

Avancem Conference. Speech by President Aragonès

Oval Room of the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, 14 February 2022

Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you very much for joining me this afternoon in this magnificent space at the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, one year after the elections of 14 February, to hear me speak about my views on the current situation and how I think the country should move forward in the future. I would like to thank all of you for being here, especially those of you who disagree with my political opinions, who probably do not entirely agree with what I am going to say today, but who have come to listen. This is the first step towards dialogue, towards discussing opposing views, towards understanding each other and designing the future together.

I have called you here today, one year after the Catalan parliamentary elections, to reflect on how we should move forward, one year after the biggest pro-independence victory in history, in terms of seats and percentage of votes. Today I want to share with all of you where we are and what we need to do to move forward again. And to reaffirm my commitment to transforming the country and to tackling the political conflict between Catalonia and the State head on, with ambition and determination.

I would also like to take this opportunity today to talk to you about the future for Catalonia as whole. About how we can reinforce the major consensuses that define us as a country, and also how we can propose new ones. About how these should help us to advance in terms of well-being and prosperity, which means making strides in innovation, entrepreneurship and economic progress, that benefit everyone. With a clear commitment to sustainability and a clear feminist ideal, while defending the Catalan culture and language.

About how to strengthen democracy and offer citizens the right to an inalienable free future. This vision of a country includes everyone. Whoever they are, wherever they are from, whatever language they speak and however they choose to love. And this vision of a country that includes everyone must reach every part of it. This is what I mean by Catalonia as a whole. A plural and diverse Catalonia. A Catalonia that wants to be united. A Catalonia without first- and second-class citizens. A Catalonia without counties and cities that feel neglected. A Catalonia that we will build to be just, prosperous and free.

A Catalonia that aspires to plenitude in all these areas, areas today repeatedly limited by a State that is incapable of recognising and contributing to the progress made thanks to the major consensuses that constitute Catalan society. That is why today I also want to share with all of you the need to unblock the resolution of the political conflict with Spain. Of the need to put an end to the repression and for the Spanish Government to make a political proposal to resolve the conflict with Catalonia.

Today we must demand that the Spanish Government demonstrate its democratic commitment. Without a resolution to the political conflict, Spain is sliding towards authoritarianism, as shown by the advance of the extreme right wing.

If the Spanish Government does not make this commitment, if it does not understand that we must resolve this conflict, if it maintains the deadlock and remains immobile; does not understand that without the courage to tackle the major issues that Spanish democracy has yet to resolve – the political conflict with Catalonia as the prime example – if it does not understand this, paralysed by its fear of a period of government by the right and the far right, it will actually be opening the door to a right-wing government in coalition with right-wing extremists. And this will, in no case, be the fault of the independence movement. If this happens, it will be solely and exclusively the fault of those who are governing, who are more concerned with not angering the right wing than with resolving underlying conflicts.

That is why we need to unite once again on the basis of the consensuses that define us as a country, in the face of this threat, in the face of the State's deadlock and the need to renew efforts in the negotiations. We must set in motion the foundations of a modern national project that learns from the past, but above all, that looks to the future with all the ambition of a small country that thinks big. A non-conformist Catalonia, which wants to move forward by allowing citizens to freely decide their political future, as was demonstrated in the elections a year ago.

That is why it is necessary to speak again to the whole country. To speak, think and govern for Catalonia as a whole. Generating opportunities and turning well-being and prosperity into concepts that reach everyone, everywhere. From the Pyrenees to Barcelona. From Girona to El Camp de Tarragona. From Les Terres de l'Ebre to Catalunya Central. And from Ponent to the Penedès. But also, from urban neighbourhoods to rural villages. And from coastal towns to those in the mountains.

We need to mobilise the public once again in defence of the major consensuses of Catalan society and to strengthen our unity of action. Starting from the broadest possible perspective. A unity of action that is incompatible with reproaches that do not contribute to anything, but one that is positive, forcing us to leave our respective comfort zones. And building a democratic, concerted and viable proposal, that takes into account the plurality and diversity of the country, that has an unequivocal desire to grow and to obtain internal and international recognition. And which contributes to unblocking the negotiation with the State and reinforces the Catalan position to make amnesty and self-determination, which won popular support on 14 February, inevitable. We are moving forward on the basis of unity of action and constructing a winning proposal that responds to the country's broad consensus.

