

Discurs President al Fòrum Minories nacionals, ètniques i lingüístiques

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1. Catalonia is a modern, advanced and prosperous nation

a. A pro-European nation open to the world that has the will to project itself into the future - fully, with freedom - and to contribute to address global challenges, as the rest of nations do.

b. We are a nation of choice, of free affiliation, where our culture and our language, the Catalan language, play a central role in ensuring and promoting social cohesion.

2. More than eight centuries ago, we Catalans turned our language into a communication tool suitable for all purposes and we began to use it in all spheres of life.

a. Today, the Catalan language have ten million speakers distributed in four different states.

b. We are ten million speakers. This is why we do not define Catalan as a minority language but as a minoritized language. Except for Andorra - a microstate where Catalan enjoys full officialdom - neither Italy nor France nor Spain, has offered the Catalan language the recognition and protection that any language in the world deserves.

c. Catalan is a minoritized language and as such, the tendency towards standardization in the contemporary world accentuates our vulnerability. Due to this, we are concerned about a significant decline in the social use of our language after the last few decades of progress.

3. In this regard, I would like to talk about our own experience and about how we are taking advantage of the recovery of our institutions - with limited sovereignty - to stop the replacement of the Catalan language by Castilian [the Spanish language].

a. A situation that has been occurring since the beginning of the 18th century, which also affects the Valencian Autonomous Community and the Balearic Islands, and which is part of a conscious process of political and economic recentralization and national and cultural assimilation that has put the Catalan language into a role of subordination to the Spanish language.

4. Since the recovery of democracy and institutions just over 40 years ago, Catalonia has developed its own language policies, of course within the Spanish constitutional framework. These policies have contributed to the progress toward the use of the language.

5. At the heart of these policies, three central ideas can be inspiring when working for human rights and fundamental freedoms for everyone around the world:

- a. Firstly, the conviction that Catalonia has an open and plural society, and at the same time, it has and wants to continue having a cohesive society in which people from all over the world can be integrated.
- b. Secondly, in a globalized world it is necessary to preserve all languages as a way to protect both the equal rights of all people and the linguistic diversity of humanity. In this regard, it is important to keep in mind the principle of linguistic subsidiarity: "whenever the local language can be used and understood, there is no need to adopt a lingua franca".
- c. Thirdly, the challenges of multilingualism. The defense and consolidation of one's language are not incompatible with the recognition, learning, and use of other languages, because the management of multilingualism constitutes a challenge that must be properly managed to preserve both individual and collective rights.

6. All these ideas have a correspondence in terms of good practices in language policies, such as:

- a. The use of the Catalan language in toponymy, the institutions and the public media of Catalonia and its promotion in all possible areas.
- b. Multiple officialdoms: Catalonia has three official languages: Catalan, Castilian and Aranese. The population can communicate with the public administration in any of the three languages.
- c. Accompanying newcomers in the learning process offering them several language services.
- d. An educational system that promotes the use of the Catalan language and aims to multilingualism for all students.
- e. The application of all these principles to Occitan Aranese as the language of the Aran Valley.

7. These and other initiatives count on a clear consensus in our society. This consensus has to be maintained and renewed. This is particularly important in the current situation with a clear decline in the use of the Catalan language.

- a. This is why during the autumn of 2021, 85% of the Parliament of Catalonia asked the Catalan Government to promote a National Pact for the Catalan Language that involves the whole of society in the preservation of Catalan language.

8. The National Pact for the Catalan Language, which is still in the drafting phase, includes different types of social participation, such as the diagnosis of a group of specialists and the open participation of citizens.

a. Through this participatory process, more than 2,600 proposals have been collected. These proposals have been integrated into the initial draft of the National Language Pact.

b. This draft will be submitted to debate and will end up becoming the final text of the agreement.

9. The National Pact for the Language highlights some of the main challenges for the survival and progress of the Catalan language and it can be inspirational for the Universal Declaration that has brought us here today. Let me summarize some key ideas:

a) First: The legal minorization of languages can lead to a violation of the rights of speakers. For example, making the state language mandatory in stateless nations such as Catalonia, while their own language—in our case, the Catalan language—implies the fact of a systemic erosion of the status of the minority language that violates our national rights. Equality is needed in the legal frameworks between the nations that constitute a state in order to prevent systemic violation of linguistic rights.

b) Second: When speakers of minoritized languages cannot access public services (health, justice, etc.) using their language because the system is built to preserve the monolingualism of dominant groups, the rights of speakers of minoritized languages are not protected. Adequate protection of linguistic rights requires certain obligations on the side of, at least, public administrations. If the State and the dominant linguistic groups do not accept these obligations, the rights of the speakers of minoritized languages end up vanishing.

c) Third: The digitization process is leading to a weakening of the protection of minoritized languages through de-territorialization. Thus, for example, many administrative procedures that were previously carried out face-to-face in Catalonia are being substituted by telematic services in Spanish-speaking territories. And this kind of substitutions are not usually accompanied by multilingual telematic services.

On the contrary, the operators argue that they do not offer their services in Catalan because they work for a Spanish-speaking. The legal instruments for the defense of stateless nations must be rethought so that they also include the right to access to public services in their language. d) And finally, let me stress the risk of loss of audiovisual space and digital diglossia. The minoritized linguistic communities and the stateless nations like Catalonia notice that higher authorities that discriminate against them are the ones regulating the audiovisual space. If the audiovisual sector is today responsible for collective imaginaries, and collective imaginaries are central to the protection and survival of collective identities, the audiovisual must be plural and include all languages.

10. To sum up. The defense of the linguistic rights of minoritized languages like the Catalan language has made significant progress in many parts of the world, although unfortunately not everywhere. Instruments such as this Declaration have undoubtedly contributed to this progress. However, there is always room for improvement and instruments must be adapted to new times. It is appropriate to expand and develop instruments like these to make them truly efficient in a changing world that imposes new challenges every day. I am convinced that, altogether, we will achieve it.