

Speech by President Aragonès at the United Nations Forum on Minority Issues

Geneva, 1 December 2022

Good morning everyone. I am Pere Aragonès, president of the Government of Catalonia.

Catalonia is an advanced, prosperous and modern nation.

A European nation open to the world, where our culture and our language, the Catalan language, play a central role in ensuring and promoting social cohesion.

Our participation in this forum is as a nation without state, with strong concerns about the future of our language, Catalan, and how we can preserve linguistic diversity.

Today, the Catalan language has ten million speakers distributed in four states.

This is why we do not define Catalan as a minority language but as a minoritized language. Except for Andorra –a small independent state where Catalan enjoys full officialdom- neither Italy nor France nor Spain, has offered the Catalan language the full recognition and protection that any language in the world deserves.

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 Spanish language.

A situation, which also affects the Valencian Country and the Balearic Islands, and which is part of a conscious process of political and economic recentralization and national, cultural, and linguistic assimilation.

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

At the heart of these policies, three central ideas can be inspiring for the base of this Declaration:

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.

Secondly, in a globalized world we must preserve all languages in the sense of the subsidiarity principle: as a way to protect both equal rights for everyone (regardless of the mother tongue) and the linguistic diversity of humanity.

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.

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

- The use of the Catalan language in toponymy, the institutions, and the public media of Catalonia.
- Multiple officialdoms: Catalonia has three official languages: Catalan, Spanish and Aranese.
- Accompanying newcomers in the learning process offering them several language services.
- An educational system that promotes the use of the Catalan language and aims for multilingualism for all students.
- The application of all these principles to Occitan Aranese as the language of the Aran Valley.

These and other initiatives count on a clear consensus in our society. This consensus has to be maintained and renewed. 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 involving of society.

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:

- 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 facto* a systemic erosion of the status of the minority language.
- Second: Public administrations and private operators must ensure that speakers of minority languages can access public services using their own language.
- Third: The digitization process is leading to a weakening of the protection of minoritized languages through de-territorialization of some services. All these kinds of substitution of services are not usually accompanied by multilingual telematic services.
- 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.

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, working together, we will be able to achieve it.