



**REPORT TO THE COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON THE
EUROPEAN CHARTER FOR REGIONAL OR MINORITY
LANGUAGES 2010-2013**

***SITUATION OF ASTURIAN AND GALICIAN-ASTURIAN
LANGUAGES IN THE AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITY OF THE
PRINCIPALITY OF ASTURIAS***

Preliminary

1. Linguistic unity of the asturian-leonese territory: previous complaint about a serious breach of the Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (from here on, the Charter).

The Committee of Experts on the application of the Charter in Spain [ECRLM (2012) 5], of 24 October of 2012, expressly recognises the linguistic unity formed by the Asturian (Principality of Asturias), the Leonese (Castile and Leon) and the Mirandese (Portugal) languages, in the following terms:

«7. As regards Part II of the Charter, Spain declared that the languages protected by the Statutes of Autonomy in the territories where they are traditionally spoken are also considered as regional or minority languages. The Committee of Experts interprets this declaration as presently covering the following languages: Galician in Castile and León and Extremadura, Aragonese and Catalan in Aragon, Asturian and Galician-Asturian in Asturias, and Leonese in Castile and León»

«63. According to the third periodical report (pages 52–53), Leonese forms a linguistic unity with Asturian in Asturias and Mirandese spoken in Portugal. While there are no official data on the number of speakers in the provinces León and Zamora, estimations lie between 25 000 and 50 000 speakers»

Based on the evidence of the undeniable linguistic unity of the Asturian and Leonese languages, the Committee of Experts verifies new legal regulation of the language in the autonomous community of Castile and Leon and demands its authorities to provide more information on the issue in the next periodical report. This is expressed in the report of the Committee the following way [ECRLM (2012) 5]:

«123. During the previous monitoring round (paragraph 97), the Committee of Experts had been informed about the adoption of a new Statute by the Autonomous Community of Castile and León, which included the Leonese language as a protected language. The Committee of Experts requested the authorities to provide more information on this in their next periodical report»

«Q. Leonese is acknowledged in the 2007 Statute of Autonomy of Castile and León. However, the regional authorities have to date not adopted any regulations for the protection and promotion of Leonese deriving from the Statute, nor have any significant practical measures been taken to protect the language»¹.

On 9th of May 2014 the “Fourth report on the compliance with the Council of Europe’s European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages in Spain, 2010 - 2013” was issued by the Kingdom of Spain. In it, there is a total absence of references to the Leonese language, a minority language which is not official, but is

¹ See Chapter 4. Findings and proposals for recommendations.

protected by the article 5.2 of the Autonomy Statute of Castile and Leon and by the Charter, at least in its Part II.

The silence about the situation of the Leonese language reveals the connivance between the Spanish State and the Junta of Castile and Leon, that, in this way, reduce, unilaterally and illegally, the protection of the language, which is a serious failure to comply with the Charter. In addition, when ignoring the information requirements by the Committee of Experts, the authorities pretend to hide from the Council of Europe the absolute noncompliance with the Charter in relation to the protection of the Leonese by the Autonomous Community of Castile and Leon, and, in the last instance, by the Spanish State itself, guarantor of the application of the Charter in Spain to the protected languages, such as Leonese.

2. Associations that sign the current report: formal complaint about the functioning of the the Committee of Experts

The article 16.2 of the Charter stipulates:

«Bodies or associations legally established in a Party may draw the attention of the committee of experts to matters relating to the undertakings entered into by that Party under Part III of this Charter. After consulting the Party concerned, the committee of experts may take account of this information in the preparation of the report specified in paragraph 3 below. These bodies or associations can furthermore submit statements concerning the policy pursued by a Party in accordance with Part II»

This is the aim of the present report developed by:

- 1) **«Fundación Caveda y Nava»**, with registered office at calle Carreño Miranda 7, 5ªA, 33013 Oviedo (Asturias), and registered in the Register of Educational and Cultural Foundations of General Interest of the Principality of Asturias with the number 33/FDC 0065. fcyn@fundacioncavedaynava.org
www.fundacioncavedaynava.org
- 2) **«SUATEA (Sindicatu Unitariu y Autónomu de Trabayadores de la Enseñanza d’Asturies)»**, with registered office at calle Telesforo Cuevas, 2, 1ª A dcha, 33005 Oviedo (Asturias). <http://suatea.org/>.

During the monitoring periods on the application of the Charter by the States, the Committee of Experts organises a visit “on site”, to meet the local authorities, the non-governmental organisations and any other organisation competent to evaluate the correct implementation of the Charter.