As I said, I would like to start by telling you about my vision of a country, which in summary is that of Catalonia as a whole. How I understand it. How I want it to move forward. How I want it to progress.

Exactly a year ago today we witnessed elections that were won by an unprecedented pro-independence majority. And exactly a year ago today we also witnessed elections that were won by a majority clearly and unequivocally in favour of progress. A majority in favour of well-being and prosperity, in favour of the environment and with clear feminist commitment. A majority in favour of Catalan culture and language. And, at the same time, an overwhelming majority in favour of strengthening our democratic institutions. In favour of civil and political rights. Of dialogue and against repression. In favour of amnesty and the right to self-determination.

These election results are a reflection of the country we have. A country with different, more or less broad, overlapping consensuses, involving actors with different political positions, with different points of view, but which as a whole show us the key ideas upon which the country is being built.

These are solid, core ideas that have a historical continuity, that have evolved over time and that today continue to form the basis and foundations of the Catalan political, civic, social and cultural identity.

This system of values, these shared spaces, are what identify us as a nation, what identify us as a people. A vision of a country that has brought us a long way. It has brought us together and strengthened us. A vision which today we need to defend and project into the future, in the eyes of the 21st century. Today, we need to once again defend Catalonia as a civic people, typical of a plural and diverse country such as ours. Typical of a country which has been chosen as such, because the Catalan nation is based on the will to be collective and to form an individual part of each and every one of us. We need to once again defend the institutions that reflect the sovereign will of the citizens of Catalonia.

A historic demand that today is inalienable for the vast majority who want this country to freely decide its future.

Today, we must once again promote Catalan, the Catalan language, as the country's common language and the language of progress, in the face of the challenges posed by globalisation, technological and demographic changes and changes in cultural consumption, and also as the language that guarantees that we are able to truly live in a multilingual society.

We need to renew our European and Mediterranean outlook. Typical of a country that is open to the world, that wants to participate directly in the construction of the European project – which is our project – and which, at the same time, is the best mechanism for a more supportive Community policy in the Mediterranean.

Today, we must continue to strengthen all of this, while continuing to promote an economy at the service of the people that ensures Catalonia is a country of opportunities. A more modern, advanced and united country. Able to adapt and lead structural change, based on re-industrialisation, economic openness to the world and a just energy transition. A country that offers all the tools necessary for everyone, absolutely everyone who lives there, to live their lives in freedom.

This vision of a country, a legacy of past majorities in Catalonia, which has driven the great transformations of the 20th century. From the ambitious modernisation plans of the Mancomunitat to the great transformative and emancipatory capabilities of the republican Generalitat. It is the idea of the major consensuses that were built in the framework of the anti-Francoist struggle, which provided us with the tools for nation-building and social cohesion, such as linguistic immersion and television in Catalan during the final decades of the last century.

This system of values, which responds to these broad consensuses, is solid and cross-cutting. But it is not immutable. It is a system that evolves as society moves forward, incorporating new elements such as a commitment to a feminist perspective or to the urgent fight against climate change. Which incorporates the richness of a plural and diverse society as defining ideas of our identity, which knows how to grow and strengthen itself through the contributions of the new Catalans. Catalans who have come from all over the world – in very difficult circumstances, many of them extremely difficult – who have chosen Catalonia as their home and have made the country a welcoming one. Migration is a constant in the history of our country, and this is not a problem but an asset.

Everything evolves. Everything progresses. Everything moves forward. It is therefore logical that the set of values that the Catalan nationalism projects towards the future has also changed in recent years.

It is therefore logical that Catalan nationalism, in the majority, has abandoned the old idea of modernising and transforming a State which does not want to change, which does not offer a response to the country's broad consensus. This vast majority, which is starting more and more to lean towards an independent Catalonia. A choice that was ratified at the polls. That is why today we, who are not satisfied, who want the country to progress, want to move forward by defending the right to decide Catalonia's political future. Catalonia wants to move forward, defending democracy and freedom. Catalonia wants to move forward by exercising the right to self-determination, that already forms part of the broad consensus in Catalan society, as the best way of resolving the political conflict with the State.

