

TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT:

Brussels. European Parliament Headquarters, 1 July, 2014

Dear President,

Congratulations for your re-election as President of the European Parliament.

As you well know, in the last term several Catalan and Basque MEPs pushed forward several initiatives in order to make possible that our languages achieve official status inside of this democratic chamber.

Together we drew up an initiative focusing on the three languages which enjoy joint official status with Castilian inside the Spanish State in three of the nationalities that make up the Spanish state: Catalonia, Galicia and the Basque Country. Our languages are spoken by more than 12 million European citizens.

Moreover in the past legislature the European Parliament has again taken up a position in regard to the protection of minority languages. On September 11 last, with 645 votes in favour, 26 against and 29 abstentions, the European Parliament approved the Alfonsí report, which proposes measures for improving the protection of minority and endangered languages in Europe (A7-0239/2013). With this report, a large majority of Euro-MPs sought to depoliticise and mainstream the debate on the protection of minority languages in Europe and encourage all institutions, including Community institutions, to engage in an effort that affects the more than 40 million Europeans who use such languages daily.

With this own-initiative report the European Parliament urges the European Commission to draw up legislative measures and specific executive actions to complete the provisions in defence of minority and endangered languages contained in the Lisbon Treaty, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages of the Council of Europe. The report also alerts of the risks run by these languages in the face of the widespread cutbacks in spending on the promotion of diversity being made by Member States and European institutions.

The document takes as its starting point a compilation of all the declarations and documents produced by European institutions concerning minority and endangered languages, including first and foremost the European Charter on the matter. The intention is to go beyond this voluntary, merely illustrative framework and move towards binding measures throughout the European Union.

As signatories to this proposal, in this context we reiterate the arguments underlying our earlier request. We further argue that a gradual increase in the use of these languages by European institutions would be consistent with the majority approval obtained by the report, and would enable the European Parliament to take a position of leadership in the development of its provisions. It would also help to forge closer links between European institutions and citizens, which is precisely one of the problems faced by the

European Commission, the Council and the Parliament, and one of the reasons behind the high abstention rate in European elections.

What's more, taking into account that several translators of Spanish language inside this house also speak Euskera and Catalan, it would be cost-free to let Catalan and Euskera MEP speakers use their languages at least on plenary.

Thus, acknowledging the particular sensitivity that you have shown towards this issue and your repeated efforts to strengthen the bonds between the Parliament over which you preside and the citizens of Europe, we would like to make the following proposal focused on improving the use of minority languages at the European Parliament.

In the coming days we are going to open this initiative to several other MEPs sharing our views and coming from most political groups in this chamber. We'll also let know to the new Vice-Presidents the paramount importance of this matter.

We remain,
yours faithfully

Izaskun Bilbao Barandica
ALDE MEP (EAJ-PNV)

Francesc Gambús
EPP MEP (UDC)

Ramón Tremosa i Ballcels.
ALDE MEP (CDC)

PROPOSAL FOR IMPROVING THE USE OF REGIONAL OR MINORITY LANGUAGES AT THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

PURPOSE:

To request the progressive mainstreaming of the use of regional languages at the European Parliament, in accordance with the principles laid down in the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages and those that underlie the so-called "Alfonsí Report" on endangered languages (A7-0239/2013):

1. By completing the conditions currently applied at the European Parliament for processing communication with citizens in regional languages.
2. By resuming and enriching the proposals submitted to the European Parliament by the Kingdom of Spain on 21 September 2005.

OUTLINE:

Practices are proposed that will facilitate the gradual introduction of regional languages into the sessions and documentary versions of resolutions of the European Parliament, adapting their use to the provisions involving promotion and respect laid down in the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages and the principles outlined in the "Alfonsí Report". To that end, it is proposed that formulae financially neutral for the European Parliament be drawn up which can also facilitate connections in this field of respect for minority languages and cultures between that Parliament and institutions in regions with their own languages.

MOTIVES:

This proposal seeks to complete the development that has been underway at the European Parliament as regards the conclusions approved by the Council "on the official use of additional languages within the Council and possibly other institutions and bodies of the European Union". The most specific expression of this process to date is the proposal for an administrative resolution between the Kingdom of Spain and the European Parliament dated 21 September 2005.

The European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages, approved by the Council of Europe on 5 November 1992 and signed by 47 European states including all the Member States of the Union, establishes that protecting historical minority or regional languages in Europe, some of which are in danger of disappearing,

- contributes to the maintenance and development of the traditions and the cultural richness of the continent; and
- is an indefeasible right of the speakers of those languages in public and private life.

Article 7 of the Charter, among other issues, urges signatories to take into account:

- the need for resolute action to promote regional or minority languages in order to safeguard them;

- the facilitation and/or encouragement of the use of regional or minority languages, in speech and writing, in public and private life;
- the maintenance and development of links, in the fields covered by this Charter, between groups using a regional or minority language and other groups in the State employing a language used in identical or similar form, as well as the establishment of cultural relations with other groups in the State using different languages;

The signatories to the Charter also undertake to:

- eliminate any unjustified distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference relating to the use of a regional or minority language and intended to discourage or endanger its maintenance or development; and
- take into consideration the needs and wishes expressed by the groups which use such languages.

For its part the “Alfonsí Report”, approved by a large majority at the plenary session of the European Parliament on 11 September, 2013:

- considers it key to protect and support such languages because they are a further manifestation of diversity, which is one of the fundamental values of the European Union;
- highlights that “a language revitalisation policy is a long-term effort that must be based on a diverse, coordinated planning of activities in various fields, in particular education (with pre-school and primary school education as a real asset, together with parents’ training in the language itself), administration, media programmes (also with the possibility to set up and develop radio and television stations), the arts and in all areas of public life”, with the work of European institutions being one of the issues to which this paragraph refers; and
- calls for binding legislation at European level to protect such languages and put this issue back on the agenda of the European Parliament.

In view of the principles indicated above, to incorporate the European Parliament into the list of institutions that defend these principles and to establish constructive cooperation in this task between European, national and regional institutions:

- with the purpose of bringing European institutions and citizens closer together by adopting measures such as this would show respect for the minority languages used daily in Europe by more than 40 million citizens, who currently feel that one of their basic rights is being undermined;
- with the intention of firmly defending principles such as pluralism and diversity, which are part of the very foundations of the construction of Europe;

- with the desire to submit to the European Parliament proposal for a constructive, practical way of celebrating the European Day of Languages on 26 September this year;

the undersigned MEP proposes to the Bureau of the European Parliament that it study the possibility of implementing the following regulation concerning the use of regional languages at the European Parliament:

PROPOSED REGULATION:

In accordance with the principles indicated above, and based on the negotiations commenced with the Kingdom of Spain in 2005, is proposed that the European Parliament join the process observed by the Commission and the Council as regards the use of regional languages:

1. All the languages considered as official in the bodies of law of the Member States and, within them, of those regions which have their own languages should be considered as official languages of the European Parliament. To that end it is proposed that those states with regional languages provide interpreters as necessary so that those languages may be used during plenary sessions in the same conditions as the languages of the Member States.
1. All official norms (directives and regulations) and own initiative reports by the European Parliament should be published in all its official languages. To that end it is proposed that those states with regional languages provide translations of the relevant documents within no more than 15 days as from the time of their approval.
2. The website of the Parliament should include on its menus an option whereby the repository of resolutions translated into European regional languages can be accessed.