

French

European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages

EBLUL

Statements of EBLUL at the first Forum on Minority Issues

Genève, Palais des Nations, 15 et 16 décembre 2008

First statement on behalf of EBLUL

Madam President of the Forum,

Distinguished Independent Expert at the United Nations,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting EBLUL, an NGO that was established after the European Parliament's resolution ARFE was passed in 1982. We work to promote cultural and linguistic diversity in Europe, and for the rights of persons belonging to linguistic minorities. In Europe, such rights are guaranteed by two conventions in particular: the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

Yet we should highlight the fact that Greece and France are the only two countries in the European Union that have not ratified either of these two conventions. France – of which I am a national – hasn't ratified article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights either, nor article 30 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Both articles recognise the rights of persons belonging to minorities. France in particular still relies on assimilationist approaches and policies towards peoples who are different, and officially refuses to recognise the rights of persons belonging to minorities.

We would therefore like to express our sincere appreciation to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights for its action and its recommendations to France last May. They were invoked by a senator from Brittany during debates in the French Parliament and we believe that they have strongly contributed to changing the minds of a number of people and to the adoption of the symbolic reference to regional languages as a French heritage in the French Constitution in July 2008 despite the government's initial opposition. Indeed, the government emphasized that such recognition would not confer any rights.

That is why we continue to find the Committee's draft recommendations very relevant.

We would therefore like to draw the attention of the working group on the wording of article 21 of the draft concerning the non-segregation of minority pupils in special schools or classes. Some might interpret this as opposing schools or classes using a regional or minority language as a working language (when these are not compulsory for all). This would be in violation of articles 47 and 51 but also of article 5c of the Convention against Discrimination in Education, concerning the the right of national minorities to maintain their own schools where they use their own language.

This issue seems crucial in particular for all those who refuse forced assimilation and set up networks of schools and classes to reclaim their languages.

Thank you for your attention.