This system of values, this broad consensus, shape the country we are building, the project for Catalonia as a whole. A transformative, innovative and disruptive project. One that places at the centre of political decisions those people, those groups that for too many years have heard that they were not part of the political agenda, that they were not at the heart of political decision-making, that too many times have felt ignored. A project that must respond to day-to-day emergencies, addressing all the crises caused or aggravated by the pandemic. A project focused on the fight against inequality. Social and territorial inequalities are what really fracture Catalan society. A project that we must implement by creating opportunities for all. Generating opportunities throughout the country. Addressing the challenges of the Pyrenees, of Les Terres de l'Ebre. Addressing the challenges of Barcelona and its metropolitan area. And thinking about the country as a whole, taking a global view of the country, because today, in an interconnected society such as ours, challenges such as housing, mobility, job creation, the extension of public services, cannot be addressed in a piecemeal

fashion. They can only be addressed by taking the whole country into account. Every region and every individual. Catalonia needs to attend to the so-called urban peripheries that have felt neglected, neighbourhoods that have felt invisible and forgotten.

This project has one requirement, which is to believe in Catalonia's potential and to eschew cataclysmic rhetoric, which does not help to boost our economy. On the contrary, we should defend the assets we have with pride. A pride that must go hand in hand with being demanding of ourselves, for the present and for the future. These two things are not mutually exclusive.

Let's make use of all the energy we have to consolidate Catalonia as one of the most innovative and advanced societies in Mediterranean Europe. Today we are leaders in economic growth. Today, Catalonia leads the world in job creation. Today Catalonia is once again breaking export records. This is why Catalonia promotes foreign and domestic investment.

But we would be wrong to focus only on responding to day-to-day needs, however urgent and important they may be. We have said it many times, and today, one year after the elections, we say it again. We have not come here to manage; we are not just a regional administration. This is the government of the country and it is responsible for everything that happens in this country. We have come to transform. I have said this from day one and I often remind members of the Catalan Government of this.

Our project for the country must address the needs of 2022, the important ones, the urgent ones, the ones that concern us, and also build the Catalonia of 2030, but above all, we must have the ambition to think big and adopt a long-term outlook. Politics is often conditioned by immediacy, which places both demands and limits on us. But if we lift our heads, we will realise that we need to be able to work with this transformative perspective.

In little more than a century, Catalonia, like much of the Western world, has experienced three great revolutions, that have changed the way we live. The second industrial revolution, based on the electrification of the economy and the country. The shift towards a service sector economy, consumer society and mass media in the 1960s.

And finally, during the beginning of the democratic period and the recovery of the Catalan institutions, the arrival of computerisation and automation, telecommunications and the audiovisual world took place, culminating in globalisation and the spread of the Internet from computers and screens into our pockets.

Each of these revolutions was approached with fear and apprehension. With significant costs. With the efforts of so many workers, who have built the country in which we live today. And with a great deal of precariousness, but at the same time with joint efforts to overcome the difficulties. All these changes brought about major demographic changes and transformations that explain who we are today. But each of these revolutions has undoubtedly meant an important leap forward in the lives of all citizens.

I think it is clear that we have entered a new phase and today, to take part in the world of this new century and to gain relevance, we need to update our project for the country once again. Prat de la Riba imagined the Catalunya-Ciutat. As Francesc Macià did with the “house and garden”. Jordi Pujol spoke of the Catalonia of “We are 6 million”. And Pasqual Maragall knew well how to generate patriotism based on social rights. Today it is up to us to work for Catalonia as a whole. Our challenge today is to dare to redefine the project for the country. To build a project for Catalonia as a whole, which means a new modernising leap forward in all areas, that reaches everyone, starting with a modern, innovative economy. Fully digitalised and sustainable. Able to generate prosperity. To generate wealth that is transformed into well-being for all citizens. And this means undergoing a process of re-industrialisation and a further opening up our economy to the outside world. An economy with science and research as its hallmarks. Catalonia, today we must defend ourselves. We are a world power in research, especially in the fields of biomedicine and telecommunications, so let's act accordingly. Helping, supporting and promoting the excellent research centres and helping the researchers we have. Collaborating in the transfer of technology from research to industry, to health, the social third sector, to public services and government agencies. This commitment to science, research and innovation must be transferred to the field of advanced technologies.

