

Tonight, we see another turn of the year. We look ahead and we look back.

We look ahead with confidence and expectation, and we look back – did the year turn out the way we had hoped?

No! – The year 2020 brought us what nobody had imagined.

In February, the coronavirus hit Europe, and in early March large sections of Danish society had to go into lockdown. The pandemic has changed all of society: it has changed our everyday lives, we have had to do a great many things differently: avoid contact, keep a distance, stay at home, work in other ways than we are used to.

We faced a disease which nobody knew and which we had no medicines against. It was alarming and it proved necessary to carry through wide-ranging restrictions on our daily lives. Crowded streets became deserted. Many, not least elderly people, had to do without their close contact with family and friends.

It was with great concern that we watched the numbers of people who were infected and hospitalised, and the numbers of deaths, which soon showed up. It was serious. We understood that.

It took its toll on everybody, but forced by the serious circumstances, new ideas emerged on how we could live with the crisis and get through it. People met on the net, they worked from home, they went for a stroll in nature where it was possible, and perhaps they experienced spring more keenly than ever before.

When summer approached, the pressure eased. We still could not go abroad, but then we stayed at home. We took walks through the green beech forest, we went to the beach – the fine Danish beach – we rediscovered or experienced, perhaps for the first time, how many wonderful and diverse places there are in Denmark – sometimes “just round the corner”.

I think that many have had an eye-opening experience regarding our lovely nature and the calm it can give us in situations when we are under pressure. The climate has benefited during the crisis – this is

worth paying attention to, and it is important that we continue to take good care of nature.

In autumn, the coronavirus returned – more swiftly than expected and with renewed strength. New restrictions were necessary, but fortunately not so far-reaching as we have seen in other places in Europe where curfews have been imposed. Nevertheless, companies have been forced into bankruptcy and many have lost their jobs. Through no fault of their own, many have seen their life's work fall to the ground. This has affected me very much.

The period we have been through has given us all food for thought. What is it that really matters to us, as a society, as human beings? What lessons have we learned? And what can we take with us? When we have lost something or have had to do without something, we learn to appreciate what we have. We have experienced how much our contact with other people means, how important the close ties are to all of us, and how essential trust is – in each other – and in the society we are all part of.

The crisis has led to changes, both at personal and societal levels. Let us assure each other that, on the other side of the crisis, we will remember what we have been through. Let us take the good lessons learned with us and let us try to organise our lives in accordance with them.

We hope that things will soon move in the right direction, but we have not reached that point yet, and ahead of us lie a few more winter months. We must continue to live with restrictions, and it has not been much fun, especially during Christmas time. However, let us not lose heart, let us continue to practice caution and consideration when socialising with others. It is a source of joy and encouragement that the vaccine is now a reality and that vaccination has started.

Tonight, I bring a special thank you to the many who right from the beginning stood on the front line in the fight against corona. They are the many healthcare professionals at hospitals who from day one did everything to combat the disease, even before we had the full overview and knowledge of the danger facing us. They did not count

the hours or the days. They relieved the suffering caused by COVID-19, they researched exhaustively to understand the unknown disease. I also send a deeply felt thank you to the many who from the outset have worked hard in the effort to test us and curb the spread of the virus.

I also wish to express my thanks to the staff at our many nursing homes and drop-in-centres, who care for and brighten the lives of nursing home residents and drop-in-centre users who cannot keep up close contact with their next of kin.

Also, many children and young people have experienced a loneliness during the corona crisis they had hardly imagined. Not to be able to meet at school or in their spare time has proved a restriction which I believe did not become lighter as time went by, especially when summer came, and the infection rate slowed. No doubt it has been frustrating not to be able to gather in large groups and to see one music festival after another being cancelled. I understand that very well, but we must see this through.

Much has been cancelled during the corona crisis. It has not been possible to hold weddings, confirmations and special birthdays as planned. Nor could my own eightieth birthday be celebrated the way we had planned it. But I have never been celebrated so overwhelmingly and so warmly as this year. That birthday will remain the most memorable in my recollection. I wish to thank you for that with all my heart.

This year, we were to have celebrated the centenary of the Reunification of South Jutland with Denmark. Like others, I had looked forward to the days of commemoration in July, but the corona epidemic made it impossible. We will now look forward to the coming summer in the hope that we can meet then.

Tonight, my thoughts go to the Danes in South Schleswig. Also for people in South Schleswig, this has been a difficult year with a partially closed border. I hope that the new year will bring us back to the close contact we are used to, and which is of so great importance on both

sides of the border. I send my warmest New Year greetings to everybody.

The corona epidemic has also impacted on life in Greenland in the Faroe Islands. Thanks to a great effort and good understanding, both societies have been able to limit the outbreak of the disease. Nevertheless, the epidemic has been an expensive acquaintance. The tourist industry, which in recent years has come to mean more and more for both societies, has almost ground to a halt – leading to huge economic losses.

