



Christmas Message from His Majesty the King

24 December 2017

Good evening.

Tonight, I am here to wish you all a happy Christmas, and join with the Queen, the Princess of Asturias, and Princess Sofía in sending our best wishes for 2018.

And I hope that on this evening, when we gather with our families and loved ones, you will let me spend a few minutes sharing some thoughts with you as the year draws to a close.

2017 in Spain has undoubtedly been a difficult year for our shared way of life; a year marked especially by the situation in Catalonia, which I will talk about later.

But it has also been a year in which we have proven the Spanish people's strongly-felt, firm and sincere commitment to the democratic Spain we have built together.

Because over the last 40 years, we have been able to create a new, modern country, one of the most advanced countries in the world:

We have permanently established democracy, including decades ago defeating an attempt to overturn our freedoms and rights.

We are an essential part of the European Union, with which we share goals and the same worldview.

We have fought back against terrorism by championing people's life, dignity, and freedom with the strength of our democratic convictions.

And in the end we have produced the greatest transformation in our history, in many aspects of our lives: in education and culture,

healthcare and social services, infrastructure and communication, defence and public security.

In fact, over all these years of democratic cohesion, Spain's rights and freedoms, its progress and modernisation, and also its international prominence and importance, have all gone hand in hand.

And this great change, this leap forward without precedent in our history, was possible thanks to an open Spain, ready to stand in solidarity, not closed in on itself; a Spain which recognises and respects our differences, our plurality, and our diversity, and makes them part of the whole; a Spain inspired by an unwavering desire for harmony.

On the path we have taken, of course we must recognise that we haven't got everything right; that there are still difficult, complex situations to be corrected, which require the commitment of all of society to overcome.

Despite all of this, no-one can deny the overall positive result of all these years. We must appreciate it and value it. It is worth the effort, and we deserve it, as a country and as a society.

Because the history of the Spain we have built together is the history of a great triumph for all the Spaniards. A Spain we must never give up on, which must excite and motivate us, and which we must continue building, improving it, updating it, based on the solid democratic principles and civic values of respect and dialogue which are the foundation of our cohesive society.

Principles and values which, as we have found even in 2017, are deeply rooted in our society, in the daily life of our citizens, and are at the core of the consciousness and the emotions of the Spanish people. Much more so than we could have imagined.

Spain today is a mature democracy, where citizens can think freely, and defend and argue their opinions and ideas in a free and democratic way; but they cannot impose their own ideas over the rights of other people.

Respecting and preserving the principles and values of our social, democratic State of Law is essential in order to guarantee the social cohesion which permits "freedom, equality, justice, and political

pluralism", as defined in our Constitution. Because when these basic principles are broken, cohesion first deteriorates, and then becomes impossible.

A few days ago, the citizens of Catalonia voted to elect their representatives in the Parliament, who must now tackle the problems facing all Catalans, while respecting pluralism and thinking responsibly of the common good.

The path cannot lead back to confrontation or exclusion, which as we already know, only create discord, uncertainty, discouragement, and the moral, civic, and of course, economic impoverishment of an entire society.

Our path must rather lead to a return to peaceful coexistence in Catalan society, which is so diverse and plural, and the recovery of calm, stability, and mutual respect, so that ideas no longer divide families and friends. This path must also lead to a rebirth of Catalonia's confidence, prestige, and positive image; and to an affirmation of the values which have always characterised its personality and have given it the best moments of its history: its capacity for leadership and hard work, its creative spirit and open-mindedness, its willingness to compromise, and its sense of responsibility.

But of course, overcoming the problems of social cohesion this situation has created must not make us forget other serious concerns and challenges facing Spanish society, which will also affect our future, which I will just mention very briefly:

Our economy and employment have improved substantially, but the creation of stable jobs must always be a core priority. Similarly, we cannot forget our obligation to deal with inequality and differences in society, especially after the consequences of the recent economic crisis which has done so much damage to many families, and affected the future prospects of many young people.

Islamic terrorism continues to be a worldwide threat, and this year we were directly attacked in Barcelona and Cambrils. The people of Spain know very well that only a united democracy, a strong State of Law, and effective international cooperation can defeat and destroy this threat. And this is what we will do, while we also constantly remember and

respect its victims.

Corruption is still a source of concern for society, which is demanding the necessary measures are taken to eradicate it completely, so that citizens can have full confidence that public funds are being properly managed.

Meanwhile, we are part of Europe, and the EU now stands at a historic crossroads. Spain must regain its leading role in the European project, which now needs more enthusiasm and support than ever. Europe – and Spain with it – must face global challenges, not with weakness and division but with a strong united front.

Defending the environment and combating climate change are not minor or secondary problems. They involve large-scale risks, and we are already suffering the consequences. We must be very aware of this, and become much more active. And Spain must remain firm in its commitments in the face of a problem affecting the entire planet, and requires solutions which will be both global and truly urgent.

We have many other concerns, of course, but tonight I also want to remember the women who suffer gender violence, and are often scared into silence. This is an unacceptable blight which offends us at the deepest level, shames us, and appals us. We must maintain political commitment and support for helping and defending the victims, and raise awareness at every level against this criminal and cowardly violence, which degrades our society.

In a few days 2018 begins, and we must continue to build our country, because history does not stand still. And we have not arrived here to fear the future, but to create it.

I'm sure that nobody wants a paralysed, hopeless Spain - we want a modern, attractive, exciting Spain, which is calm but dynamic, and continues to develop and adapt to the new era.

Let's be justly proud of everything we have achieved, because it is thanks to all of us; let's put our trust in what has always united us, in what we are, just as we are, and above all, in what we can accomplish together, with strong faith in our convictions and our abilities. If we continue on this path, as we have been doing, with all our energy, I'm convinced that next year, and the years that come after it, are going to

be much better. Without a doubt.

This is my wish for all of you on this very special night.

Thank you very much. Feliz Navidad, Eguberri on, Bon Nadal, Boas Festas, Merry Christmas.

Good night. And a happy and prosperous 2018.