30 years of language policy

commemoration
30th anniversary approval
Act 7/1983 18 April
language normalisation
Catalonia
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30 years of language policy brings together the speeches made on 15 July 2013 in the Auditorium Hall of the Parliament of Catalonia, during the institutional ceremony commemorating the 30th anniversary of approval of the Language Normalisation Act 7/1983, of 18 April.
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On 15 July, the Parliament of Catalonia implemented a proposal by the Minister of Culture and institutionally commemorated thirty years of the 1983 Language Normalisation Act. The Catalan Parliament has approved many laws, but few have had the political, social and cultural significance of the first law in the field of language. A law which is a key component in a comprehensive policy of national reconstruction, energetically driven by a nationalist government with broad parliamentary and social support. It was to be the basis of a democratic language policy which established the official use of Catalan, guaranteed that all who lived in Catalonia would know its two official languages and initiated the process that should unambiguously lead to the irreversible revitalisation of the country’s native tongue, Catalan. The Act also constituted the basis on which the population of Catalonia would become one sole people, free of dynamics differentiated by language.

The 1983 Act established the three pillars of language policy, which remain key to this day: education, public administration and mass media. Catalan would regain the communicative space it was entitled to above all if it entered the education system as a matter of normality, with Catalan as the vehicular language and rejecting the separation of pupils for linguistic reasons. A model which, once adopted into compulsory education, would ensure all young people had

Presentation
full knowledge of both official languages. Children and adolescents whose mother tongue and usual language of communication was Spanish could also be bilingual and able to speak Catalan should they so choose. The Act established that Catalan would be the language normally employed in the Generalitat de Catalunya (Government of Catalonia) and in that institution’s public communication media.

Months later, the Act 10/1983, of 30 May, which set up the Catalan Broadcasting Corporation and regulated the Generalitat’s radio and television broadcasting services, established that in such media the language normally used would be Catalan.

Catalonia’s first language law was met with hostility from the Spanish government and ignored by the Spanish state administration, including the area of Justice. The Spanish government took the law to the Constitutional Court, seeking annulment of the precept establishing that school pupils should demonstrate knowledge of Catalan when their compulsory education concluded. However, the Court’s favourable sentence did not go far enough and there followed a series of decrees and orders relating to education which were the subject of continuous debate, until a new sentence was handed down in 1994. This hostility was repeated in the same 1983 with a challenge to the decree on labelling, which opened the door for Catalan to be included on product labels, and an appeal against the 1985 Catalan law establishing that Generalitat officials should provide proof of their knowledge of Catalan, as well as other countermeasures. Re-examination of the legal and judicial obstacles that the Spanish government has imposed and continues to impose against the application of Catalan language legislation, with the explicit intention of preventing Catalan from recovering lost ground, is proof that the Spanish state is one of the primary impediments to Catalan becoming the language of normal use. The latest episodes, consisting in objection to the new Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia and the Education Act, together with the educational proposals put forward by central government, the persistent boycotting of the use of Catalan in European institutions and the attempt to weaken TV3, evidence little change in this sense. The last
thirty years have enabled us to verify that a formally democratic Spain has never ceased to marginalise Catalan.

Nonetheless, we would highlight the collective success, as a whole and for everyone, represented by the language policy initiated with that law and defined more clearly and with better instruments fifteen years later, with the Language Policy Act, in force since 1998. The fact is that we maintain the majority social and political backing for our language policy, we have avoided the scenario of a dual Catalonia and, going beyond schooling, public administration and the mass media, which operate on a day-to-day basis in Catalan, the knowledge and use of the language is undoubtedly growing. Not only has its inter-generational transmission not weakened, its capacity to attract new speakers has actually increased. The language has recovered a number of spaces – the daily press and field of music are good examples – and has penetrated into hitherto non-existent areas such as the Internet and social networks, where it has nothing to envy of other European languages. Consensus in the essential aims of language policy, the political determination of successive governments and the involvement of Catalan society as a whole have led to Catalan occupying a position clearly better than that of three decades ago.

The celebration on 15 July was moving and memorable. On the following pages we offer an extract from the speeches made by the Professor of Administrative Law, Antoni Milian Massana, the Generalitat’s Minister of Culture, Ferran Mascarell, and the President of the Catalan Parliament, Núria de Gispert.

We mark the thirty years of language policy more convinced than ever that Catalan is the core element of cohesion in a society which is diverse, including linguistically, and that it will maintain the instrumental and symbolic space it so merits. But this will entail resolute action from the political and academic authorities, commitment from the economic and intellectual sectors and the engagement of all citizens of Catalonia.

