



Open letter to CNEWS

Barcelona, October 17, 2017

Dear Messrs. Desarbres, Mathias and Elkabbach,

We are writing with regard to an interview broadcast last October 12 on your television, in which the Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Alfonso Dastis, deliberately lied about the status of the recognition of the languages spoken in Catalonia. The Spanish Minister painted a picture according to which Catalan is the language that enjoys greatest respect and protection in Catalonia while Spanish speakers suffer discrimination. Moreover, he stated that there is also discrimination against Spanish in Catalan schools, when he told the interviewer, Mr. Elkabbach, that it is true that it is possible to study English, French or German, but not Spanish, in Catalonia.

Mr. Dastis' appearance comes at a time when the self-determination of Catalonia is a matter of international debate, and is intended to discredit Catalan aspirations by attributing bad faith in Catalan people and to their actions and to portray them as childish and almost criminal. The Minister's utterances prove that the Spanish government is not above using lies and slander as a form of propaganda since, as we shall proceed to explain, the situation he describes is not only unreal but also seeks to conceal a totally different reality: the attacks - past and present - on Catalan language by the Spanish institutions.

The situation of Catalan language

Catalan is a medium-level language in Europe, spoken by about 10 million people, of whom more than 6 million live in Catalonia. 80.4% of the population of Catalonia speak Catalan and 94.6% understand it. It is the lingua franca of the local and Catalan administrations and is the language used by the most popular radio stations and by many television channels and digital and paper-format newspapers. The language is also widely used in business. At this moment in time, the majority of the main companies that are involved in the new technologies can operate fully in Catalan; some examples are Google, Apple, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Wikipedia and Whatsapp, as well as the websites of multinational concern such as IKEA, Nestlé, Danone or Nike. Moreover, 83% of the mobile telephones sold in Catalonia have operating systems in Catalan.

However, this vitality is not matched by the legal recognition afforded to the language by the Spanish state. In Europe, or in the Western democracies, there is no other linguistic community of a similar size and vitality comparable to Catalan with so little legal recognition or acknowledgement, not even in communities where they are the main state language – such as Danish, Norwegian or Slovakian - or in cases where the languages belong to states that do recognise their plurality, such as Belgium, Switzerland, Finland or Canada. You can read further data about the situation of Catalan language in the “[The Catalan language](#)” guide.

We would like to furnish you with some details to give you an idea of the extent of this lack of recognition:

- Catalan is not an official language of the Spanish State and is vetoed as an official European language (11 of the official languages have fewer speakers than Catalan does). There is no other European country with its own language with similar characteristics that is not an official state language.
- The [reports](#) published by the Council of Europe on the fulfilment of the European Charter of Regional or Minority Languages point to dozens of non-fulfilments, and demonstrate that the Spanish State simply ignores most of the recommendations issued to it.
- Public officials or civil servants working in Catalonia must know Spanish, but not Catalan. The Spanish courts prevented the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia from rectifying the situation and the Spanish Courts vote against it systematically.
- Catalan speakers are subject to continuous discrimination by the Spanish Administration, in Catalonia and in other Catalan-Speaking territories in Spain, simply for speaking their own language. [Report](#) (in English).
- Many bureaucratic formalities for citizens must be conducted via the Internet, although only 1.6% of State public websites are fully available in Catalan. [Report](#) (in English).
- The right to conduct legal proceedings in Catalan is not observed. [Report](#) (in Catalan).
- Every year, the Spanish Government and Parliament approve numerous regulations that impose the use of Spanish in Catalonia. For example, the obligation to use Spanish as the only language of [communication with the Spanish Patents and Trademarks Office](#), as a [language requirement for private security guards](#) or as the only language in which PhD theses about gender

violence can be submitted if they wish to [be eligible for the awards organised by the Spanish government](#). Our [latest report](#) (in Catalan) is available here.

- The right to express oneself in Spanish in the Catalan administration is guaranteed not only by the Spanish Constitution, but also by the Catalan linguistic legislation ([Act 1/1998, on language policy](#), English version). On the other hand, the right to use Catalan in the Spanish administration bodies seating in Catalonia is limited. On the other hand, State bodies that render services in Catalonia but do not have their physical headquarters there do not guarantee service to citizens in Catalan.

The linguistic model of Catalan schools

We Catalans assert our right to their own language, but we are also receptive to the world, and we demonstrate this with facts and deeds. Moreover, our objective is not only for our young people to be bilingual, but also to be able to express themselves properly in as many languages as possible. Over all these years, Catalan pupils have accomplished the language objectives of knowing both of our country's official languages, namely Catalan and Spanish. In the second case, i.e. Spanish, they even improve upon the state average and are above the grades obtained in single-language communities, according to data by the State Ministry of Education.

Students from Catalonia get higher grades in the university access Spanish examination than in the equivalent examination in Catalan in the Principality (Catalonia). An examination of the average grades of University access tests for the Catalan Language and Literature subjects and Spanish Language shows that Catalan students get better grades for Spanish language than for Catalan, although both examinations are very similar.

We reject the attacks that have been made upon Catalan schools recently. These attacks are clearly targeting one of the core elements of Catalan schools, a model that has worked successfully over the last thirty years and thanks to which our society enjoys a good level of education and social cohesion. Language immersion must continue to be one of the main assets in order to achieve a cohesive society, in which there is no separation between communities or discrimination of any kind.

Education in Catalonia is underpinned by a consolidated model based on the non-separation of young children and young people for reasons of language and allows pupils to complete their compulsory education with a comprehensive knowledge of both languages, thus promoting social cohesion and equal opportunities.

Language immersion and the consideration of Catalan as a lingua franca or vehicular language has afforded this model strength and solidity, as has been recognised by different international institutions. It is an acknowledged and efficient pedagogical model in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. This language model has made a decisive contribution to offsetting the serious disequilibrium between Catalan, Catalonia's own language, and Spanish, [as you will be able to see in the report *La immersió lingüística a Catalunya: un model eficaç i exitós* \[Language immersion in Catalonia: an effective and successful model\]](#).

The current educational model is the outcome of the efforts made by Catalan society in general, and more particularly by the teaching community which, driven by a total consensus regarding the linguistic model and the involvement of parents and teachers, has strived on a daily basis to achieve democratic and quality Catalan schools.

Following the arrival of a major number of new families in the first decade of the 21st Century, this educational model helped to maintain the country's social cohesion and has proven its effectiveness in welcoming the children and young people arriving in the latest waves of immigrants and in helping them to find roots and settle. Moreover, it has configured a new multi-language scenario that is conducive to excellence in communicative skills.

Finally, and as a stakeholder in linguistic affairs, we would like to use our right of reply in your medium about this issue. We would also like to invite you to come to Catalonia and visit as many schools as you like in order to see all this for yourselves and to realise, objectively, that a Spanish Minister has misled you.

Please feel free to contact us, I remain yours sincerely,



Òscar Escuder i de la Torre
President of the Plataforma per la Llengua