We are lucky to have such important infrastructure as the MareNostrum supercomputers, and we must take advantage of this to spearhead and lead ambitious international projects, such as the design and manufacture of the European chip. An utterly strategic project for European industry as a whole and one that must undoubtedly become a driving force to consolidate Catalonia as a country with a high added-value economy and shared prosperity. This transfer requires that we take advantage of the full potential of the ALBA Synchrotron. And that we make the most of the fact that Barcelona is the world capital of mobile telephony, as we will see in the coming weeks.

In the field of industry, we must be able to complete a transformation as far-reaching for our economy as the great changes in mobility that took place in the 20th century. Now is the time for automotive electrification. A true revolution that will transform both our industry and employment. This represents real progress, not only from the point of view of decarbonisation and the fight against climate change, but also as a challenge for the country's automotive industry and related jobs.

We in the Catalan Government are committed. We are fully engaged. That is why we support and encourage this essential transformation, in order to continue projecting Catalonia's industrial potential into the future.

At the same time, Catalonia must address the green transformation that is already under way. A transformation that involves profound changes in this country. Which implies changes in our landscape, to our landscapes, in the same way that all the progress we have experienced as a society has brought changes.

Changes that may be contradictory and that we may not like from the outset, but that are based on the realisation that either we produce clean energy ourselves – and we have all the land and all the wind power to do so – or we will continue to depend on nuclear power and import energy through high-voltage power lines. That is why doing nothing is not an option. Just as more than 100 years ago we took advantage of the waters of the Llobregat and the Ter rivers to drive our industrial revolution, today we need to take advantage of the sun and the wind we have to drive a green revolution.

This is extremely important in the short, medium and long term. But if Catalonia as a whole is characterised by anything, it is by its capacity to reinforce ourselves as a society, to bring us together, to unite us. And this involves taking the paths we have already travelled historically, modernising, strengthening and extending the network of public services that ensures equity and equal opportunities for everyone, in all parts of the country, at all times. Rejecting and eradicating all forms of discrimination and violence. And highlighting the value of the Catalan language as a shared language for social progress.

A united country is a country in which all citizens have access to quality public services, regardless of the town, neighbourhood or city where they live or the social class and family they were born into. The clearest example is schools, because a village without a school is a village without a future. And at the same time, schools, and the education system as a whole, is the best guarantee to ensure that Catalonia as a whole is increasingly a land of opportunities. That is why we must continue to work to ensure that educational innovation reaches everywhere. The fight against school segregation must continue. And it is necessary to continue strengthening the education system with such critical measures as free pre-school education, or more recently, improvements in the school calendar.

The same applies to the entire health system and the social action system. These are fundamental and essential to implementing our welfare state. Areas in which we have had great difficulty in reversing cuts that have had an enormous social cost. The pandemic has shown not only how essential these areas are, but has also demonstrated their potential and how indispensable they are to ensuring our well-being. However, it has also served to highlight how today social inequalities very much determine the health and life expectancy of citizens. Alongside a strong social and health policy, we must also address social inequalities. Investment is obviously necessary, and this must be a modernisation drive to ensure that health care and social services can continue to play an essential role in the welfare state.

But at the same time, we must be ambitious, and work from a new perspective, from new viewpoints, and address the needs that must be guaranteed in order for citizens to lead a fulfilling life. From housing to access to water, energy and digital connectivity.

A united country is also a country free of discrimination. Of any kind. Discrimination that still takes place in our society. Discrimination, abuse and violence against women and children, of which there is still too much, always too

much. Discrimination, abuse and violence based on gender, sexual orientation, origin, disability or age... which must be denounced, tackled and eradicated once and for all.

And a united country needs tools such as Catalan, which must continue to be the common language of a society in which Catalans with a multitude of languages coexist. This is why language immersion in schools must continue to be promoted. Modernising it, adapting it to the new times, which is the best way to defend it. Because immersion is the tool that guarantees that all children in the country are multilingual. There is no child in school in Catalonia who only knows Catalan. None. Absolutely none. There are no Catalan speakers who are merely monolingual.

That is why immersion is a successful model. Because it guarantees that everyone leaves school knowing Catalan and Spanish. Because it holds us together as a society. It offers us an equal treatment that is only possible with tools like immersion, implemented through the linguistic model in schools, always underpinned by pedagogical criteria.