Ester Franquesa i Bonet

Director General of Language Policy
The Language Normalisation Act: 
the road to reform

Antoni Milian i Massana

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I

The Act of Parliament 7/1983, of 18 April, on Language Normalisation in Catalonia, was approved by plenary session of this Chamber on 6 April 1983. Published in the Official Gazette of the Generalitat of Catalonia (DOGC) on 22 April, it entered into force the following day, as stipulated in the second final provision. The text received the favourable vote of all Members of Parliament except one, who abstained. Such broad consensus, along with the very passage of time which makes everything seem easier, could lead one to think that the process was a smooth one. It was, however, far from placid.

Drafting of the Act took place in two phases. The first, driven from the Ministry of Culture and the Media, which in those days was headed by Max Cahner, consisted in meetings and consultations with leading figures from the world of culture and with representatives of the parliamentary groups to discuss and agree upon a draft law, subse-
sequently a Bill, which could quickly be passed to Parliament. With this phase, initiated in June 1980 and lasting four months, the aim of the Generalitat government – led by Jordi Pujol – was to gain time until the Catalan Parliament, awaiting definition of its rules of procedure, was able to legislate, given the extremely precarious situation of the Catalan language. The draft was based upon a text prepared by Josep M. Vilaseca i Marcet who, along with Josep M. Puig Salellas, also drew up the successive redrafts. The final result would be a draft of the Bill on language use in Catalonia, which was presented to the representatives of the parliamentary groups or political parties Joan Colomines, Josep M. Ainaud, Lluís Armet, Rafael Ribó, Marçal Casanovas and Josep-Rafel Carreras de Nadal, as well as to linguists and socio-linguists, who were invited to offer advice and suggestions.

The draft Bill failed to satisfy some parliamentary groups, and the Catalan Parliament’s Cultural Policy Committee had to begin its work despite not having a previously agreed text. A general will to find consensus still existed in this second phase. Thus agreement was reached to continue the process through the special joint initiative procedure provided in Article 108 of the regulation, the Bill consequently being drawn up from a white paper drafted by representatives of all the political groups, appointed by the Cultural Policy Committee. The Committee named a joint sub-committee on 16 October 1980, which initially comprised the following Members of Parliament: Josep M. Ainaud and Joan Colomines, from the parliamentary group Convergència i Unió; José González and Marta À. Mata, from the Socialista group; Teresa E. Calzada and Xavier Folch, from the PSUC (Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia) parliamentary group; Albert Planasdemunt and Anton Cañellas, from the parliamentary group of the Centristes; Marçal Casanovas and Francesc Vicens, from the Esquerra Republicana group, and Francisco Hidalgo, an independent Member of Parliament from the PSA (Socialist Party of Andalusia).

Drafting of the text and its discussion in committee lasted thirty-one months, evidence of the considerable confrontations that took place among the parliamentary groups. This is not the place to detail
the entire process. I will simply highlight the fact that dissenting votes and amendments abounded and that, finally in the closing stages, the groups agreed to submit to the Advisory Council the decision the Committee had originally put to the Presiding Committee of Parliament. If the result of the vote was commendable, so was the huge effort made by the groups to reach it, and this is a merit I wish to emphasise at a time like the present, so lacking in consensus. Aina Moll, the then Director General of Language Policy, would later refer to it in the following terms: “All the groups have had to reduce their initial demands in one way or another in order to reach a point of understanding”, and she underlined the fact that approval by an almost unanimous vote was “the best guarantee of success in the law’s implementation”.

II

In December 1978, the Spanish Constitution granted official status to languages other than Spanish in their respective geographical areas of use. This partially resolved a long-held grievance in Catalonia and began a stage which saw the end of almost forty years of, first, persecution, followed by prohibition and then, in the final years, tolerance/prohibition, to which the Catalan language had been subjected. Moreover, excluding the short period of the Second Republic, if we add to that the more than two hundred years of denigration already suffered by Catalan, it will be easy to understand the fragile situation that was inherited. With implementation of the Statute of Autonomy, the mission of the Normalisation Act was precisely to redress the situation of profound assimilation with respect to the Catalan language, while respecting the linguistic rights of speakers of one official language or the other. Thus the context in which the Act was born could not have been infused with greater expectation or agitation, and a good deal of hope was deposited in its success. At the same time as Catalan sociolinguistics began to flourish (Vallverdú, Aracil, Strubell, Bastardes and so on), action was also set in motion on the subject of language rights,
the study of which had hitherto been prohibited. The task to be undertaken was huge, but the most pressing actions, such as providing teachers, university lecturers and public servants in general with facilities to learn Catalan, were already under way.

