one of its main values. In fact, Catalonia as a whole is deeply involved in participating in the European project. Europe is the place where we want to be, without a doubt. This is not our desire since 31 years ago, with the entry of Spain into the European Economic Community, but has always been our wish. Historically, from the distant time of Charlemagne, Catalonia has looked towards Europe and has been identified with an idea of common belonging.

Lately, some have decided they want to leave Europe. It is legitimate and necessary to accept it, but we do not endorse it. We could say that we are just at the other extreme. Catalonia is very committed to Europe, our goal is to enhance this shared project. That is, we want to fully exercise our sovereignty and share it with our European partners, in the areas that make us collectively stronger.

Secondly, the Catalan proposal for a referendum is Europeanist since it is rooted in one of its fundamental principles, that is, democracy. In recent decades Europe has seen how new states arise. Unlike other cases not too distant in time, Catalonia aims at achieving independence peacefully, in a civic way, and “armed” exclusively with democracy. We consider our citizens as adults who are responsible enough to freely decide on their future. It is ultimately a process of democratic vanguard that wants to set an example and is connected with what the European project is and should be.

In conclusion, I shall repeat what I said at the beginning and throughout my speech. Rest assured that this year 2017, Catalonia will freely decide on its future by means of a legitimate and legal referendum, with all the effective and binding guarantees offered by democracy.

Again, many thanks for your support and attention.

**Carles Puigdemont i Casamajó**  
President of the Government of Catalonia