

# **Institutional Christmas message from President Aragonès**

*National Library of Catalonia, 26 December 2022*

Citizens of Catalonia,

After two years of pandemic, we are back to celebrating Christmas as we have always done. Meeting with family and friends, enjoying time with children at home, spending time with elderly relatives and missing those who are sadly no longer with us.

A year ago, we were all talking about how 2022 was supposed to be the year when we turned the tide against Covid. The year in which we would leave behind all restrictions and embark on a journey of economic recovery, full of ambition and a desire for transformation.

Today, we can say that we have made clear and unequivocal progress in this direction. Thanks to the efforts of everyone. To the scientific advances and the dedication of all public servants. Especially those in the health system and care sector, to whom we owe an enormous debt of gratitude as a society.

We can also see, from an economic perspective, how progress has been made in many aspects. We see it with job creation. We see it with the sustained record of exports and we see it, above all, with the successive announcements of new foreign investments.

A clear example of how the international economy trusts in Catalonia's potential, in the country's assets, in its experience, in its capacity for innovation and resilience and in all the talent and creativity that exists in Catalan society.

All of this should undoubtedly fuel our self-confidence and encourage us to set our sights on overcoming the current new difficulties in order to move forward.

Global difficulties such as those caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, a threat to European values of democracy and human rights and which requires us, as pro-Europeans, to be fully committed to defending Ukraine's freedom and restoring peace.

That is why I would like to highlight the enormous solidarity shown by Catalan society. But the Ukrainian war has also led to economic difficulties that directly affect the citizens of Catalonia, due to an increase in the price of energy and the cost of living. Faced with these major obstacles, the Government of the Generalitat has reacted by reinforcing all public services. With measures such as the improvement of the thermal social bonus and fundamental changes such as free schooling for 12 children, the former P2 academic year. These are just a few

examples of how we best respond to emergencies and, at the same time, how best to promote transformative change.

Because this is how the country moves forward, this is how the country progresses. For this reason, we need to have all the tools and resources available to continue supporting citizens and the productive fabric as a whole. This is why we need to all rise to the occasion and make the approval of the new budget of the Generalitat possible.

A national budget that has been agreed for the first time with trade unions and employers' organisations and which has received the explicit support of the third social sector, farmers' unions and the main cultural organisations.

A budget that reinforces the health system with 1 billion euros. Which prioritises primary care, which makes a clear commitment to Vocational Training and which updates, after twelve years, all the social benefits offered by the Generalitat. In what is considered one of the most important social advances in recent years. There is a broad consensus for this budget to be pushed through and taken forward, so that citizens can begin to benefit from it without wasting another day.

The bulk of the work has been done. All that is needed now is the political will to make it happen. I call, therefore, on the parliamentary groups with which it has not yet been possible to reach an agreement, to act responsibly with the public, and not to delay their decision any longer.

Energy, perseverance and conviction. Having a clear vision and always blazing a trail. Being aware that there are always obstacles and difficulties that we have to overcome. And that we must do so by building a wide path for everyone to follow. Accompanying everyone to ensure that no one is left behind and creating a space where we can all move forward, ever onward, walking determinedly and with our heads held high. As we have shown when defending Catalan in schools, renewing a national consensus that is essential for the Catalan language to make progress once again and which, to a large extent, marks the way forward.

Perseverance is key to progressing. To move forward, and based on this persistence, today it is evident that dialogue and negotiation to resolve the political conflict with Spain are beginning to bear fruit. They said that it was impossible to repeal sedition, they said that it was impossible to modify the charge of misappropriation. And today, the charge of sedition for which our political prisoners were convicted no longer exists and many of the aspects of misappropriation, which through the manipulation of the current law allowed the organisers of the 1 October referendum to be prosecuted, have been restricted.

Without a doubt, these steps forward have improved the situation of all those who suffered repression on 1 October. And above all, they have been an essential step towards achieving an amnesty that will put a definitive end to all forms of repression.

We are making progress. That's why it is now necessary to open a new phase of negotiation and find a solution to the root of the political conflict. Finding a solution

to Spain's inability to respond to the vast majority of citizens of Catalonia who want to democratically, freely and peacefully decide the political future of the country. Which for many of us means independence.

Until we find an answer, the political conflict will persist. And it is the responsibility of all the parties involved, the Government of Catalonia and the Spanish Government, to build a democratic path that includes all of us, through dialogue, negotiation, and agreement, to make it possible for the citizens of Catalonia to decide the future of the country.

In Catalan society there is a broad consensus on the need to resolve the conflict with Spain by voting. For this reason, in 2023 the Generalitat will promote a debate with society as a whole, a major discussion that will shape and reflect this consensus. That will reflect the agreement between us on when Catalonia should be able to exercise the right to decide again, under what conditions it should vote again, to ensure that this time all parties feel included and everyone accepts the result.

2023 must be the year that gives shape to the Catalan proposal for a Clarity Act. A major agreement in Catalonia, which offers us all the strength and internal legitimacy to ensure protection from Spain as a vision for our country. A major agreement in Catalonia that the international community understands and approves and that is scrupulously democratic, because it seeks nothing more than to empower the people.

It seeks nothing more than to give people a voice again. That is why it is time to pave the way again. To continue paving the way, while aware of the difficulties that will have to be overcome. Let's build a democratic path that serves as a new meeting point for Catalan society as a whole. With determination and conviction. And above all, with an unequivocal will to move forward, always forward. To drive the whole country forward. Catalonia as a whole. Because that's how a country of free citizens is built.

Citizens of Catalonia. The world does not stand still and neither do we. I hope you enjoy a happy festive season and that you have a very good start to the new year.

Long live Catalonia and long live freedom.