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Asking France to promote the protection of national minorities and minority or regional languages, in particular as regards the use of the Catalan language in education

Reply to Written question[1]: Written question No. 763 (Doc. 15303)
Committee of Ministers

1. Concerning minority languages, the Committee of Ministers takes note of the information provided by France, set out below. It recalls that the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ETS No. 148) is open for accession to member States of the Council of Europe and to any other State, upon invitation by the Committee of Ministers. Activities promoting the Charter address therefore both member States and non-member States.

2. France is not a Party to the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (ETS No. 157) nor to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. It signed this Charter on 7 May 1999 but has not ratified it. Indeed, the Constitutional Council ruled (decision of 16 June 1999), on the basis of Article 2 of the French Constitution, which states that "the language of the Republic is French", that the Charter contained clauses contrary to the Constitution and that by acceding to the Charter, France would be disregarding the constitutional principles of the indivisibility of the Republic, equality before the law, the uniqueness of the French people and the official use of the French language.

3. Nevertheless, it should be noted that, since 2008, regional languages have been recognised by the French Constitution, through Article 75-1, which states that "regional languages belong to the heritage of France".

4. Furthermore, although France has not chosen the path of ratification in view of its constitutional framework, the government is taking concrete and determined action to enhance regional languages and support their promotion.

5. In the field of education, France promotes regional languages throughout the educational system, from nursery school to higher education. Currently, almost 121,000 pupils are learning regional languages, of which 11.5% (14,021) are in schools with immersive teaching.

6. With regards to regional languages and cultures belonging to the heritage of France, Law of 8 July 2013 (No. 2013-593) provides that their teaching is encouraged on an equal basis in the regions where they are used. This teaching may be provided throughout schooling according to the terms and conditions defined in an agreement between the State and the territorial authorities where these languages are used.

7. Other legislative and regulatory provisions work to promote the development of the teaching of modern regional languages. In particular, Act No. 2021-641 of 21 May 2021 on the protection of the heritage of regional languages and their promotion introduced several measures to enhance and develop the teaching of regional languages. The introduction of Article L. 312-11-2 in the Education Code specifies that "the regional language is a subject taught as part of the normal timetable in nursery and elementary schools, middle schools and high schools in all or part of the territories concerned, with the aim of offering the teaching of the

1. Adopted at the 1434th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (11 May 2022).

regional language to all students". The law also facilitates the enrolment of children in private primary schools under a contract of association providing regional language teaching when the commune of residence does not have a school providing regional language teaching. The law also introduces the obligation for the communes of residence that do not have bilingual schools to contribute to the schooling costs of the students concerned in public schools under contract offering bilingual teaching.

8. In addition, since the start of the 2021 academic year, the teaching of Breton, Basque, Corsican and Occitan has been integrated into the national distance learning offer (CNED) in order to facilitate access to this teaching throughout the country and increase the number of learners.

9. Further, following the publication of the Euzet-Kerlogot report in July 2021, France has continued its reflection to further promote the teaching of regional languages within the framework of its constitution.

10. In order to put into perspective the different actions deployed in favour of the learning of modern languages and ancient languages, a Higher Council for Languages was created on 24 January 2022. A body of expertise and reflection, it has three main objectives: to raise the general level of language proficiency among students, to encourage openness and exchanges in the interests of social justice and the transmission of humanism, and to develop language policies based on research and adapted to the needs of the territories.