

Institutional Christmas message from President Aragonès

Santa Coloma, 26 December 2021

Citizens of Catalonia, let me begin by wishing everyone a merry festive season and a happy New Year.

The country is entering a new phase with the shared goal of making the lives of its citizens easier, kinder and happier. The lives of each and every one of us.

Hence our commitment to driving a social, green, feminist and democratic transformation that will move us forward once again.

This transformation has already begun and today, with tools such as the new budget –which for the first time in 12 years will come into force on 1 January – we will have far more resources to support our people.

To strengthen education and the health system. To build public housing. To bolster the fight against climate change. To act as a state with an entrepreneurial spirit, which can boost our economy and create jobs.

Nevertheless, it is clear that this was not how we expected to end the year. Thanks to the vaccination drive and our concerted efforts, the last few weeks and months had been positive, allowing us to withdraw many of the measures implemented to keep the pandemic under control.

We were doing very well. Recovering our day-to-day activity. Normalising meetings with friends and family. And revitalising economic activity and stimulus. We were doing well. But the arrival of the omicron variant has set alarm bells ringing again.

As a result, the Government of the Generalitat has adopted measures aimed at reducing mobility and social interaction and has accompanied these with financial aid for the most affected sectors. Painful measures, especially at this time of year, which will last no longer than is necessary to stop the pandemic once again, and to prevent the collapse of the health system.

That is why I would like to thank you all for your huge efforts. The efforts accumulated since the start of the pandemic and the extra effort we are asking you to make during this period.

Likewise, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to all health workers and public servants who are once again doing their utmost to protect us. To all those who care for us, thank you very much indeed. You are indispensable.

Sadly, a lot of people are suffering from the disease at this time. To all of you, whether you are in hospital or housebound, I wish you a speedy recovery and hope that you will soon be reunited with your loved ones.

Tomorrow will mark the first anniversary of the first vaccine. We have come a long way since then, especially in reducing the mortality caused by Covid. That is why I am convinced that in 2022 we will complete our recovery. By further boosting vaccination programmes and, above all, by directing all the efforts of the NextGenerationEU funds towards a transformative economic revival.

Many companies are struggling. Many workers have lost their jobs, either because of Covid or for other underlying reasons, inherent to the production system itself. Examples include Mahle in Vilanova i la Geltrú or the various Nissan plants that will close before the end of the year.

And in the face of this reality, we are building alternatives. We must provide new opportunities, so that no one is left behind, so that everyone is able to work and can enjoy good quality of life.

Because it is true that new entrepreneurial initiatives are constantly emerging, that we are leaders in scientific research, that we are breaking export records once again.

Hope and confidence in ourselves and the opportunities before us. Because we will rise again, just as this country has always done during difficult times throughout its history.

Let's abandon any defeatist attitudes and reinforce our confidence in ourselves. In all that we have as a country and that should engender a sense of pride. Our spirit of achievement and work ethic. Our imagination and creativity. Our know-how. Our teamwork and concerted effort. Our civic and social engagement. Our ability to think big. Our non-conformism and transformational capacity. Our ability to establish ambitious goals for our collective future.

This is what drives us. This is what has driven Catalonia throughout history. This collective will to build a better future for our sons and daughters.

That is why I wanted to give this speech at the Rosselló Pòrcel school in Santa Coloma de Gramenet. A school that will soon be 40 years old, thanks to the stubbornness of mothers and fathers who insisted that their children should be able to study in a public school and in Catalan.

Mothers and fathers who wanted their children to learn Catalan, because they were fully aware that this was a way of contributing to the social cohesion of the country and of offering a future full of opportunities for their sons and daughters.

We owe parents a great deal of gratitude. Thanks to them, the current Catalan school model was born. A modern, open, supportive school that builds community and brings society together. And which, above all else, with excellent teachers, offers our children and young people everything they need to be able to lead a full and free life.

Catalan is the central element of this school. As the language of instruction and everyday language. A role that made sense in the society of four decades ago and which today acquires much more significance, in a context where the country's cultural and linguistic diversity has not stopped growing and enriching itself, with contributions from all over the world.

This is why we need to reinforce the school system. Its linguistic model, its capacity for cohesion and for generating opportunities. Because it is undoubtedly the core of the Catalan nation.

For this reason, the next school year will start with free education for 2-year-olds. A measure that we want to extend to the whole pre-school education system. And for the same reason we are working persistently and making every effort to ensure that the Catalan language continues to play a vital role in the education system of Catalonia.

I have no doubt that in 2022 we will emerge from the crises caused by Covid. And, in the same way, we must succeed in resolving the democratic crisis that has been dragging on for far too long.

2022 must be the year in which we start to unblock the conflict with Spain. It must be the year in which the negotiation with Spain moves forward and starts to produce tangible results. We need to begin to provide a response to the vast majority of citizens who know that the resolution of the conflict with Spain involves the exercise of the right to self-determination and amnesty.

We have a solid majority across the board, sustained over time. A majority that wants to resolve the conflict and which will not accept this deadlock. So we need to start building alternatives – acting realistically, looking for the greatest consensus and learning from the path we have taken so far – in case the negotiation stalls and fails to deliver results. Because just as we are not willing to give up on the democratic resolution of the political conflict, we are not willing to give up on Catalonia's independence.

Citizens of Catalonia, we have the whole future ahead of us. Let's put all our energy and all our enthusiasm into it. Let's put all our transformative will into it. Always standing with our people. Always thinking of Catalonia as a whole, a country open to the world that we want to make fairer, more prosperous and more sustainable.

Citizens of Catalonia, I hope you are enjoying a happy festive season and that you have a very good start to the new year.

Long live free Catalonia!