Immersion is a clear example of the need to strengthen and update the tools we have, to ensure the progress of the Catalan language. And each era has had its own. From the libraries of the Mancomunitat, with TV3 and Catalunya Ràdio, to the commitment to the schools of the republican Generalitat. That is why today the Catalan language and culture must enter fully into the digital era. That is why we are working with ambitious projects such as the audiovisual hub. A set of cutting-edge infrastructures in the field of audiovisual production, aimed at boosting an entire production sector with enormous economic potential, which explains our way of being and of seeing the world while, at the same time, ensuring excellent Catalan-language audiovisual productions, capable of being competitive in a global digital market.

This is the country that we have started to build. This is what I mean by Catalonia as a whole. One that recognises all the potential we have, that awakens all our pride and compels us to be demanding of ourselves, and above all one that must awaken in us the conviction that, despite the difficulties, we will move forward again.

As you are all aware, our starting point is beset by political and economic restrictions that condition us enormously and that have historically conditioned all the generations that have preceded us. The major political restriction is basically that Spain neither embraces nor respects the broad consensus that we have created as a country. That's why I am convinced that the tools to achieve all this, the tools we need to transform the country, are the full exercise of self-government, having all our own resources, and democracy.

That is what we are fighting for. And that is why we are here. Because today the full exercise of self-government, having one's own resources and democracy, inevitably means that the citizens of Catalonia must be able to vote freely, peacefully and democratically, on what the political future of the country should be.

Sometimes the current situation we are living through, especially in recent years, can make us lose our historical perspective and I think it is good to remember how we got here and why. That what we have experienced in recent years is not the result of a sudden whim, nor of a particular moment, nor of a certain fleeting situation. What we have experienced, the conflict we have with the State and the current situation is structural and is the result of the State's inability to understand, to protect and to strengthen the consensus that unites the vast majority of Catalan society. It is the result of the exhaustion of Catalan society, which has tried time and time again to transform a State, a Spain, that does not want to be transformed, that is happy with status quo. But we want a different kind of country.

It is true that the whole process of drafting the Statute – how it was cut back in Congress, how it was knocked back by the Constitutional Court – contributed to this distancing, which I believe to be natural and inevitable. I am convinced that if it has not happened before in history, it is because authoritarian regimes have stopped every democratic experience in its tracks. In other words, within just a few years of the historical moment in which the democratic framework of institutions became consolidated in Spain, it became evident that the way we understand the country of Catalonia does not align with how Spain itself understands and identifies itself.

Today, the will of the people, which gives democratic legitimacy to all the consensuses in Catalonia, has been disrupted by the State. We have talked about the Statute, but it is by no means the exception. There have been countless initiatives by the Parliament and the Catalan Government, aimed at improving the lives of citizens, which have ended up being blocked or rolled back by the Constitutional Court. The Law on energy poverty, the Law on taxes on vacant homes, the Law on gender equality, the Law on the housing emergency, the Law on the fight against climate change, etc. The latest example is language immersion, a model of success and political, pedagogical, academic and educational consensus in our country.

For all these reasons, every day more and more of us defend independence as the toolbox for promoting the broad consensuses that we have as a country. And that is why this country has decided to take control and has given its citizens a voice in the referendum of 1 October, and also at every opportunity at the polls in every election we have had and in the participatory process of 9 November 2014.

Today in Catalonia there is a broad, solid and cross-cutting majority that wants to decide the political future of the country, that wants to vote in a democratic referendum, recognised by all parties, on whether Catalonia should become an independent Republic, an independent state within the European Union.

And it is the State's inability to respond to this reality, to this majority, that is the cause of the political conflict between Spain and Catalonia. And this is what needs to be resolved, this is what needs to be addressed in this negotiation that we have opened with the State, which has begun to move forward, to advance, but which must begin to produce results.

Never before has Spain acknowledged the existence of a political conflict with Catalonia. And this must be recognised. It has never so far shown a willingness to sit down to talk and negotiate, it must also be said.

With the pro-independence victory of 14 February, a year ago and the formation of a pro-independence and progressive government in May, things have started to move. In June, pardons were granted, a step that I believe was indispensable to give confidence and credence to the State's willingness to negotiate. In September we met again at the negotiating table, overcoming the paralysis caused by the pandemic and also the paralysis caused especially by the unjust disqualification of President Quim Torra. But it was not enough, and these measures – the pardons that were a step forward and the reconvening of the negotiating table in September, to resolve the conflict – are not enough. And today it must be said, and we say it clearly, that we are facing a new deadlock. It is clear that progress is proving difficult. And this should come as no surprise to anyone. We already knew that it would not be easy, because the two sides are coming from very distant starting points. Building trust, bridging gaps, and reaching agreements often requires time, discretion, patience, and a long-term perspective that must isolate us from the most immediate political contexts.

