**DELAY AS A STRATEGY**

We are somewhat concerned to discover that the Ministry of Culture of the Government of Catalonia has extended the deadlines for decisions and discussion of a thorough review of the Catalan Archives System. Despite our meetings and conversations in recent months, the necessary first step, the convening of the National Council on Archives and Records Management of Catalonia, has not yet been taken. We strongly request that it be convened. It is a wide-ranging and plural forum for debate that enables consensus-based decisions to be taken on initiatives that affect the country. We believe that it is the appropriate forum for reviewing, revitalising and relaunching the Catalan Archives System. We made the same request in February 2016. We asked the Minister Santi Vila in Parliament on 23 February, when he responded extremely positively. The first Standing Committee was formed in May, but there is still no scheduled date or time for it to meet. We are in July, with holidays approaching. We are now looking at the month of October at the earliest. The last National Council on Archives and Records Management was held on 11 June 2015. That was over a year ago. This announcement can be delayed no longer.

We mention the National Council on Archives and Records Management of 11 June 2015 here because it was important. The meeting approved the document [*Línies prioritàries del departament de Cultura en matèria d’arxius i gestió documental*](http://cultura.gencat.cat/web/.content/dgpc/arxius_i_gestio_documental/000_home/banners/Lineas_prioritaries/Linies-estrategiques-SAC.pdf) [Priorities of the Ministry of Culture in archives and records management]. That document was a broad and positive roadmap that required regular reviewing, and it also established a space for comparing ideas that we had found almost impossible to achieve in the latter years of the previous legislature. Unfortunately, since then we have also failed to make any progress on this roadmap in practical terms. It could be argued that this lack of progress is due to the election campaign and the political uncertainty to which Parliament and the Government of Catalonia were subject during the final months of 2015. However, there has been ample time since January 2016 to implement it and monitor it as planned. In this respect, we agreed to reduce the frequency of the meetings for reviewing of the document from monthly to every three months. This suited the pace of the Standing Committee of the National Council better, and left more room for manoeuvre for the content to be implemented more easily.

In February 2016, the AAC presented a document which aimed to highlight the need to consider the structure of the Catalan Archives System. This document should have accompanied the 'Priorities' document. It was entitled [*Reiniciar el Sistema d’Arxius i Gestió Documental de Catalunya*](http://www.arxivers.com/images/documents/Reiniciar_SAC_vf.pdf) [Restarting the Catalan Archives and Records Management System]. Indeed, it provided grounds for reflection and analysis at the meeting with the Director-General on 29 February. Some of the points had already been raised at the meeting with the Minister Vila on 23 February, and at times encroached on the meeting of the Standing Committee of the National Council, which took place on 23 May. A dose of realism was put on the table. There is a lack of resources, and financial difficulties. However, the meeting which could have begun a thorough review of the Subdirectorate-General for Archives (SAC) has not yet been convened. We insist once again: it is necessary to convene the National Council on Archives and Records Management.

The AAC met the Minister Santi Vila on 2 June. At that meeting, and among other points already explained in the editorial of last June's Bulletin, we mentioned the possibility that the AAC would be entrusted with reviewing the Catalan Archives System. Obviously, we believed that it was a good proposal, on the understanding that we could bring together all the profession's sensitivities and opinions, and that the possibility of a 'White Paper on Archives and Records Management in Catalonia' has often been discussed. However, we would also ask for such a proposal to come from an agreement of the National Council on Archives and Records Management, so that it is on behalf of the nation. Bearing in mind that the National Council is a plural and diverse body, the request would have the utmost consensus necessary. Obviously, the strategy to be followed, the kind of reflection to be undertaken, and the necessary funding would arise from this agreement. The AAC was willing, and asked to convene the National Council meeting as soon as possible. But it has still not been called.

During this period of delay, we have come to think that it is in fact a strategy to play for time or to wait until circumstances are more favourable. We are hopeful that the meeting will be convened before October, after the holidays and when everyone has returned to work. There is a further factor to bear in mind. The need for a white paper or a strategic plan for archives and records management in Catalonia is not a new request. It was made for the first time during the National Council meeting on 1 October 2013. That was three years ago. And the only document that has been agreed upon since then, 'Priorities', is not being implemented with any degree of conviction. That is what we mean when we talk about delay.

Some important decisions should have been taken during this period. Fortunately, one of them has been implemented. That is the consolidation of the management of the National Archive of Catalonia (ANC), which we requested in point 6 of our 'Restarting' document. In fact, the point does not mention the management itself, but instead talks about 'rethinking the role and functions of the National Archive of Catalonia'. The AAC has argued for some time that the ANC should play a greater role in the Catalan Archives System, and be the main driving force if necessary. Have a higher profile and a greater presence. Receive more resources and a larger budget, bringing it into line with the major facilities in Catalonia. What makes the National Library of Catalonia so different that it has a budget of over 6 million euros, while the National Archive has a significantly lower budget? Why do many of the major facilities have greater autonomy than the National Archive when it comes to making their decisions?