Next summer, it is my hope to be able to visit both the Faroe Islands and Greenland once again.

I look forward to my revisit to the Faroe Islands – the wonderful islands and the proud people in the North Atlantic. I look forward to witnessing the rapid development which Faroese society has experienced since my latest visit in 2016.

The year 2021 is the centenary of the first-ever visit by a King to Greenland when Christian X and Queen Alexandrine together with their two grown sons, my father Crown Prince Frederik and Prince Knud, sailed to Nuuk, then Godthåb. At the same time, it is the tercentenary of Hans Egede's arrival in Greenland, a landmark year for both Greenland and Denmark. I look forward to revisiting Greenland and to once again meeting Greenlanders both in Nuuk and in many other places.

I hope that 2021 will be a good year. I wish everybody in the Faroe Islands and Greenland a happy New Year.

Also this year, many Danes have been posted to various places throughout the world where there is unrest and conflict. The efforts they make are noticed internationally. They have also been affected by the corona crisis. I send my thanks and my best New Year wishes to them and their relatives at home.

Tonight, my thoughts also go to everybody in the defence and the emergency management services. They have experienced much restructuring and have had to take on new tasks, but they have

performed them responsibly and cheerfully. I wish to thank them for that, and I wish everybody a happy New Year.

I send my New Year wishes to the police with a thank you for their effort in the past year. They have faced many challenges in addition to the usual ones. It has not been easy, but we have much to thank them for – they contribute to ensuring that life in Denmark can be safe and secure.

Tonight, my thoughts go to the Danes abroad and to the many with Danish roots who feel a deep connection with Denmark. This year they must have felt more cut off from the old country than usual, but I want them to know that they are in our minds. I send my warmest New Year wishes wherever in the world they are.

I have just celebrated Christmas with Prince Joachim and Princess Marie and the children. It has been a joy being together again and seeing how well Prince Joachim has recovered from his disease last summer. The many warm greetings and wishes that he has received have moved him and us all deeply.

I have also seen Crown Prince Frederik and Crown Princess Mary together with their children during the days of Christmas. They have had a busy year, and their many tasks have had to be performed in untraditional ways. It is a constant joy to see who well they do.

Tonight, we bid farewell to a strange year. We will not forget 2020. This year has been a trial by fire, but we have shown that when it comes to the crunch we can stand together, and we manage to find moments of light, in spite of deprivation and uncertainty.

We are now entering 2021. I hope the new year will be a year that brings us many joys and where we continue to remember to be there for each other.

Together with all my family, I wish everybody a heartfelt happy New Year.

God bless you all

GOD BLESS DENMARK

Tonight is the last evening of the old year. We call it – New Year's Eve.

It is the new year we celebrate. While looking back, we express hope and expectation of a quite new year.

The coronavirus has left its mark on our lives the last two years, and they have been hard years to get through. They have presented many challenges, which we all have had to get used to in big and small matters.

In the course of 2021, we could ease the restrictions and we felt that everyday life was approaching normality; alas, once again the coronavirus has tightened its grip, and this time as an even more infectious variant. Once again, the authorities have had to make a number of decisions, which in many ways may feel unpleasant and which affect our daily lives. Many people must again make an extra effort. This applies in particular to those who help trace and limit infection, and to those who treat the sick and who again must put in an extra effort to cope with everything. Even though it is cumbersome having to live with restrictions again in our everyday lives, I do believe that there is widespread understanding of the need for it. We are facing a common challenge and we must all take responsibility for ensuring that our society gets safely through the pandemic.

There are some we owe a special thank you, some who we may not notice very much in day-to-day life: They are the scientific researchers who spend days and years digging deeply into a subject matter that most of us have little insight into. To a large extent it is these researchers who have contributed to curbing the infection and who within an exceptionally short time have developed vaccines against corona.

Knowledge and insight have helped us during the corona pandemic and have shown us that new knowledge brings progress. We are reminded that we must encounter the unknown with a feeling of curiosity, inquiring minds and innovation – rather than fear.

The same applies to the climate change question. When oil and coal pollute our globe, we must develop better sources of energy. Huge

offshore wind farms are being built, harnessing nature's enormous power for the benefit of us all. More is underway, for example "green fuels" to power planes and ships and ambitious proposals to capture CO₂ and store it underground. Science and technology can help us to meet the targets of climate neutrality and sustainability. We face huge challenges and obligations, not least in the interests of future generations. This is something we all need to respond to – in time!

When I was a child, we learnt that we were approximately four million inhabitants in Denmark. Now we are close to six million people.

As a country and as a people we must find a common direction, but not in order to walk in step. That has never come natural to us in this country. One person dashes ahead at full speed, another prefers to stroll through the landscape at a leisurely pace; but there are some for whom the road is not at all level.

This applies in particular to those who struggle with a disability.