In the first place, knowledge of Catalan had to be extended and generalised throughout the population as a whole. According to the province of Barcelona census data from 1975, only 14.5% of people were able to write the language. Despite the deficient methodology employed, this is a very telling percentage: a large majority of Catalan speakers were illiterate in their own language. In 1981 the percentage of the population that understood it was 79.8%. In second place, if the language was to be used in schools and Catalan public administrations, teachers and the staff of those public institutions had to be encouraged to learn it. A study commissioned by the Jaume Bofill Foundation and published in 1979 by Blume revealed that only 35.4% of primary-school (EGB) teachers could speak and write the language. Thirdly, the use of Catalan had to be extended to encompass all areas, both public and private. And fourthly, an attempt had to be made to cleanse its lexicon and syntax, increasingly more subject to Spanish linguistic elements, and to re-establish administrative and legal Catalan terminology. The flux of the moment meant that a host of initiatives would be set in motion in parallel to the Act, of which I shall mention just three: the “Norma” campaign; publication of *Revista de Llengua i Dret* (Journal of Language and Law) by the Escola d’Administració Pública (Public Administration School of Catalonia), directed at the time by Carles Duarte; and the II Congrés Internacional de la Llengua Catalana (2nd International Congress of the Catalan Language), which was held only a few years later.

III

In accordance with that provided in Article 3.2 of the 1978 Spanish Constitution, Article 3 of the 1979 Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia had
effectively recognised the official nature of Catalan by establishing it as the language of Catalonia. Thus the Language Normalisation Act implements Article 3 of the Statute and, in particular, the mandates given to the Generalitat in the aforementioned set of fundamental principles.

In doing so, the Act places special emphasis on the areas of official use, education, the media and institutional promotion. Title V of the Act, the last, is devoted to “normalisation of the use of Aranese” and implements the section in Article 3 of the Statute of Autonomy dedicated to the Occitan language, called Aranese in Aran.

With regard to official use, among other matters the Act specifies one of the legal consequences of both Catalan and Spanish being official, namely the possibility for any natural or legal person (any “citizen”, as inadequately stated in the Act) to use them in dealings with any Administration, including that of Justice, without being required to produce any form of translation. The Act is more prudent with respect to the regular use of both languages in official acts and rarely prioritises the use of Catalan. Place names, on the other hand, would have one sole official version, the Catalan one, as that would be the original and proper designation except, for the same reasons, in the case of the Val d’Aran.

With regard to non-university education, the Act opts for the model of language conjunction. This consists in guaranteeing children the right to receive their initial education in their usual language, whether this be Catalan or Spanish; in not separating children either in centres or in group classes according to their language; in ensuring the teaching of both official languages; and in progressively employing Catalan as the vehicle of normal expression, with the condition, established subsequently by means of a regulation, that at least one subject or area must be taught in Spanish in addition to the Spanish language class. The Act aspires to all active teachers attaining understanding and mastery of Catalan through the organisation of courses. In higher education centres, the use of both official languages is to be governed by the criterion of linguistic freedom.

In the case of the mass media, the Act stipulates that the normal language of broadcasters managed by the Generalitat and local
authorities in Catalonia must be Catalan. Consequently, the pro-
grammes broadcast by the television channel TV3 which, without
waiting for approval of the Spanish law on third channels, was
launched a few months later (to be precise, on 11 September that
year), will usually be in Catalan.

For the other communications media and to promote the exten-
sion of Catalan in other cultural and socio-economic sectors and activ-
ities, the Act guides administrative normalisation action towards the
techniques of fostering, influencing and empowering. Thus it autho-
rises Catalan public administrations to award subsidies and grants and
establish tax allowances or exemptions with the aim of stimulating the
use and presence of Catalan and correcting the effects of the preced-
ing impositions and bans. The Act opts for persuasive measures, shun-
ning more constrictive techniques.

As part of the institutional stimulus, the government of the Gene-
ralitat undertook to guarantee the teaching of Catalan to staff in the
service of the Generalitat and Catalan local authorities. The require-
ment to present proof of knowledge of the language would be intro-
duced by the 1985 Act on Public Offices of the Administration of the
Generalitat (Art. 34). The Normalisation Act goes no further than mak-
ing this compulsory for teachers and lecturers.

A commitment to collaborate and cooperate with other adminis-
trations and bodies closes the section on institutional promotion.

Review of the Act’s content reveals, as occurs with the other con-
temporary normalisation laws, that the text finally chosen is a unique
model that has nothing in common either with Quebec’s Charter of
the French Language, which in those days enjoyed ample support, or
with any other contemporary foreign legislation.

