



Press Release 20 March 2014

The Catalan Ombudsman addresses the Parliament and the Catalan Government

The Ombudsman urges to preserve and strengthen the current language model detaching it from the results of the sovereigntist process

- **The Ombudsman highlights that Catalonia is a good example of linguistic coexistence and explains that violations of language rights are punctual**
- **The Council of Europe praises the language rights situation in Catalonia and shows that there is a decline in the use of official languages in state-run public services**
- **The different governments of Spain violate constitutional and international mandates on language and do not develop the policies established to achieve greater equality**
- **In Canada and Finland regional languages are official in the whole State and have the same legal status**
- **On Friday, the IALC (International Association of Language Commissioners) will be constituted in Barcelona**

Proposal for the future of Catalonia

The Catalan ombudsman, Rafael Ribó, has presented the Catalan experience during the International Symposium on Language Rights and Social Cohesion in Multilingual Societies, held in Barcelona on the 19th and 20th of March and organized by the Ombudsman himself, along with the IALC (International Association of Language Commissioners). The Symposium, which is part of the acts of the Tricentenari Commemoration Events, has also had the collaboration of the Catalan Government and the Barcelona City Council.

Rafael Ribó, together with the president of the IALC and the Federal Language Commissioner of Canada, Graham Fraser, stressed that from his role to protect and ensure the rights of people, he considers Catalonia a good example of linguistic coexistence.

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In recent years, the Catalan Ombudsman has analyzed exceptional language rights violations, but has not detected the existence of a social conflict due to linguistic reasons.

Thus, the 62 actions undertaken by the Catalan Ombudsman related to language matters in 2013 represented 0.2% of total actions (27.0773). Of these (31 complaints, 2 ex-officio actions and 29 queries), 39% were related to a possible violation of rights of Catalan speakers and 20% of Spanish speakers. In 2012, 75 actions were processed. As in previous years, the little use of the Catalan language in the field of justice is one of the recurring causes for complaint. Complaints about the non-availability of documents in Spanish on the local administration are also common.

The situation of language rights in Catalonia today, according to the Ombudsman, is a treasure that must be preserved and promoted. This opinion is shared by the international organizations and observers, who consider Catalonia to be a model of linguistic coexistence.

Therefore, the Ombudsman stated that, whatever the outcome of the Catalan process and above the legitimate differences between parties, the current language model should be maintained and improved, as this would be the best guarantee of language rights for everyone. The Ombudsman will inform of such consideration the Parliament and the President of the Catalan Government.

Breaches of the Spanish Government

Despite such good linguistic coexistence, confirmed by experts who have taken part in the presentations, the Catalan Ombudsman has reported that the Spanish Government violates national and international mandates on language.

Thus, although Article 3.2 of the Spanish Constitution recognizes that other Spanish languages different from Castilian shall also be official, this recognition is only established within the territory of the autonomous communities that have qualified their official languages as such in their constitutions. This limitation of the recognition of the other languages spoken in Spain lessens their effectiveness and demonstrates that the Spanish Constitution has established a hierarchy between Castilian and the other languages, as the duty to know the language is only established for Castilian.

This view is shared by the Council of Europe, represented at the Symposium by the Vice President of the Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, Sigve Gramstad. Thus, in recent reports published by the Committee of Experts on the application of the Charter in Spain, published in 2008 and 2011, it is stated that the presence of all regional languages in state-run public services shall be guaranteed, and highlights the



fact that the use of official languages other than Spanish in public services is declining.

International examples of protection of languages

Different speakers explained that in countries like Canada or Finland regional languages are official in the whole state, which prevents a different treatment between citizens of the same country who speak different languages, as all languages have the same legal status.

In addition to the aforementioned speakers, the Symposium, which was attended by more than 130 people, also counted on the participation of the ombudsmen of the Basque Country, Iñigo Lamarca; Navarre, Javier Enériz, and Galicia, José Julio Fernandez. Other speakers have been the former Minister of Education and Foreign Affairs of Finland, Pär Stenbäck; the Ombudsman of Flanders, Bart Weekers; Professor of Administrative Law, Antoni Milian, and the President of the Philological Section of the Institute for Catalan Studies, Isidor Marí.

The event will conclude on the 21st of March with the official launch of the International Association of Language Commissioners (IALC), an organization founded in Dublin in April 2013 with the aim of unifying efforts in the defense of language rights. Some of the institutions that are currently part of the IALC are from Canada, Ireland, Belgium, Kosovo, Finland, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Catalonia.