For the first time, unlike during the first three monitoring rounds, the organisations that sign this report did not have any direct knowledge of the visit of the Committee of Experts to Spain. The organisations learned about the visit to the Basque Country

and Galicia through the press, which caused a hasty meeting in Madrid by motion of the Government of the Principality of Asturias.

We wish to formally state our complaint and total disappointment about the functioning of the Committee of Experts. We consider that, although it is impossible to visit every territory in particular, a meeting between the Committee and the non-governmental organisations dedicated to the protection of the languages should be organised with some anticipation and scheduling. A meeting that acquires more importance, if possible, in the case of the languages that are not official and that live in a situation of a greater risk and with more obstacles from the authorities.

Evaluation of the implementation of the Part II of the Charter in the Autonomous Community of the Principality of Asturias.

The present report, following the recommendations and conclusions made by the Committee of Experts in its Report on the Implementation of the Charter in Spain [ECRLM (2012) 5], of 24 October 2012, analyses the article 7 of the Part II of the Charter examining the sections that continue arousing problems relating to the Asturian and, by extent, to the Galician-Asturian languages.

Article 7- Objectives and principles

1. In respect of regional or minority languages, within the territories in which such languages are used and according to the situation of each language, the Parties shall base their policies, legislation and practice on the following objectives and principles:

b) the respect of the geographical area of each regional or minority language in order to ensure that existing or new administrative divisions do not constitute an obstacle to the promotion of the regional or minority language in question; [...]

e) 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

«228. As non-governmental sources from León pointed out to the Committee of Experts, so far no form of transnational exchange to speakers of Mirandese has occurred. The representatives of the Asturian-speakers expressed their wish to establish educational and cultural exchanges with speakers of Mirandese in Portugal. The same applies to Leonese» [ECRLM (2012) 5]

The geographic area of Astur-Leonese exceeds the administrative frame of only one Autonomous Community, therefore the language called “Leonese” in the Autonomous Community of Castile and Leon, or “Mirandese” in the neighbour state of Portugal, is the same Romanic language that the one called “Asturian/Bable” in the Autonomous Community of Principality of Asturias, and which is recognised in the Romanic linguistics as “Asturleonese” (or “Asturian-Leonese”). The fact that the geographic area of this language is divided between two Spanish autonomous communities and between two States (one of them Portugal, which has not signed the Charter) determines an unequal recognition and promotion of this language, making it recommendable to implement measures that could help to bring together the whole of the asturian-speaking community.

At present, no steps have been taken in this direction. Furthermore, there isn't any contract or interchange between the Junta of Castile and Leon and the Government of the Principality of Asturias to favour the phenomenon of a shared language.

a) the recognition of the regional or minority languages as an expression of cultural wealth;

«119. In its previous report, the Committee of Experts encouraged the authorities to consider in collaboration with the Asturian-speakers the possibilities of improving the current level of protection provided by the Statute of Autonomy»

«120. The Committee of Experts was not informed of any changes in legislation affecting the legal status of Asturian. The Law on Asturian which was mentioned in the first evaluation report is still enforce (Law 1/98 of 23 March on the use and promotion of Bable/Asturian). It ensures the right to use Asturian before public authorities, and the promotion of Asturian in education, the media, etc. During the on-the-spot visit, representatives of the speakers repeated their estimation that the lack of co-official status of Asturian hampers the full protection and promotion of the language» [ECRLM (2012) 5]

Nothing has been done to increment the legal status of the Asturian language and, with it, the linguistic rights of its speakers. Its legal framework is still the same, the Law 1/98 of 23 March on the use and promotion of Bable/Asturian, and which still lacks a real, complete and effective development. There is a total absence of political goodwill to develop and fulfil the minimum legal framework actually in force.

The same conclusion is applicable to Galician-Asturian, which has the same legal status.

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

Although all the governmental actions aimed to the promotion of the Asturian and Galician-Asturian languages have been and continue being positive, a lack of a coherent and efficient planning can be noticed. Three observations can be made relating to this:

- During the legislative session 2003-2007, the Government, with the unanimous support of the autonomous parliament (Junta General of the Principality of Asturias) passed the Plan of the Social Normalisation of the Asturian, being that the first time that something similar happened. Nevertheless, in the following legislative session 2007-2011, and with a government of a same political sign, the mentioned Plan was not renewed nor implemented, so that the linguistic policy did not follow any recognisable planning, and an important nucleus of this policy kept being delivered in the form of subsidies to companies, entities and individuals. This tendency, aggravated by the economic crises, which has noticeably diminished the subsidies to cultural and business activity in Asturian language, has continued in the current period 2011-2015. The amount granted to the General Office of the Linguistic Policy in the General Budget of the Principality of Asturias was gradually reduced from 3.058.482 euros in 2010 to 1.978.401 euros in 2012. The tendency continues: in 2013 the budget

provision was of 1.706.735 euros, amount which is repeated this year due to the extension of last year's budget.