IV

Shortly before the Act was passed, the president of the Spanish gov-
ernment had lodged an appeal against the constitutionality of certain
aspects of the law on Standardisation of Use of the Basque Language. News of this caused great concern in the Parliament of Catalonia, as it augured similar action against the Catalan legislation. And that was indeed the case; there was no way out for the Act and the moment it was published the Spanish president filed an appeal against two of its articles, which were declared unconstitutional in the Sentence of 26 June 1986. The declaration of invalidity affected provisions which declared the Generalitat competent to bring such legal action as it deemed necessary to enforce citizens’ linguistic rights, and the clause stating that in the case of dispute over the interpretation of Catalan laws, the Catalan text would prevail. The Constitutional Court considered that both cases encroached upon competences of the Spanish state and, additionally in the second instance, breached the principle of legal certainty.

A question of unconstitutionality presented by the Supreme Court enabled the Constitutional Court to rule once again upon the constitutionality of the Act. In the Sentence of 23 December 1994, the Court declared that the educational model of language conjunction was not contrary to the Constitution.

Implementation of the Act was also the object of numerous appeals before the contentious-administrative courts. Some of the early sentences, whether for reasons of the newness of the matter or for ideological reasons, clearly denote a lack of judicial rigour. Jurisprudence gradually evolved however, resulting in an ever-growing number of actions being rejected.

V

The Act succeeded in extending the knowledge and use of Catalan, and in making it the language of normal use in education as well as in a good deal of Catalonia’s public Administrations. Census data clearly reflects the increases achieved: from 79.9% of the population of Catalonia understanding the language in 1981 to 95.0% in 1996, two years
before replacement of the Act, and from 31.5% being able to write it in 1986 to 45.8%, some ten years later. There was also significant growth in book publication, the press and so on. Despite these encouraging figures however, the Act fell somewhat short of expectations in social use, considerably so in the socio-economic sector, and in areas related to the Spanish state Administration, which in any case were not strictly-speaking within its scope, such as that of the Justice system.

An appraisal of the Act reveals both positive and negative points. A more audacious law with coercive measures would probably have been more beneficial from the outset to the normalisation process. It is also true however that the precarious situation in which Catalan found itself in the early nineteen-eighties and which doubtless required more energetic measures could easily have resulted in some of those measures being disproportionate or discriminatory, in the absence of simultaneous long and adequate transitory arrangements.

Challenges began to appear as from the early nineties, which the Act and its instruments were unable to cope with. Some of the new circumstances were beyond its influence, such as the emergence of ICTs, with the corresponding expansion of private television broadcasting, the Internet and so on. Others were brought about by transformations originated by the law itself. The general increase in the knowledge of Catalan, for example, justified and at the same time intensified the need for adoption of more incisive measures in areas such as the socio-economic dimension, where its presence had hitherto been sparse.

Faced with this new context, the Parliament of Catalonia approved Act 1/1998, of 7 January, on Language Policy, which replaced the Normalisation Act. The latter was not repealed, but substituted, and not therefore removed from the statute books. In other words, the Act we are commemorating is still in force. Pursuant to the third final provision of the Language Policy Act, it became part of the Catalan legal tradition, which uniquely links it to the rules of interpretation and integration of Catalan civil law. The new Act prioritises the use of Catan-
lan in Catalan public Administrations, generalises the vehicular use of Catalan in non-university education and integrates constrictive provisions for the socio-economic area, measures which, in some cases, had been timidly anticipated by statutory provision implementing the Normalisation Act itself or other sectoral legislation.

VI

Thirty years have passed and, looking back, it becomes obvious that the progress made to date has been remarkable. It is also true however that Catalan’s frailty continues and, in some respects, is even worsening. The extent of social use is far from making Catalan the common language, and the globalisation phenomenon is tending to weaken it further.

There can be no doubt that the success of normalisation depends on having a good law. But more than that, it also depends on the personal attitudes of those who speak the language. And it depends still more and above all – and I underline the above all – on the constitutional framework that underlies it.

The constitutional context of the Normalisation Act was shaped by Article 3 of the Spanish Constitution, which is still valid today. This article reproduces the linguistic model of the Constitution of the Second Republic, ratified in 1931. A model which, despite the considerable number of people who speak it, excludes Catalan from the central institutions and bodies of the State’s general Administration, and which dilutes the full effect of Catalan’s official status in Catalonia, through a slanted interpretation of the obligation to know Spanish.

This model from the early- to mid-twentieth century was perhaps adequate for the agrarian and industrial society of those times. It is however inappropriate and obsolete in a post-industrial society such as ours, with a predominant service sector, in which migration is an everyday reality and the supranational level acquires major significance.
The current constitutional framework renders Catalan ineffectual at the state level, and to all intents and purposes unnecessary, except in education, in Catalonia. Thus it not only hinders the normalisation of Catalan, it fails even to guarantee that the language survives.

