

Barcelona, December 20th 2023

Parlement européen
Rue Wiertz, 60
B-1047 Bruxelles, Belgique

Dear Sir or Madam,

Catalan is our language. We, defenders of the Catalan language, of the linguistic rights of the Catalan minority and of the Catalan model of immersion, denounce the instrumentalization by the European Parliament's Committee on Petitions for purposes related to Spanish domestic politics. The mission that has taken place in Catalonia between December 18th and 20th is a textbook case of discrimination against the rights of the Catalan linguistic minority, protected by various international instruments, including the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

This partisan and political mission is part of petition no. 0858/2017¹ presented by Ana Losada on behalf of the Asamblea por una Escuela Bilingüe en Cataluña, resurrected by the Spanish People's Party MEP Dolors Montserrat in 2019. However, the petition concerns a subject, "Education", which is not a competence of the European Union as the European Commission and the Committee on Culture and Education² have recalled.

This political instrumentalization, from the beating heart of European democracy, is a serious impediment to the values protected by Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union, according to which the Union is founded on the values of respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities.

This mission also constitutes a frontal and deliberate attack on the principle of non-discrimination referred to in the European Parliament's resolution of November 13, 2018 on minimum standards for minorities in the European Union and, in particular, points 66 to 77 on linguistic rights and also the prohibition of all discrimination³.

Furthermore, while it is established that the right to education (Article 2 of Protocol No. 1) is a fundamental right, the Catalan immersion model, applied since 1983, is hailed the world over. And even if it can be perfected, the right to education is guaranteed in Catalonia because the Government of Catalonia guarantees their holders the right to receive instruction in Catalan, one of the national languages recognized in the Spanish Constitution.

It is because this right to instruction in one of the national languages is guaranteed in Catalonia that it must be protected against any attempt at instrumentalization on the part of a committee of the European Parliament, which has moreover distinguished itself by its partisan drift, often in defiance of the European Parliament's rules of procedure.

¹ Petition no. 0858/2017 https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2014_2019/plmrep/COMMITTEES/PETI/DV/2022/02-07/Item6-CULTopinonto0858-2017-EN.pdf

² Committee on Culture and Education https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2014_2019/plmrep/COMMITTEES/PETI/DV/2022/02-07/Item6-CULTopinonto0858-2017-EN.pdf

³ Normes minimales pour les minorités dans l'UE - Résolution du Parlement européen du 13 novembre 2018 sur les normes minimales pour les minorités dans l'Union européenne (2018/2036(INI)) https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2018-0447_FR.html

Catalan, a protected language, must be the object of every attention by Spanish authorities, including Spanish courts, as the UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues recalled in his March 2020⁴ report:

“In light of the commendations that Catalonia has received from UNESCO and other international commentators for its highly successful immersion model, the Special Rapporteur recommends that Spanish authorities, including at the level of autonomous communities, review any measure that might reduce the proportion of teaching that is carried out in the Catalan minority language in public schools.”

On October 13, 2023, the same rapporteur reiterated the need to protect the Catalan language and for judges to respect international human rights obligations⁵. Indeed, when Spanish judges protect a non-existent right (that of guaranteeing education in Spanish), not only are they undermining protected linguistic rights, but they are also ignoring international instruments ratified by Spain, as well as international case law on the subject.

Spanish nationalist forces, among them the Spanish People’s Party, heir to an organization founded by fascist Francoist ministers, have been attacking the Catalan language and identity for decades, using all sorts of political and legal means. The use of the Catalan language in primary schools and high schools has been one of their main targets since 2015, often resorting to hate speech against Catalans, using false accusations of discrimination related to the Catalan immersion system of education. In this context, the instrumentalization of EU institutions, such as the European Parliament’s Committee on Petitions as part of this systematic campaign, sets a dangerous precedent as it questions its impartiality, especially when used as a tool against the rights of a national minority such as the Catalan one.

In addition, in a plural, democratic Europe that is supposed to respect linguistic diversity and regional languages, this orchestrated attack against the rights of Catalans from the heart of Europe constitutes a serious and disproportionate attack on the principle of non-discrimination based on language, which we denounce today in this open letter.

For all these reasons, we call on you to express respect and consideration for an immersion model of education that, as international human rights bodies and experts have expressed, ensures proper knowledge of both the Catalan and Spanish languages by students in Catalonia.

Sincerely,

Assemblea Nacional Catalana – Catalan National Assembly (NGO registered in the EU Transparency Register with ID 602541324089-94)

Constituents per la Ruptura

Súmate

Associació Més Junts Sempre Anem Més Lluny

Federació d’Estalvis de Catalunya (FEC)

Acord d’Esquerres per la República Catalana

⁴ Visit to Spain - Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues, Advance Edited Version, published on March 9 2020
https://imatges.vilaweb.cat/nacional/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/A_HRC_43_47_Add.1_AdvanceEditedVersion.pdf

⁵ Communication to the Spanish government, UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues, 13 October 2023
<https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gld=28240>