With some it is easy to see it if, for instance, they sit in a wheelchair. With others the suffering is invisible. It may be a mental disease, chronic pain or something quite different.

What they all have in common is that they must live with a disability that makes life more difficult, and they do not always encounter understanding and respect – perhaps quite the opposite.

Some people with disabilities are even discriminated against, perhaps also insulted and laughed at. This may be caused by thoughtlessness and ignorance; no matter what, it is wrong, and we should be above that! We must take the time, not just to help but also to learn from each other. It ought not to be so hard to treat everybody with respect.

We must meet our fellow human beings with openness. The life stories of others can make us wiser. To see one's life reflected in that of others can provide food for thought and inspiration. We get to know ourselves in the encounter with others.

When we are young, we strive for recognition; it is so important to get attention, to be seen – preferably to be unique – like the others!

But to be a human being is to a large extent a matter of acknowledging who we are, of getting to know ourselves. There is development in that – enough for an entire lifetime!

Now, in dark winter, we can look back at a summer which I believe will be remembered for a long time. The men's national football team offered experiences that brought together all of Denmark. There were red and white colours and flags everywhere and enthusiastic crowds filled the streets. Also in Tokyo, achievements were made which we can all take pride in – both during the Olympic Games and the Paralympic Games.

The new year will also present sport that is quite exceptional. In summer, the world's greatest bicycle race, Tour de France, will include several stages in Denmark. The start will be in Copenhagen, and the tour will go from Roskilde across the Great Belt Bridge and end in Sønderborg. It is going to be a major event, and at the same time we will be able to show how wonderful Denmark is.

Last summer gave me many unforgettable experiences.

Together with the Crown Prince and Prince Christian it became possible in June after a year's delay to celebrate and commemorate the Reunification of South Jutland with Denmark in 1920. It was a great experience for all three of us and I wish to thank the people of South Jutland for a wonderful day. The day showed very clearly the very special spirit that characterises the border country. Tonight, I send my New Year greetings to the people of South Jutland, to the Danes in South Schleswig, and to the German minority in Denmark.

It was a great joy for me to visit the Faroe Islands last summer. A revisit which I had looked very much forward to.

It is always a pleasure to visit the beautiful islands, to be met with heartfelt hospitality and experience the commitment and drive of the Faroese. Faroese society is going through an impressive development process. I shall remember my visit with much gratitude.

I send my New Year wishes to everybody in the Faroe Islands with a warm: Thank you for last summer!

I had looked forward with great expectation to last summer's visit to Greenland; but also there, corona got in the way. The large-scale visit could not be carried out until autumn, and much reduced. On the other hand, the few days in October proved a wonderful experience for which I would like to express my heartfelt thanks. Everywhere I was met with feelings of warmth and goodwill that moved me deeply. I wish to thank you for the memorable days, and I send my warmest New Year wishes to everybody in Greenland.

The people Denmark posts abroad perform big and important tasks every day throughout the world.

In the past year, especially the situation in Afghanistan has loomed large. We have all seen the shocking images from Kabul Airport of desperate people fleeing the country.

In the hectic days, our people posted there together with Danish authorities succeeded in airlifting several hundred evacuees under exceedingly difficult conditions. It was an impressive achievement.

Tonight, my warmest New Year greetings go to the people that Denmark has posted abroad.

This applies to all those who right now are far from home – at sea and on land – and to the same extent to the thousands of Danes who over the years have been posted to Afghanistan and to other flashpoints where Denmark has assumed international tasks. We must remember them and their relatives. We owe them a warm “thank you” for their contribution for Denmark.

Denmark and Danes are present all over the world. I am thinking of the many who have left the country for short or lengthy periods of time, or those whose background and roots are Danish. To them I wish to express my thanks tonight for staying faithful to their old country and I wish them a heartfelt happy New Year.

I send my thanks to the defence, the emergency management services and the police for their effort in the past year and for their vigilance also tonight. I wish all of them a happy New Year.

In the course of the past year, my family and I have met great attention and kindness everywhere. It moves us all, and it makes us take pleasure in our tasks and our everyday lives. It was a pleasure that the Crown Prince accompanied me during the State Visit to Germany. His contribution is of great significance, not least for the business community – and he does it well!

The Crown Princess has also many tasks, and in the new year we shall celebrate her 50th birthday. I look very much forward to that.

Prince Joachim and Princess Marie have now settled well in Paris. They are in the service of Denmark there, and it makes me proud to see how committed they both are to promoting Denmark's interests.

Very soon in the new year we can celebrate the 50th anniversary of my accession to the throne. It will not take place the way we had imagined it. The coronavirus has been too tough an adversary. But it will not be allowed to have the final say – the celebration will come when the time is ripe – later in the year.

It is difficult for me to understand where all the years went. I find that they have passed so quickly.

Much has changed in that period of time; but not my love for my nearest and dearest and not my love for my country.

May we all experience a happy New Year!

GOD BLESS DENMARK