

## Second Statement

We wish to highlight the importance of the last parts of the draft recommendations on the content of education and in particular human rights education for all, minorities and majorities, and education of the entire population on other cultures and on preserving cultural diversity.

A few days ago we celebrated the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 1 of the Declaration states that „**All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.**” Yet in a country like France, equality means uniformity and the notion of equal dignity is often forgotten. After all, dignity refers directly to the respect for the cultural identity of persons and groups to which they belong, since the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity affirms that „**the defence of cultural diversity is an ethical imperative, inseparable from respect for human dignity**”. EBLULFrance mentioned in its report to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 2007 the unfortunate example of an official school textbook for geography edited in 2003 and distributed in second year classes of secondary education in France, where populations at the periphery of the state, such as Alsatians, Basques, Bretons, Catalans, Corsicans, Savoyards, are incredibly portrayed on a map of France and in texts as being at „**risk of identitarian closure**”. This is far removed from reality, for if such risk of an identitarian closure does exist, it is rather to be found among monolingual French speaker. In such stigmatised regions, autochthonous language speakers are at least bilingual, often trilingual or even quadrilingual when they are able to attend the all too few schools in regional languages. On the contrary, their multilingual and pluricultural education prepares them to embrace cultural diversity beyond state borders, improves their school results and contributes to their integration in today’s world.

Thus, a tremendous amount of work should be done to develop human rights education and the understanding of the variety of languages, cultures and history, in particular the regional and transnational ones which are often ignored in official curricula. The spirit of tolerance and intercultural exchanges should equally be promoted.

The very notion of minority has also been questioned several times during these debates. A population may well be a numerical minority a given state, its members may still resent being referred to as a "minority" , given the possible derogatory connotations. As has already been said, we might talk of „diverse components” of society on equal terms. We might also talk of dominated people or population, for minorities may be a majority in numerical terms, while a dominant minority group may hold most power. In France, 90% of those who graduated from ENA (National School of Administration) and control the state apparatus were born in Paris. And as we saw, French Academy members

unanimously protested against the reference to regional languages in the Constitution while 68% of the French population was in favour, according to the last CSA poll in June 2008.

Thank you for listening.

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