- The promotion of the asturian language is reduced at national and international levels to these acts: yearly celebration of *Día de les Lletres Asturianas nel Esterior* (the Asturian Literature Day Abroad), since 2001, in the Asturian centres of America and Europe; organisation of the *on-line course of Asturian language for the foreign Asturian communities*, in the years 2011 and 2014, in 11 countries; performances of Asturian music groups in the Festival Interceltique de Lorient (Bretagne); and, as most remarkable, the integration of the Premiu al Meyor Cantar en Llingua Asturiana (Best Song in Asturian Language Award) into the Liet International Festival, which 2012 edition was celebrated in Gijon/Xixón. In conclusion, the cross-border promotion of the Asturian language does not fulfil a satisfactory objective and is noticeably wasted. Promotion opportunities that could be offered by such organisations as Cervantes Institute or by events like the National Literature Award are not being used. The participation of the Asturian government in fairs like Expolingua Lisboa (2009) or Expolangue Paris (2010) has not been continued. In the publishing field, there was no working on making Asturian language as a proper publishing language.
- The presence of Asturian and Galician-Asturian languages in the public mass media, the Radio and Television of the Principality of Asturias (RTPA) is especially frustrating. The absence of the language in the programmes with informative content (except for the minimum presence on the radio); a bad use of the official place names in the programmes; a non-existent or sporadic programming for children in the local languages. In conclusion, the RTPA seriously fails to to comply with the one of its founding objectives.

d) the facilitation and/or encouragement of the use of regional or minority languages, in speech and writing, in public and private life;

Although the law 1/1998, of 23 March, on use and promotion of Bable/Asturian, recognises, as a principle, the right of all the citizens to use Asturian and express themselves in it for speaking as well as writing, (article 4.1 of the Law 1/1998 in connection with the mandate on promotion of the use expressed in the article 4.1 of the Statute of Autonomy), and that any use of Asturian in spoken or written communications with authorities of Principality of Asturias will be seen as valid (article 4.2 Law 1/1998), occasionally this right has been of a difficult or impossible exercise.

It is still problematic to exercise this right in different offices of the autonomic administration (public registers, internal communications of the public employees, etc.). These problems are present in the most of the town halls (except five), since they have not passed an ordinance allowing the exercise, in its competencial area, of the right to use the language recognised in the Law 1/1998. Furthermore, it should be noted that both local and autonomic authorities, together with the State authorities, fail to comply with officially approved place names in public documents (problems to use the official names in National Identity Document), and in linguistic landscaping (information and sign posts in roads and public ways, etc.).

Equally, there continue being troubles in the University of Oviedo due to the absence of a regulation that, as mandated by a court sentence, would permit the educational and administrative personnel, as well as students, to exercise the right to use the Asturian language. Language that in some areas (PH regulations) has the same treatment as a foreign language.

f) the provision of appropriate forms and means for the teaching and study of regional or minority languages at all appropriate stages; [...]

h) the promotion of study and research on regional or minority languages at universities or equivalent institutions;

«197. The Committee of Experts encourages the authorities to increase the offer of Asturian education, especially at secondary schools, through creating more favorable conditions for pupils and teachers»[ECRLM (2012) 5]

The situation of the Asturian language in the education has light as well as shadow, and could be shortly summarized in the following way:

- In the first place, *there is no teaching in Asturian language*. The recognised lingua franca in asturian education is Castilian, and, for some years, English and French, working languages for teaching of most of the subjects in bilingual schools. But Asturian and Galician-Asturian are completely unused as working languages. They are only present in the subject of Asturian Language and Literature (or Galician-Asturian in its geographic area), in spite of the fact that there are many teachers of all levels perfectly able to teach their subjects in Asturian.
- In the second place, the *teaching of Asturian language* (or Galician-Asturian, in its area). Although the Law 1/1998 on Use and Promotion says expressly that the subject must be available for students of any educational level, the reality is that, up to date, there is no teaching of Asturian in the primary education, although it is an obligatory stage. In the rest of the stages, the system of minimum ratios required to form a group to teach the subject, makes it impossible to teach it in many schools.

A court case had to be started because of this, and it was only by the court sentence that the minimum ratios were removed in the primary and secondary education. Despite this, the educational establishments were not properly informed, so many of them keep applying the ratios.