A constitution is necessary which recognises Catalan’s official status in central government institutions and bodies. As Professor Alber Branchadell, among others, has argued, a good deal of the new multilingual states created in the late 20th century opted to recognise multilingualism in their state organisations. We need a constitution that allows Catalan to occupy a preferential position in Catalonia, while respecting at all times the rights of Spanish speakers; or we need our own constitution. In the latter case, I am of the opinion that maintaining Spanish as an official language would not necessarily endanger the survival of Catalan, though Catalan should be the first official language, it being the native language of Catalonia.

VII

Returning to the Normalisation Act. The plenary session of this Chamber held on 6 April 1983 was an emotive one. The Act being passed was not just any law. It was the first time Catalonia would have legislation that established general regulation of the language issue. For that reason, once the voting had taken place, solemn speeches explaining the reasoning behind their vote were made by the Members of Parliament Mr Xavier Folch, Mr Marçal Casanovas, Mr Agustín Luna, Ms Marta À. Mata and Mr Joan Colomines, each on behalf of their respective parliamentary groups, and two independent members, Mr Ramon Viñals and Mr Joan Besa. Thirty years have gone by since that day and the Normalisation Act we are commemorating seems to have proved a useful tool in gaining a little redress. However and as I mentioned before, time is passing and we still have a long way to go, a fact we cannot ignore.
30 years of the Language Normalisation Act, the history of a collective success

Ferran Mascarell i Canalda
Minister of Culture

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you here. Your presence raises the significance of this commemoration of the 30 years of the Language Normalisation Act, and I am most grateful for that.

I would also like to welcome and thank Antoni Milian for his wise thoughts.

And I want to express my very special gratitude for the words of each and every member of the community who has taken part, with your personal views and experiences.

In this act you represent the voice of Catalonia. The voice of a people which has remained loyal to its language, generation after generation. A people which, throughout history, has embraced a wide and diverse range of origins and backgrounds.

You represent the voice of a people which has finally won the day. The voice of a society which, many generations ago, resolved to let no power, irrespective of how ruthless it was, ever take away its words.

You represent the voice of a community which decided, 30 years back, that national emancipation, democratic life and the normalisation of Catalan amounted to the same thing.

Ladies and gentlemen, I think today’s ceremony, above all, commemorates the success of a people which has understood how to preserve and cultivate our language, day after day and against powerful enemies, making it our normal vehicle of communication. And I
would go further; you represent a people which has been able to position our language among the living, vibrant languages of the world.

Before all else then, as Minister of Culture of the Government of Catalonia, I am pleased to offer you all our heartfelt gratitude.

Because of you, no political or military imposition, enforced harmonisation, dictatorship, war, migratory movement, technological imperative or market unification, nor 300 years of persecution or, at best, indifference by the improper State in which we live, has been able to silence the Catalan language. They have interfered, put spokes in the wheels and placed stumbling blocks in our path, but have not been able to break the will of the huge majority of its people.

Today we remember an important milestone on the road to full normalisation. Approval of the first Normalisation Act in 1983, which was passed with just one abstention. It was a law born out of consensus. And it was the foundation which would enable, some fifteen years later, enactment of the Language Policy Act, which is currently in force.

Today, 30 years on from that timely first law, we celebrate more than the legal text, we celebrate its fruits; we celebrate the fact that Catalan is now a consolidated, living language.

Catalan is a language which dates back thousands of years, and is also a language of today, of the 21st century, with a projection for the future bordering on normality, though conditioned by political factors. It is the 9th most spoken language in Europe, used by over 10 million people throughout its linguistic domain (more than such official languages as Swedish, Greek, Czech or Bulgarian). The teaching method employed in schools has proved highly effective and is today recognised for its excellent results. And for the first time in history, two entire generations of young Catalans have studied from childhood in Catalan.

Catalan is taught in 162 universities the world over. It is present with increasing normality on the radio and television and in newspapers. There is Catalan poetry and very good Catalan fiction. We have come far since that debate in the early seventies which claimed ours
was a country unable to produce novels! But that is not all, Catalan ranks 22nd among the most-translated languages in the world. And not by chance. Today, Catalan is a vehicle for the production of creative excellence in a practically complete cultural system which is competitive on the world stage, despite the immense difficulties posed by the economic crisis, the Catalan fiscal deficit, and the cultural policies of the Spanish state.

