

## **Speech by the President of the Generalitat, Pere Aragonès i Garcia, before the Senate**

Madrid, 19 October 2023

Good morning, everyone. I appear before this commission to advocate for amnesty, to defend the referendum on the self-determination of Catalonia as a solution to the political conflict, to defend the well-being and prosperity of the citizens of Catalonia. In short, I have come here to defend Catalonia. A Catalonia for everyone, for all Catalans, who, regardless of their views, want to live in freedom, peace, and justice.

I am fully aware that the true purpose of this session is to merely use Catalonia once again for partisan battles at the Spanish state level. To stir up anti-Catalan sentiment once more to undermine the opposition. No matter who is in power, Catalonia is always exploited to scrape a few extra votes.

To those who initiated this commission, the Partido Popular, Catalonia's views do not matter. They do not care about the opinions, will, aspirations, or desires of the Catalan people. In fact, they assumed they could discuss Catalonia without the presence of Catalonia's representative.

If Catalonia mattered to you, you would call on us to meet to address the annual fiscal deficit of 22 billion euros that erodes public services, competitiveness, and the welfare state in my country. A fiscal deficit that restricts the resources we can allocate to hospitals, schools, security, economic development, infrastructure, and culture. These are resources that Catalans pay in taxes but have no access to.

If Catalonia mattered to you, you would call on us to meet to address the poor service of suburban train network, the result of decades of lack of public investment, a poor service that affects all users, no matter who they vote for, no matter what language they speak.

If Catalonia mattered to you, you would call on us to meet to discuss why when the Parliament of Catalonia approves regulations that are advanced at the European level in areas such as housing, combating climate change, or gender equality, we face annulments by the Constitutional Court.

If Catalonia mattered to you, ladies and gentlemen of the Partido Popular, you would stand alongside us in promoting the Catalan language, not only in Catalonia but also in the other territories where it is spoken, from Salses to Guardamar and from Fraga to Maó. You would not oppose its full official recognition in the courts of justice, in the Congress of Deputies, or in the European Union.

Ultimately, if Catalonia mattered to you, you would listen to it. You would want to hear what the nation thinks. With all its views and thoughts, with its ideological and cultural diversity, but also with its consensuses. Consensuses such as Catalan in schools, an end to repression against the independence movement, as well as the broad majority of Catalans who want to resolve the political conflict between Catalonia and Spain by voting in a referendum.

You don't care about Catalonia. You don't care about Catalans. You just use us for your own ends.

Catalonia is a nation. A European, civic, democratic nation that has been forged over the centuries, thanks to the contributions of those born in Catalonia and as well as people from all over who, upon arriving in Catalonia and embracing the society that becomes their home from that moment on, also become Catalans. And, as a grandson of Andalusians, I can testify to this

perfectly. Andalusians who, by the way, spoke Catalan to their grandchildren because they were proud of Catalonia and what it represents.

I also want to acknowledge that, despite what the Spanish nationalist right represents and does, there are numerous citizens from other regions of Spain who understand, cherish, and respect Catalonia. They appreciate our identity and love us for who we are. With them, there is a fraternal bond that transcends the political relationship that exists between Catalonia and Spain at any given moment in history.

Catalonia is a nation that doesn't look at the origin of its citizens but at the shared future we want to build in freedom. A nation that is driven by the search for well-being, prosperity and opportunities for all.

A nation aspiring to be a cohesive society through opportunities, rights, and freedoms. I believe many of you are already aware of this, even though some may be unwilling to acknowledge it.

A nation, Catalonia, which is no better or worse than any other, but which wants to be fully responsible for its own future. It wants to decide. In peace, in freedom, among all the options. In democracy and with recognition.

Amnesty is now essential to move forward in resolving the political conflict between Catalonia and the institutions of the Spanish state. It is essential to return what is a political conflict back to the political sphere. To prevent the imprisonment of citizens for political reasons from recurring. To put an end to forced exiles, fines, espionage, and political disqualifications. Or the persecution suffered by citizens of our country for exercising their right to protest. Ultimately, to put an end to the general crackdown on independence movements.

Amnesty is an essential step, a starting point that must continue the work done in recent years to provide solutions where others have responded with repression, deadlock, and lack of dialogue. This work includes the release of political prisoners two years ago, the repeal of the crime of sedition, and the recognition of the existence of a political conflict to be resolved through dialogue, negotiation, and agreements. Agreements that must be voted on by the citizens of Catalonia, as was agreed by both the Catalan and Spanish governments.

Amnesty is not an end point. It has to be the starting point. The starting point of a path with a destination: a vote by the citizens of Catalonia, in a referendum, on their political future, a vote to decide on independence.

We aim to do this in a collaborative and acknowledged way, with participation from all. Because it should be the Catalan people that have the final say. Where all options are open if endorsed by a majority. As I have emphasized, and reiterated this very week, a referendum akin to the one conducted in Scotland.

Putting an end to repression and opting for a peaceful, mutually agreed and democratic resolution to the political conflict enjoys widespread consensus in Catalonia. And the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, on several occasions, and the United Nations Human Rights Committee have also expressed themselves along the same lines.

You have called us here today – though I must admit that I believe some of you were not expecting me to be here – to try to prevent amnesty. Some are outraged by the notion of

amnesty, which is intended to put an end to repression and to return what is a political debate to the political arena.

You are outraged by a possible amnesty, but you did not express the same outrage towards the 6,000 pardons granted by the various governments of Felipe González. You did not express outrage towards the other 6,000 pardons granted by the governments of Jose María Aznar, which benefited individuals convicted of corruption – corruption involving the embezzlement of public funds – or those convicted of state terrorism.

Some of you argue that amnesty constitutes an attack on the State, but you overlook the fact that there is an amnesty law currently in force, one from 1977, which you supported. This law prevents the investigation of the crimes committed during the dictatorship.

Despite the long history of the use of Catalonia for partisan interests by the Partido Popular, which includes the collection of signatures against the Statute of Autonomy, which includes the enforcement of Article 155, which includes repression, Catalonia looks to the future and will find its way forward.

Because we believe passionately in working for a dignified life for the nearly 8 million Catalans. Because we aspire to move beyond conflict and achieve victory democratically, equipped with all the necessary tools to secure healthcare, education, security, job opportunities, a robust science and research system, environmental sustainability, and gender equality that Catalonia deserves. And these are rights that every nation in the world deserves, in freedom and solidarity.

But we want to look ahead and take full responsibility for the future of our people.

Ladies and gentlemen, Catalonia will vote in a referendum. I am convinced of it. Through sheer will, perseverance, and democracy. Always with an unbound, but outstretched hand.

Long live Catalonia