

# Discrimination of the Catalan language by the Spanish administration (2013-15)

Contributions to the debate on linguistic discrimination Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs

The document you have in your hands is a small excerpt from recent cases of linguistic discrimination suffered by Spanish citizens speaking the Catalan language when dealing with Spanish public administrative bodies. The “Plataforma per la Llengua” is an NGO that works to promote the Catalan language in the regions where Catalan is spoken. Since 2007 we have gathered information on cases of discrimination suffered by Catalan language speakers. We are currently preparing a new report on cases of discrimination that we will present later this year. From the preliminary findings of the report we would like to highlight five cases. This report has already been sent to the MEP Marina Albiol Guzmán.

## 1 PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

**Spanish passport denied to a Catalan speaking citizen, of Chinese background, for not having enough knowledge of Spanish**

December 2014. Valencia. A Chinese citizen applied for a Spanish passport. He had been living for 11 years in Valencia, was married, and he used the Catalan language socially and at work. Catalan is an official language in Valencia, together with Spanish. The Spanish public administration refused to process the passport application because he did not speak Spanish, although this citizen is fully integrated within the society. It's more important for the Spanish policy, to keep the Spanish language above the other official languages in Spain. The Spanish language is the only one granted full rights, as specified by the Spanish Constitution.

## CHILD CUSTODY

**A Law Court of Tenerife (Canary Islands) withdrew custody of her daughter to a mother who had to move to Catalonia because it considered that the Catalan language, in Catalonia, may be a "problem" for the girl.**

March 2014. Guímar (Tenerife). A judge withdrew custody to a mother who moved to Catalonia because it believed that learning a second language would hinder the development of the child. In Catalonia the language of education is Catalan, but both official languages are taught (Catalan and Spanish). There was a similar ruling in June 2015 in Aragon, another Spanish autonomous community, which specifically mentioned that moving to Catalonia was inconvenient because it introduced changes in the habits of schooling, traditions and also because of the presence of a different language.

## POLICING

### Two Spanish Police officers were acquitted from having arrested and attacked the musician Miquel Gironès who had spoken to them in Catalan

May 2013 (arrest), November 2015 (Court ruling). Valencia. Valencian (the name use to refer to the Catalan language in the Valencia region) and Spanish are official languages in Valencia, but the civil servants working for the Spanish government in Valencia (such as police) are only required to be able to speak Spanish. This situation has been repeatedly denounced because it violates the linguistic rights of Catalan speakers. After the arrest and assault of the musician Miquel Gironès for talking to them in Catalan, police officers were charged by the prosecution with illegal detention, against the constitutional rights, threats, forgery of public documents and inflicting injuries. The Court acquitted the officers, alleging contradictions between the versions of the prosecution and the police and also because the facts could be neither proven nor denied. One of the officers showed his racism and attitude against linguistic diversity when during the trial declared that he didn't think it was appropriate for Miquel Gironès to speak in Catalan.

## JUSTICE

### 4. A judge in Figueres threatens a witness with suspending the proceedings if she speaks Catalan

March 2015. Mixed Court 2 of Figueres (Catalonia). A witness asked to make her court statement in Catalan since she felt more comfortable in this language and expressed herself better. The judge rudely told her in Spanish that she could not "because I don't understand you and it is me who must understand you, so if you speak Catalan I will suspend the proceedings". Catalan and Spanish are official languages in Catalonia. Accused people, witnesses, lawyers, prosecutors or judges have the right to speak both official languages (Catalan or Spanish) but not all the judges working for the Spanish Courts in Catalonia are able to speak or understand Catalan.

## HEALTH

### A GP bullies a mother and daughter and demands that they speak to him in Spanish at a health practice in the town of Torelló.

July 2015 Torelló (Catalonia). A mother and daughter visited their local GP. When they started talking to him in Catalan, he stopped them by saying "Here we speak in Spanish, because we are in Spain, aren't we?", "I said, is this Spain or are we in England?" and he eventually went on to say "It's ok I'll give you two choices, you could either speak in Spanish or speak in English. Which one would you prefer?". Of course, English is not an official language of Catalonia, which are Catalan and Spanish. There have been similar cases in the last year in Catalonia (Roses and Sant Joan Despí) and Valencia (L'Alcora and Sant Joan de Moró).