Today, the identification between the Catalan language and its own, quality contents is a fact. Catalan culture expressed through our language reveals, without complexes, our particular view upon the world. There exists today a unique Catalan cultural production which, moreover, creates works of universal value.

In Catalan we also conduct science of excellence and advanced knowledge. Catalan is present in our research laboratories. In Catalan we express all manner of feelings and ideas, plainly and categorically. Its use is intensive in social networks. It is the 26th most-used website language and ranks 13th in articles published on Wikipedia. TERMCAT has produced 40 specialised on-line dictionaries, authentic points of reference for terminology. Last year, the Consortium for Language Normalisation received 98,329 enrolments on courses to learn Catalan, and conducted 3,995 face-to-face courses. The 10,129 language pairs are testimony to an extraordinary model of civic and cultural harmony.

Catalan is, today, a modern language, perfectly suitable for all spheres of activity, clearly regulated and totally valid as a system of communication and as a mechanism of social identification. Catalan is, today, a language of the first order, grammatically and lexically codified, adopted by scholars and the immense majority of cultural sectors in all Catalan-speaking territories.

The Catalan people have consolidated Catalan as their national, contemporary language. Catalan is a language of culture, a language of prestige inextricably connected to an ethos of excellence. Catalan is also the language of the people, of everyone, and associated with the opportunities of each individual and the cohesion of all.
The internal vitality of Catalan and the conviction of those who speak it have resulted in the language, in itself, no longer being “the” problem.

And none of what I have just said is intended to deny the numerous difficulties and dysfunctions Catalan has suffered in certain areas of our country. We still have a lot of work to do with the newly arrived, in some fields of business, in the media, the cinema and justice administration, as well as in the attitude of certain organisations of young people.

The gravest problem however lies outside the language itself. It is political and related to the State and its policies.

For that reason it would be wrong and unfair to ourselves and the generations that have enabled us to get where we are not to solemnly state here, in the Parliament of Catalonia, that the Catalan people have already won this battle. Antoni de Capmany’s famous sentence (originally written in Spanish) from the late 18th century, “Catalan is an old, provincial language, now dead for the republic of letters”, is now far behind us.

Capmany failed to count on the will of the people. Two hundred years later we have finally realised how, just as the languages of Dickens or Cervantes are unlikely ever to disappear, that of our poets and our novelists, essayists, historians, translators and scientists has carved a permanent place for itself among the world’s languages.

Like it or not, this is the decisive fact. No matter how much some people determine to continue pushing Catalan up against the ropes, we can today show ourselves as a people proud of our accomplishment. The history of the normalisation of Catalan is one of civics, politics and culture; an extraordinary history full of resolve and conviction. A history of determination which has succeeded in overcoming the monolingualistic and unicultural imperative of the Spanish state throughout the last 300 years.

So I say it again, with humility but also with absolute conviction: the history of Catalan is extraordinary, and one of which we can feel justifiably proud.
The defeat of 1714 caused great harm, and Catalan was hit hard. The monarchical state saw Paris as a model of imperial capital. The French monarchy became the frame of reference upon which to impose a cultural and linguistic system apparently enlightened, but unmistakeably unitary and centralist. And this has been the tone of State policies throughout the entire 18th and 19th centuries, and a good deal of the 20th. Catalan has survived an intensive process of teaching exclusively in Spanish. It has resisted schooling, asymmetrical bilingualism and the first communications revolution, but has always suffered discrimination in favour of Spanish.

There has always been discrimination in favour of Spanish. The rights of Catalan have always been denied. It has been like this for the last 300 years of Spanish state policies. And this is still the policy emanating from the bowels of the State and its apparatus. Even to the point of systematically violating the Constitution they insist they defend. Remember, Article 3 of the Spanish Constitution states that: “The richness of the different linguistic modalities of Spain is a cultural heritage which shall be specially respected and protected”. They even breach the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, approved by the same State over a decade ago.

They systematically deny the social reality of Catalan. They try to make it a second-class or minor language. They consistently devalue its singularity and official nature. They try to impose the idea that the use of Catalan is a superfluous and unnecessary expense. They want the promotion of Catalan to be interpreted as an encroachment on individual freedoms and as an instrument of indoctrination. They want well-meaning people to believe that Catalan in the schools and the media is synonymous with pensée unique. And it goes without saying that the aim of all this is to divide Catalan society and to isolate it from other Catalan speakers.