On the other hand, the free selection of the subject is not only held up by the insufficient information given by the regional Ministry of Education to the schools and by these to students' parents, but also by the policy permitted by the authorities to deny the right to choose the subject depending on the previous year's results or on the decisions taken discretionarily one by one by the school's management.

Table: Teaching and use of Asturian language in different educational stages

EDUCATIONAL STAGE	TEACHING OF ASTURIAN LANGUAGE	TEACHING IN ASTURIAN LANGUAGE
Pre-school educación	No availability	Non-existent
Primary	Is available together with another subject as an alternative. Without ratio.	Non-existent
Secondary Obligatory Education (ESO)	Is available as an optional subject. Without ratio.	Non-existent
Bachelor	Is available as an optional subject. Ratio: minimum of eight students per group.	Non-existent

- In the third place, the situation of the teaching personnel in the above mentioned stages of education has to be brought to attention. The non-existence of a teaching speciality (which is a historical claim of the linguistical recuperation movement and a petition of the Junta General of the Principality of Asturias, by unanimity of its 45 members, for many years), continues offering a base to the nonexistence of the department of Asturian language in secondary education centres, making the teachers of asturian join the department of Castilian language, often a forced fitting in which the teachers of Castilian see the subject of Asturian language as a competitor with which they have to share resources. It has to be noted that, by motion of SUATEA, the State School Council, in its plenary meeting of 23 September 2014, has requested the Ministry of Education the immediate creation of the teaching speciality of Asturian language.

Asturian teaching personnel is, in addition, condemned to permanent precariousness, the majority (95%) working as supply teachers, without any possibility of job stability. Because of the absence of a formal teaching speciality, there are no national access exams to it, and, therefore, impossibility to obtain a permanent post. Thus, the teachers are forced into nomadism, usually having to change from one school to another every year, living a situation of mere subsistence, because most of them (80%) work on a part-time basis, with every time smaller salaries. Although it can be said that the part-time jobs and permanently decreasing salaries are a generalised problem of all the public education workers, in the case of Asturian language teachers it is an older and more serious problem.

- In the University it is necessary to highlight that in 2018, for the first time in the history of the University of Oviedo, Asturian was included in the regulated studies of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters (until 2010, Faculty of Philology) in the form of a Minor on Asturian, which is active from the school year 2011-2012. It is clear that the Minor on Asturian does not meet

all the expectations that such studies require, but it is an important first step. In the framework of an internal University policy, we have to highlight that the Minor was passed with an overwhelming majority, in a problematic context of divided opinions that certain aspects of Asturian raise between the humanities teachers. Furthermore, in the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, a research group called «Seminariu de Filoloxía Asturiana» (Seminary on Asturian Filology) works since 2003. It is made up by teachers, PhD students and graduates, and it develops a wide activity: linguistic, sociolinguistic and literary research projects; publishing of the *Revista de Filoloxía Asturiana* and a connected collection of books; organisation of specialised conferences; etc.

i) the promotion of appropriate types of transnational exchanges, in the fields covered by this Charter, for regional or minority languages used in identical or similar form in two or more States.

In Portugal, the Mirandese language, which counts on some institutional recognition by the authorities, belongs to the same linguistic area that Asturian (the Asturian-Leonese area). It would be convenient to intensify the transnational interchanges within the scope of the Charter.

2. The Parties undertake to eliminate, if they have not yet done so, any unjustified distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference relating to the use of a regional or minority language and intended to discourage or endanger the maintenance or development of it. The adoption of special measures in favor of regional or minority languages aimed at promoting equality between the users of these languages and the rest of the population or which take due account of their specific conditions is not considered to be an act of discrimination against the users of more widely-used languages.

In the presence of a progressive weakening of the Asturian language, and of the Galician-Asturian in its geographic area, the mere prohibition of discrimination of its speakers does not guarantee a sufficient protection, therefore it is important to give special support that would reflect the interests and expectations of the speakers of these languages, aimed at their protection and development.

In this direction, it is necessary to develop a coherent, continuous and efficient linguistic policy directed towards removing the legal and political obstacles encountered by the speakers of Asturian and Galician-Asturian in the Autonomous Community of the Principality of Asturias, especially in three vital aspects:

- The teaching in and of autochthonous languages.
- Its use in the relations with the autonomic and local authorities.
- Display of the autochthonous languages on RTPA, as a way of public communication, and in the rest of the so called linguistic landscaping or public activity, paying special attention to the recovery and use of the traditional place names.