But I believe that today we must share with the entire country that the negotiation process is going through a difficult moment, and I sincerely believe that it is due to the lack of courage on the part of the Spanish Government, which is not offering a political proposal for Catalonia. The challenge ahead of us is immense. It is therefore incomprehensible, if this conflict is to be resolved, that the convening of the instrument that should enable it, the negotiating table, should be repeatedly delayed due to partisan or electoral interests.

Because this only helps to sow doubts about the real willingness to resolve the conflict and provides arguments to all those who hope that this negotiating table, this negotiating process, will derail, fail and end without agreement.

All political conflict resolution processes are complex and go through ups and downs. And, therefore, go through phases such as this one. That is why I am convinced that we are going to overcome this situation of deadlock, of procrastination. Absolutely convinced. But in order to overcome them we need to push for a change in the balance of power that will allow us to strengthen the Catalan position.

That's why we need to reactivate all our strength. All our institutional strength and the political mobilisation of all actors involved, because when we have demonstrated all our strength in a unified way in the past, this is when the State has taken a step forward, has been compelled to take a step forward. One example is the pardons, which are by no means the solution. But we recognise this as an important step, because it is an admission that the Supreme Court's sentence was unjust and because it enabled hugely committed political leaders to be released from prison and to regain their freedom. And rest assured that if it wasn't for our major victory a year ago, this would not have happened.

The Spanish Government does not move of its own accord. It moves and will move because of our strength. And we have this strength, and this means that we must act with more generosity, with more unity and with more cohesion.

That we must force the Spanish Government to make a move and start talking about proposals that really tackle the root of the problem. Because complying with the obligations established by the Statute or the Constitution or the laws that they themselves have approved is not a political proposal. The problem needs to be addressed, just as the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has demanded. Starting by dropping the charges against President Puigdemont and the rest of the exiled political leaders. And ending with a democratic solution to the conflict.

What have other countries done? Countries that we consider to be advanced democracies. Let's follow their example and learn from them. Let's learn, for example, from how Canada and the UK have approached the issue. That of Quebec and Scotland. Scotland and the UK agreed to a referendum in 2012, the year after the first pro-independence majority in the Scottish Parliament, even though they hadn't obtained 50% of the votes. Canada and Quebec established a set of rules, the Clarity Act, which determines the way forward and offers certainty to all parties.

We believe this is the way forward. Let's start from a set of democratic principles and, from there, study all possible avenues and mechanisms, which depend solely on political will, to allow citizens to vote for the political future of the country.

Conflict resolution is a historical necessity and responsibility. It is an undeniable democratic commitment. Therefore, anyone who thinks a negotiation process such as the one we are promoting is the tactical price to be paid for governing the State during a legislature has understood nothing. They have failed to understand that without a democratically and mutually agreed resolution to the Catalan issue, the only alternative for Spain is authoritarianism, as history has shown us many times.

And that is what is at stake. Because what really plays into the hands of the right and extreme right wing is when no alternative project is presented. When the underlying political conflict is not addressed and there is no will to resolve it.

If the next Spanish legislature is governed by a coalition of PP and VOX it will not be the fault of the independence movement. It will be due to the current government's lack of courage to confront the significant issues that remain unresolved, including the political conflict with Catalonia. For this reason, now is the time to be brave.

The Spanish left wing, which governs the State, must choose whether it wants to complete the pending democratic reform, which includes recognising the plurinational nature of Spain and, therefore, the right to decide, or whether it restricts itself to a left-leaning but conservative, stagnant, complacent position, hampered by the excuse of the perennial threat from the right wing.

The Spanish left wing must choose whether to be content with being a weak and defective democracy in regression – one that requires a gag law to control its citizens, with a General Council of the Judiciary dominated by Spanish nationalist right-wing forces that influence the most crucial judicial decisions – or if it is capable of addressing all that was renounced during the transition to democracy after the Franco dictatorship.

