

# **Institutional message on the occasion of the National Day of Catalonia**

*Institute of Catalan Studies, 10 September 2023*

Citizens of Catalonia, I would like to wish you all a very happy National Day. Like every 11 September, tomorrow we will fill the squares and streets, as we have always done: Full of pride. Demonstrating everything that unites us. Everything that defines us as a nation. And, above all, we will do so by defending our desire to continue building, together, a future full of opportunities, prosperity and freedom for all.

Before I continue, I would like to offer a word of support, affection and solidarity to the people of Morocco, the country of origin of so many of our fellow citizens, which has suffered an earthquake that has claimed the lives of so many people and left so many injured. To the victims and their families, our deepest condolences; and to those injured, we wish them a speedy recovery.

I have no doubt that the people of Catalonia will once again show their solidarity with those affected by humanitarian disasters.

Tomorrow we will be celebrating our National Day with the Catalan population on the verge of reaching the 8 million mark. The most plural and diverse Catalonia that has ever existed. A plurality and diversity that come together in a shared "we," as a nation for everyone, through Catalan as our common language, an element of collective identification and expression of our constantly evolving culture, with contributions from all around; through the construction of a country of rights and freedoms, with opportunities for all, and through a firm, continued and defended will to be ourselves, transmitted over the centuries by all the generations that have preceded us.

The Catalonia of 8 million people has extraordinary potential, as well as challenges. This is the first message I wanted to share with you all. We must be able to offer all our fellow citizens the possibility of a full life. To do so, collectively we must overcome the limitations that prevent us from freely determining our future as a people.

The potential of Catalonia, with its 8 million Catalans, is today limited by a fiscal deficit that prevents us from having the welfare state we deserve, and by infrastructure that is managed from outside our territory, as is the case of our commuter trains, which cause misery to many commuters on a daily basis.

The Catalonia of 8 million people is also the most global that has ever existed. A Catalonia defined by the major challenges that are transforming everything, such as climate change, which has brought us the worst drought in memory; such as the energy transition, digitalisation or demographic change... But far from standing back and resigning ourselves to this change, what we need to do is to tackle these challenges head on and provide a Catalan solution that generates new opportunities and greater prosperity; that contributes to strengthening the country's social cohesion, and that seeks to connect Catalonia to Europe and the world.

The second message I wanted to convey to you is that we have the opportunity to resolve the sovereignty conflict with Spain. Now is the time. Based on democratic principles and by listening to the people. The way is clear and more and more of us are practising it: firmness, negotiation and democracy. To overcome repression once and for all. And to

lay the foundations so that the citizens of Catalonia can decide without any limits what the political future of the country should be.

We know that it is difficult, that Spain is not going to make it easy for us and that it won't offer us any concessions; that there will always be those who will oppose us and try to undo all the progress we have made. But we also know that nothing is impossible. And that if we join forces and work together we will have much more power to seize all the opportunities that are opening up before us. Like the results of the recent elections to the Congress of Deputies.

Catalonia has halted the extreme right. And Catalonia holds the key to the governability of Spain. That is why today we must harness this strength to make possible everything that was not possible until now. Amnesty as a guarantee that no one else will be imprisoned and that those in exile will return in freedom. The immediate improvement of the well-being of citizens with measures such as the transfer of powers over the commuter train system and the end of the fiscal deficit.

And the immediate start of a new phase of negotiations, focused solely and exclusively on the substance of the conflict. A new phase of negotiation in which the Spanish and Catalan governments agree on how to respond to the will of the majority of citizens of Catalonia to decide, through a vote, what the political future of the country should be.

Putting an end to all forms of repression is an indispensable condition to be able to carry out negotiations on an equal footing. That is why we are forcing the Spanish government to take decisive steps towards amnesty. To accept it as essential and inevitable, as we have demanded from day one. This is the way.

But amnesty alone will not resolve the sovereignty conflict with Spain. Catalonia wants to vote freely on independence. And until Spain responds to this democratic demand, the conflict will continue.

This is why a second phase of negotiations should begin. Joining forces and aligning strategies. Agreeing internally on an inclusive proposal on how the citizens of Catalonia should vote. And defending it jointly before Spain, in order to make it possible. We have tools for this, such as the Clarity Act.

We can do it. Four years ago, in a situation similar to the current one, we managed to get political prisoners out of jail. And today, with the strength we have as a country, we must make the amnesty possible. We must make it possible, in order to bring about an immediate improvement in the well-being of our citizens. And we must make it possible in order to give new impetus to negotiations with Spain, and to lay the foundations for Catalonia to vote.

Let's not forget how strong we are. Amnesty is the starting point of this stage in which we are now embarking. It is not the end of anything and Spain knows it.

And the third message I would like to share with you is that today, more than ever, we need to give a new boost to the Catalan language, the pillar of the nation and an absolutely essential element for the country's social cohesion.

Steps such as making Catalan an official language of the European Parliament and in European institutions or being able to use the Catalan language normally in the Congress of Deputies are extremely important and represent a great step forward towards the full national recognition of Catalonia.

It has required huge efforts, like the ever-increasing presence of Catalan on audiovisual platforms. We have had to move heaven and earth. But we have succeeded thanks to perseverance and our ability to work together.

This should encourage us to keep moving forward. Because we must accept that institutional recognition is not enough. That we have a historical responsibility to keep the language alive, and that we will only do so if we all work together to speak it. To use it habitually in every sphere of life. We will only achieve this if we work together and encourage everyone to use it, without fear, without embarrassment. If we work together to teach Catalan to new arrivals in our country, we can add new accents every day. And if we agree together, under the broadest consensus, not to take any step backwards in the face of the attempts of the right and the far right to curb Catalan in Catalonia and also in the Balearic Islands, the Valencian Community, the Franja and Northern Catalonia.

This is what will keep the language alive. It requires promoting schooling in Catalan as a fundamental tool for equity and equal opportunities. And it requires putting Catalan in every corner of our lives. Let's share it with everyone. Let's make it an indispensable tool. And let's defend it, as we defend the things we love.

The Catalonia of 8 million people must be the Catalonia of full linguistic normalisation. This is key to keeping the language alive, so that it continues to be the glue that holds a plural and diverse country together.

Citizens of Catalonia, we are moving towards a country of 8 million. A Catalonia that we are building with the daily efforts of each and every one of us. An ambitious Catalonia that thinks big. That wants to be more just, more prosperous and fully free. A Catalonia that will be whatever its citizens want it to be and that has the whole future ahead of it.

Happy National Day to all!

Long live Catalonia and long live freedom!

**Pere Aragonès i Garcia**

President of the Generalitat de Catalunya