

RESOLUTION 2023-01

Plataforma per la Llengua

The Delegates of the Member Organisations of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) adopted the following resolution at their Assembly of Delegates in Pécs • Fünfkirchen • Pečuh, Hungary on 9 September 2023:

Resolution on the recognition of Catalan speakers and the other autochthonous language communities in Spain as national minorities and their inclusion in the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM)

With over 10 million speakers, 9 million of which are in Spain, Catalan is the 13th most spoken language in the European Union. In the regions of Catalonia, the Balearic Islands, and Valencia, Catalan is a co-official language besides Spanish. But the Spanish Government portrays the citizens of Spain as belonging to a single nation and ethnicity, united by the Spanish language. The state authorities impose the use of Spanish in public and private life.

For example, state civil servants in the Catalan-speaking territories are required to be fluent in Spanish but not Catalan.

Although Spain has ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (Council of Europe, 1992), the Catalan speakers do not have equal rights and Spain breaches its commitments under the Charter, as recognized by the reports of the Committee of Experts on the implementation of the ECRML.

Spain has also ratified the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (CoE, 1998). However, in a letter to the President of the Advisory Committee, the Government of Spain reiterated that, in line with its constitutional provisions, “it has consistently interpreted the Framework Convention in the sense that no national minority exists in its territory”. According to the opinion of the Spanish government expressed in the aforementioned letter, the Framework Convention applies to the Spanish citizens of the “comunidad gitana” (Roma, Gypsies, Caló), although these citizens “do not constitute a national minority”.

For this reason, Spain did not include the Catalan minority as a protected group. Even though the main law of Catalonia and the Balearic Islands regions (the Estatut) recognises Catalan as a national group and Italy does recognise the Catalans in its ratification of the FCNM.

At the same time, the Spanish government denies that the concept of “minority” can even be applied to Catalans or Catalan speakers and persists in defending that the notion of linguistic minority is irrelevant when it comes to protecting rights. In this regard, it can be assessed that the national and linguistic Catalan minority is also denied the rights afforded by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (OHCHR, 1976),

the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights (PEN Club, 1996), the Oslo Recommendations (OSCE, 1998) and the above-mentioned European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992).

Despite the negation of the existence of any minority by the Spanish authorities, the United Nations special rapporteur on minority issues visited Spain in January 2019 to analyse the situation and, in accordance with his definition of minority, consistent with UN standards (see the annual report A/74/160), in March 2020, concluded that Catalan speakers are indeed a minority in the Spanish State and that the development in Spain has generally led to increasing obstacles to the use of minority or regional languages like Catalan.

The European Union is also of little help in protecting linguistic diversity and only safeguards the limited rights agreed between Spain and some European institutions that allow Spanish citizens to communicate in Catalan. Catalan speakers in France and Italy, however, are exempt. Furthermore, the European Commission has refused to initiate legislative reforms to achieve the aims of the Minority SafePack Initiative, despite a favorable resolution of the European Parliament. Due to the lack of state and European recognition, the Catalan-speaking regions are losing speakers, and for new inhabitants, it becomes easier to learn Spanish and make it their everyday language.

The FUEN Assembly of Delegates calls upon Spanish authorities to:

1. Include the Catalan-speaking minority as a protected group in the signature of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.
2. Recognise its linguistic and national minorities as such.
3. Elaborate a statistical monitoring tool for language vitality in Spain.
4. Make an exhaustive census of the existing national and linguistic minorities in Spain through reliable statistical data and specific questions about linguistic uses and preferences declared feelings of minority belonging or self-identification (linguistic, religious or ethnic)” and publish the statistical results of the responses obtained.

The FUEN Assembly of Delegates calls upon the European Commission to:

5. reconsider its position on the Minority SafePack Initiative and initiate the regulatory changes that more than one million Europeans and a majority of the European Parliament have supported.