So these are the principles of the State we know. We are all too aware of them. That is why it is more important than ever to remember what the problem is. And no-one has expressed it better than Joan Solà, when he accepted the Premi d’Honor de les Lletres Catala-
nes (Catalan Literary Lifetime Achievement Award). Allow me to remind you of his words: “The mismatch which for centuries we have endured with the State has had negative repercussions on the possibility of maintaining our personality throughout the huge upsets produced over the last sixty years: in demography, in the economic balance of the State, in the mass media and in technology. If we want to be a normal country we should aspire to an overall situation comparable to that of recognised states with a well-established, powerful and autonomous language of reference, with a literature, history, civil power and geographical space which are visible and differentiated. We must aspire to equality with other peoples that surround us. Our life, in all economic, scientific, linguistic, artistic, literary and technological senses, cannot settle for being an appendix, a subordinate of any other.”

These words from 2009 make yet more sense if we compare them to those of president Prat de Riba in a speech made in May 1917. Shortly before he died, he voiced his conviction that: “We have not made the Mancomunitat to have a larger Diputació or to provide the Catalan soul with a small, subordinated and secondary apparatus of administration: a province. We all want a State apparatus for Catalonia, we all feel that the dignity of the Catalan people urgently demands structures of State, be they more, or less, accentuated. This is the spirit of the call for autonomy made by our people under the name of State service delegations in the Mancomunitat”.

This is the meaning – as Espriu would say – of the political debate of our time. Today’s generations – the deucentistes – have not created the Catalan nation, and much less have we invented the concept of State, but we have indeed produced a decisive idea: our nation can only fully and properly develop its language, its culture, its progress, its ideals of justice and the promotion of democratic values if it is able to count on the leverage of a State that stands by it.

There can be no doubt that the 1983 Act has played an outstanding and key role in the process that has brought us this far. It is the decisive link. Indispensable. And tribute must be paid to those who made
it possible: president Pujol, minister Max Cahner and Aina Moll, the then Director General.

And our Parliament should also be congratulated. In the words of Aina Moll, the law was “a great triumph for the Parliament of Catalonia”.

Special mention should be made of those who moved the Bill: the Members of Parliament Josep M. Ainaud de Lasarte and Joan Colomines, from the CiU parliamentary group who, sadly, have since passed away; Helena Ferrer Mallol, who continued the work of Ainaud de Lasarte in the CiU group; José González and Marta Mata (also, no longer with us), of the Socialista group; Teresa Eulàlia Calzada and Xavier Folch, of the PSUC parliamentary group; Albert Planasdemunt and Anton Cañellas (also deceased), of the Centristes group; Marçal Casanovas and Francesc Vicens, from the Esquerra Republicana parliamentary group, and Ramon Viñals and Francisco Hidalgo, independent members. Our thanks go out to all of them.

Since then, application of the Act has required a great deal of hard work from professionals at the Generalitat, in the Ministry of Culture, the General Directorate for Language Policy and the Consortium for Language Normalisation, as well as from members of the Catalan Language Social Council, and the Catalan director generals, ministers and presidents. To all of you, present or not, thank you so much for your effort.

The Act showed us once again that the future only exists if it is built from the present. The future in all its potential will not arrive unless we are capable of fully assuming our responsibilities in every present moment. These responsibilities have made a mark on our collective history. They have followed the hypothesis of Pompeu Fabra which said: “Neither the task, nor hope, should ever be abandoned”. They have led us to a path which is reaching a decisive crossroads.
Sharing words with more and more people

Núria de Gispert i Català
President of the Parliament of Catalonia

It gives me great pleasure to close this event marking the anniversary of the Language Normalisation Act, or the “law of Catalan” as we called it, which I think has been one of the most relevant to be moved and approved by this Parliament since its reestablishment in 1980. It has become a landmark in the Catalan democratic self-government process spanning recent years.

I wish to congratulate the Ministry of Culture, personified in its minister, for this ceremony and the huge response it has attracted. There are so many people here and more still in an adjoining room who can follow the event on closed-circuit TV. I want to congratulate all of you who in one way or another have been responsible for this success. And this responsibility perhaps also rests with the various ministers of the Generalitat, with the different director generals and, in particular, with the man who was then the president of Catalonia, president Pujol.

That first legislature of the re-established Parliament of Catalonia produced a series of notable accords. Mention has already been made of the Members of Parliament who moved the Bill, a passage that lasted thirty-one months. When we say thirty-one months it means the task was far from easy. It was without doubt hard and complex, but most important of all and following those thirty-one months, Parliament voted almost unanimously in favour of the Act. It addressed a
matter of supreme significance, one that we now call a “question of country” or “question of state”. And in that respect I would like to thank directly, on behalf of the Parliament of Catalonia, those parliamentarians who worked so hard to make it possible, thirty years later, for that law to be a reality.