That is why it is necessary for the Spanish Government, and we invite them, we compel them, to be brave, to stop acting unilaterally and to take advantage of the opportunity offered by the negotiating table, to tackle one of the great challenges facing Spain. These legislatures, both here and there, are about moving forward and finding a democratic path for citizens to decide. If the possibility of building this path, of walking along this road, is repeatedly denied, what message are they sending us? That we are condemned forever? Expelled from the framework of rights and fundamental freedoms? Is this the alternative, the State's proposal for Catalonia?

We can discuss the when, we can discuss the how, we can discuss the formulas and the conditions. But what we cannot accept as an answer is that there will never, ever, ever, be a democratic way for Catalans to decide our future. We cannot accept this, because no one should be afraid of democracy. No one should be afraid to let the people decide.

And I would like to stress how we need to reinforce the consensus we have, in order to move forward with more strength than ever. Negotiation and agreement – whether through the current negotiating table, my preferred option and one that I am committed to, or through other tools that may be constructed if the current process ends without an agreement – is the best way of making this possible. It is the best option to achieve what we want. Out of a democratic principle and commitment and desire to include everyone. This is a value we cannot and will not ever give up. We must never let the flag of democracy, dialogue and negotiation be taken down. And we must never confuse negotiation with renunciation. Because in order to achieve independence we know that sooner or later we will have to go through a negotiation process. Therefore, let's seize the opportunity we have now, and be as demanding and ambitious as possible.

But also, being honest and clear. If the negotiation does not move forward, if we do not start to see progress and results, it is clear that we cannot stand idly by. This is why it is necessary to activate all the tools we have, to apply pressure to unblock the negotiation and move it forward. To strengthen the Catalan position at the negotiating table itself, to force the State to move and to offer a proposal on how they want to resolve the political conflict. To open up avenues and to create new opportunities for negotiation when this process stalls, so that it can continue to move forward if it eventually derails. And above all, in order to strengthen and reinforce ourselves, it is essential to do this in order to make amnesty and self-determination inevitable.

That's why we must make a show of all our strength, once again. Of our united front. Of our unity of action. We need to start to lay the foundations of a modern

and non-conformist Catalan nationalism, which looks to the future with an immense transformative will, and in my view, this involves seven conditions.

The first condition for achieving this is to strengthen and visualise the ten major consensuses that exist in our society. Strengthening and projecting the set of values that underpin and shape Catalonia as a whole. The consensuses that include the idea that we are a nation and the fact that we have our own institutions that represent our sovereign will. That we are a welcoming country, that Catalan plays a basic role as a common language and a language for social progress. That Catalonia is a pro-European country, open to the world and that it wants to lead the European project with a Mediterranean outlook. That we are building a country where everyone can pursue in complete freedom the lifestyle they choose. That we want to be a country of opportunities, where economic progress and the well-being of all citizens are two ideas that are not only complementary but also inseparable. A country that recognises that it must take a leap forward, that it cannot wait any longer, in its feminist commitment. A country that recognises that it must make a leap forward in the fight against climate change. And a country that advocates amnesty and the right to self-determination, to resolve the conflict with Spain, democratically and freely.

These are the major consensuses of the Catalonia of 2022. These are the values that underpin Catalonia as a whole. And today, in the face of deadlock, the time has come to start to put the bases of Catalan nationalism in motion once again in order to move forward. To project ourselves into the future and ensure that Catalonia remains a single people.

That is why I will initiate a dialogue with all the country's institutions and with the main political, economic, social, civic and cultural stakeholders, not only to share our analyses of the situation but also to translate these consensuses into concrete political action. And we will do so with unity of action, starting with the Catalan Members of Parliament in Madrid and the Catalan Members of Parliament in the European Parliament. To work and decide together what we want the Catalonia of the future to be like.

Over the next few weeks, I will be meeting with all the stakeholders, not only to share this concern, this worry, but also to strengthen the idea of setting in motion the major consensuses that have enabled us to make so much progress in overcoming the current situation. I will meet with everyone who, for the most part, share these major consensuses. Because it is absolutely essential that our shared set of consensuses guide and determine how we defend Catalonia's interests before Spain and the European Union. That is why I will meet with all of them. To start translating these consensuses into concrete policies.