A good time to show that some change in the role of the ANC was possible was the endorsement of the leadership of the National Archive of Catalonia, which as mentioned above, took place this July. We could discuss this announcement at length. Why was there a free election process without giving the candidates the opportunity to present a project to justify the task, as usually occurs in calls based on merits for the management of regional archives, for example? Why are there no clear criteria defining the system of evaluation that will be used to choose the candidate, or any information on how their merits will be evaluated? Why do the candidates only need to demonstrate general knowledge of archival science, records management and history, without defining the specific academic background that would be the most appropriate? Why is knowledge of information and documentation an advantage when being considered for this position, when training in these areas within archival science is limited to one or two subjects throughout the entire degree course, and is patently insufficient? Why is it only possible for officials of the Government of Catalonia to apply, and why has there not been an open call, as was the case for the other major facilities in Catalonia, as had been proposed by the previous Ministry? There are some aspects of the call which are unclear, and this suggests that the Ministry of Culture of the Government of Catalonia is still unclear as to the responsibility it will give it, and that the aim is for everything to continue more or less as it was, at least in terms of allocating a more appropriate budget and resources. We cannot therefore see any proposals for regenerating the SAC in this area.

The Ministry of Culture has still not joined the Transparent Governments Network of Catalonia, as requested in point 5 of our 'Restarting' document. Or at least it has not done so effectively, i.e. by participating in the promotional projects and working groups. That was also agreed upon in June 2015. It has been suggested at various times that the Government of Catalonia is already represented in this Network by the Ministry of Transparency and Foreign and Institutional Relations and Affairs. That is true. But does it participate in the working groups which have been developing the strategies defined in 2015? Do archivists actively participate in these groups? Has the Ministry of Culture offered to participate, by sending its specialists? More delays—this time on an issue as sensitive as transparency and access to information. It is worth bearing in mind that, as a result of the Archives Act, the Ministry of Culture has a major role to play in this area. This is a very important point. However, in terms of transparency, it appears that normalising the role of archivists in decision-making is impossible, and there is no clear and resolute impetus from the management of the SAC. [The interview with Jordi Foz](http://www.naciodigital.cat/noticia/112775/jordi/foz/hem/lluitar/amb/contundencia/batalla/corrupcio), Secretary for Transparency and Open Government of the Government of Catalonia, on 24 July, is surprising in this respect. The journalist Karma Peiró asked him about the role of archivists in the field of transparency. His answer is very interesting: 'They play a key role because they ensure that documents, records series, the issue of traceability, the location of data, etc. are managed properly. They have the training and expertise. The role of archivists and records management in automating and ensuring transparency is crucial. **We must find the mechanism for them to be involved in all the most important policies.**' We have added the bold type. What mechanism needs to be constructed so that we 'are involved' in all the important policies? We need a response from the Ministry of Culture, but perhaps also one from the Ministry of Transparency and Foreign and Institutional Relations and Affairs.

The Government of Catalonia's Inter-ministerial Committee for Transparency and Open Government met on 22 July. Was the Director-General for Archives, Libraries, Museums and Heritage present? No. We will be told not to worry, and that records management will be defended by the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Culture, and that lower-ranking officials are unnecessary. However, the director-generals of Inter-ministerial Coordination; Citizen Services; Public Procurement; Transparency, Open Data and Democratic Quality; and Law and Legal Entities will be present. None of them are legally competent in the field of records management. The Government of Catalonia must decide on the 'mechanism' as a matter of urgency. Because while everyone has yet to reach an agreement, records management remains in limbo. This is no trivial matter—many professionals work in this area every day. It is no trivial matter.

The fact is that we are probably witnessing a structural problem in the model. Law 10/2001 undoubtedly marked significant progress. But 15 years later, we often find the standard interpretation of the law remains the same as it was in 1985—with a tone that is markedly more historicist and focused solely on heritage. The robust, innovative and modernising concepts of the 2001 law have in many ways been neglected. Their implementation has been delayed. A cultural change and a change at the Ministry of Culture is essential. This feeling of permanent delay, of not wanting to address a holistic reflection on the Catalan Archives System, is unsustainable.

In September, it will once again be necessary to insist that the necessary steps are taken and that improvements start. The use of delay as a strategy is not to our taste. The National Council cannot wait any longer.

The Board of the AAC wishes you all very happy holidays and a good rest. More will follow in September.