As I said earlier, we often speak of questions of state to refer to those matters which, for their very nature, lie beyond party politics and, contrarily, generate broad consensus which rises above the melee of political wrangling. Examples of such state-wide accords which always come to mind are the Toledo Pacts on pensions or, in the case of Catalonia, the pact on immigration and the one currently being proposed on poverty by the Taula del Tercer Sector (Table of the Third Sector) and the Ministry of Social Welfare and Family.

It could be said that language normalisation is a “question of country”, with a huge capacity for producing public involvement. It is an element of progress and cohesion for society born out of harmony and, consequently, should result in general agreements in the civic sphere.

If we look back upon these last thirty years we see that a historical process of some relevance has taken place. So I am grateful for the ten personal testimonials we have heard, each of them from a different point of view, and for their contributors’ willingness to explain, here and now, their experience of these thirty years of the law of Catalan.

We are speaking of years of repression and uncertainty, but also of resistance. The words of the poet Salvador Espriu still have impact to this day: “We have lived to save your words”. They date from a situation of emergency for people who refused to accept that Catalan was a minoritised, residual, decadent, dying language. Theirs was a difficult situation however, as they had neither the cooperation nor, far less, the involvement of government bodies. Thus Espriu’s “save your words”. At that time we had no Catalan institutions, they had been abolished, so it was left to the families to carry on the preservation of the Catalan language.

We are now living the years of normalisation. It is no longer a question of saving words, but rather one of sharing them with more
and more people, aware that under equal conditions with other, more common, languages, ours is just as suitable and versatile for the purposes of communication. And we have managed to extend the knowledge and social use of Catalan. The goal could not be clearer: to achieve the normalisation of our language in Catalonia. Normalisation which will allow Catalan-speakers the full exercise of their language rights, without the servitudes and shortcomings of the present moment.

Throughout the years, language normalisation has been a living process, adapted to a changing Catalonia which has grown demographically through new immigration. This has presented numerous challenges, as well as huge potential for development.

It has been said that we went from the Catalonia of the six million to the Catalonia of the seven and a half million inhabitants. And that difference of a million and a half has taken place over very few years. Had there not been clear will and a dedication to integration, our language would have been in great danger. Because in a country without State, like Catalonia, in a country whose population of six million is raised in twelve years by a million and a half different cultures, races and languages, had there not been a determined desire to persevere, our identity could have been lost.

This process has gone forward thanks to the contribution, effort, commitment and generosity of many people – both professionals and volunteers – but also of the different governments of Catalonia and the numerous entities of its well-developed civil society. I take this occasion to thank all of you for the passion and perseverance you displayed, and which must be maintained. We must endure, we must go on. As Aina Moll said: “We have other challenges.” We have achieved much after thirty years, but there is still much to do. The work done to date has encompassed a diverse range of highly relevant fields, among them the education system, the mass media and the world of culture.

Two months ago in this same auditorium we celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of the Law on Creation of the Catalan Broadcasting
Corporation, TV3 and Catalunya Ràdio. Also thirty years. And also a law which garnered broad consensus and strong unanimity in this Parliament. The political forces were ideologically very different then, but nonetheless they succeeded. And we can say that the Corporation today is a State structure, and that the Corporation has helped enormously in our country’s language normalisation process. There may however be areas, some of which I know more directly and personally, which have failed the “casting-out-nines” test. One of the testimonials has also spoken of this, saying there were pending issues such as in the world of justice. In 1714 justice was Catalan, absolutely Catalan. The judges were Catalan; as from 1714, judges had to come from Spanish-speaking lands. And since then we have failed to introduce language normalisation to its full extent into the justice Administration system. I am aware we have all made great efforts. But maybe other steps need to be taken of which we are also aware, and which we are on course to bring to a successful conclusion one day.

These have been thirty years in which much has been done and done well, but there is still a long road to travel. We have to reach new milestones and create new horizons. The path we have taken and will continue to take is one of cohesion; it is a path of integration, of dialogue. Nothing could be further from the phantoms of exclusion, division and segregation seen by some.

And by way of conclusion, let me recall the words of the poet J. V. Foix, transformed into the hymn of the Second International Congress of the Catalan Language; wise words, words of peace and harmony: “Let us calmly open our language to the thousands of languages of the friendly world, with the clarity of an old verb. Open to all, to live and live together.” Live and live together in Catalan, in Aranese, in Spanish, open to the world, in conflict with nothing and nobody.

The Language Normalisation Act, our law of Catalan, laid the foundations of the edifice which we have all, together, been building, in a way which is both harmonious and enduring, and which is consolidating Catalonia as a cohesive society. Long may it be so!
30 years of language policy

commemoration
30th anniversary approval
Act 7/1983 18 April
language normalisation
Catalonia