The second condition for moving forward again is to govern with strength and to govern well. A government such as the one I have the honour of leading, a government that is ambitious and transformative. A self-demanding government. That stands unwaveringly with its people. That governs and thinks in the interests of everyone. That governs in the interests of the entire country, of Catalonia as a whole. That works to address everyday needs, while building and shaping what

the country will look like in the medium and long term. And a government that commits itself to politically promote the country's major consensuses.

The third condition is to ensure that Catalonia continues to make economic and social progress. Economic progress is the driver of social progress. We would not have achieved all that we have towards national freedom had we not had a strong economy and a unified society. That is why we must anticipate changes and transformations. Encourage and lead them. To remain a competitive country. To move forward, to grow. To be able to transform prosperity into well-being for all citizens.

The fourth condition is mobilising the public in defence of the major consensuses of Catalan society. In defence of progress and well-being. In defence of social rights. In defence of cultural and linguistic rights. In defence of civil and political rights. Ultimately, also amnesty and self-determination. This is the great political capital we have: our citizens, even though we do not yet have a state. This is why we must once again offer them a global, ambitious project that follows the will of the majority.

The fifth condition is that these consensuses must be reflected at the polls. In a plural and diverse way, but reflected at the polls. The next milestone is the municipal elections, which must serve, once again, to demonstrate that this consensus represents the country as a whole, represents Catalonia as a whole. They should serve to reflect once again the broad consensus that was victorious on 14 February.

The sixth condition is the internationalisation of the country and the national project. Forging an understanding. Searching out and building alliances that are absolutely essential for social and economic progress, and the recognition of Catalonia.

And the last condition is to re-establish unity of action. This is key in order for us to move forward again. A unity of action, open to everyone in defence of the country, but especially for the sovereign and independence movement as a whole. It is up to all of us to rise to the occasion. Being as demanding of ourselves as possible, myself more than anyone. It is time to listen to each other. Listening to other views, even dissenting ones, never hurt anyone. And to stop eyeing each other with suspicion. We need to stop competing to see who is more pro-independence, more leftist or more progressive. No one is more pro-independence than anyone else. Just because someone has been active in this movement for decades doesn't make them more pro-independence than someone who has just today assumed that this is where the country's future lies. We all have a shared goal. And we are all needed. Nobody is surplus to requirements.

We must understand that there is no single view of the independence movement and what the independence movement represents. There is no right and wrong way to be pro-independence. If the debate is reduced to identifying heroes and traitors, the movement as a whole loses. We must understand that the independence movement is plural and diverse, as is Catalonia. This is our strength. This is what makes us winners.

That is why we need a collective commitment and that is why I am taking it upon myself, before everyone, to abandon the approach based on tactics, reproaches and mistrust that weaken us. That weaken our negotiating position, and that weaken the construction of future opportunities. This is why we need to rebuild trust. Let's do it with a broad and inclusive vision. Involving the entire sovereignty movement to make amnesty and self-determination inevitable. No longer referring to itself as a movement but rather talking once again about the country, about the concept of a country as a whole.

So, there is work to be done, and we need to do it constructively, joining forces once again, working together positively. Because we know that we make unstoppable progress when we are able to offer citizens a proposal that is democratic, concerted, honest, that reflects the will of the people, that takes into account the plurality and diversity of the country, that unites and broadens support, and that is capable of strengthening internal and international alliances.

I think this is the winning proposal. This is the proposal that must allow us to win the country's freedom, that will decide how we want the Catalonia of the future to look, how we want the political future of the country to look. Starting from the existing consensus that, I repeat, are limited by being part of Spain, a State that has not provided an answer, not because it cannot, rather because it does not want to. Catalonia. Let's move forward, then, with a proposal that speaks to and wants to address the country as a whole. Catalonia as a whole. Let's move forward, then, with a proposal that thinks, speaks and works for Catalonia as a whole. Let's move forward, strengthening the idea that Catalonia is a nation and that we have our own institutions in which all our sovereign will resides. Let's move forward, strengthening Catalonia as a welcoming land and one where Catalan plays an essential role in social cohesion. Let's move forward strengthening our European vocation. Let's move forward, making Catalonia a country of opportunities for everyone, where anything is possible. Let's move forward starting with feminism, starting with the fight against climate change. Let's move forward by making amnesty and self-determination inevitable. And let's move forward towards a Catalonia that is just, that is prosperous. That is why we want it to be free.

