

LANGUAGE(S) AND IDENTITY(IES) IN FRENCH SOCIETY

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Abstract

Most discourses about France seem to imply that France is a homogeneous, monolingual, monocultural country. This is denying the cultural and linguistic diversity of the country. Regions were conquered throughout the centuries and the various regimes have always tried to eradicate regional languages and cultures, imposing French as the sole language, a powerful tool of colonisation. Resistance to the linguistic and cultural genocides have always been present. Until the second half of the 20th century this resistance was expressed only in linguistic terms. Recent events such as the Algerian war led to a new militancy and a political awareness slowly developed among the groups defending their minority languages and cultures. By denying their peoples, their rights to be educated and express themselves in their own language, French governments throughout the centuries have denied them their specific identity. Some attempts at improving the situation were made by Jack Lang, the then minister of Education, but his efforts to improve the place of regional languages in the Education system were thwarted by the State and Constitutional Councils. Regionalisation and the growing importance of the European Union may bring some changes to an otherwise bleak situation.

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Introduction

More than 95% of all internal or inter-state conflicts are ethnic in nature, that is to say mainly conflicts between linguistic communities.

Although the term is used mainly to describe conflicts in the developing world, ethnic conflicts do occur on every continent. In Europe, one thinks of the Balkans in such a context, but few would apply the term to France's internal situation.

In 2003, hundreds of bombs exploded in the country, including 77 in July alone. Various factions of the FLNC (National Front of Corsican Liberation) claimed responsibility.

One of their three major demands is the officialisation of the Corsican language and provision for its teaching throughout the education system. This is deemed unacceptable in a country that has spent nearly 500 years imposing a single language in order to standardise the cultural values and control its diverse populations.

Most discourses about France seem to imply that the country is homogeneous, monolingual, and monocultural, whether French language, culture, arrogance or cuisine is under discussion. This is to deny the cultural and linguistic diversity of the country.¹

Linguistic diversity in France

The history of humanity is characterised by the constant movement and meeting of populations who must interact culturally and linguistically.

The number of cave paintings (Tautavel, Les Eyzies, Chauvet...) and monoliths (Carnac) dating from the Palaeolithic to the Bronze Age are evidence that pre-Indo-European cultures existed in France. The Basques seem to be the descendants of the Palaeolithic men who inhabited the Pyrenees some 50,000 years ago and incorporated into

their language that of their “commercial partners” from the Caucasus at the end of the Stone Age (Moruzzi, 1988).

Most branches of the Indo-European linguistic tree had an influence on framing French linguistic diversity: Celtic, as the Celts spread throughout western Europe between 1500 BC and 300BC; Hellenic, with the establishment of Greek trading centres along the Mediterranean coast; Italic, through the Roman Empire; and Germanic with the migrations that took place between the 3rd and the 5th centuries, involving a number of different groups, each with their own cultures and languages: in particular the Franks, the Alamans, the Burgonds, the Vandals and the Visigoths settled in parts of what is now France.

The various adstrats and substrats gave birth to a mosaic of languages divided themselves in a variety of dialects and sub-dialects. Throughout the Middle Ages, for reasons of safety and defence, the people organised themselves in small communities around a castle and his owner. The feudal system maintained a fragmentation of the population and increased the linguistic fragmentation until the central power became strong enough to assert its authority on the country.

Language and Power

In the early 16th century, when the idea of the nation started to emerge in France as in England, the nexus linking language and power became very clearly perceptible. To impose a common language in order to make uniform the cultural values of all the people to be controlled is always politically tempting.

The first text translating this concept on the legislative level, the Edict of Villers-Cotterêts, imposing French as the exclusive language of the kingdom, dates back to 1539². The aim was to unify the elites who, cut off from their socio-cultural roots, would be in a position to better serve the king. Language was therefore becoming, *de facto*, the instrument of social discrimination: social superiority and linguistic superiority merged and grew inseparable in the framework of that State-in-the-making.

During the first expressions of nationalism and belief in the European Nation-State, Henri Estienne developed the concept of French linguistic superiority in his book: *“De la précellence du langage français”*³, published in 1579. From the middle of the 17th century, edicts following the annexation of newly conquered provinces demanded the exclusive usage of French.

The French Revolution, in order to organise the new social and political order, found itself forced to first educate the masses politically⁴. At first, the republican decrees were translated into the various regional languages (Breton, Occitan...), but rapidly there was a change in direction.

If, as a political principle, nationalism holds that the nation and the state should be congruent (Guibernau, 1995, p. 62), the State had to artificially create the common elements necessary to the establishment of a new nation. Barère expressed very clearly the correlation existing in the minds of the leaders of the Revolution between the linguistic and the political problems they were facing when he addressed the Assembly on the 27 of January, 1794: “Citizens, you detest political federalism, abjure the linguistic one. Language, as the Republic, must be one” (Guibernau, 1995, p. 62). A decree of the 8 of Pluviôse⁵ II banned the use of any language other than French in all dealings, both public and private.

The Loi Toubon and Article 2 of the Constitution

The 1994 Toubon Law on the protection of French was widely presented as a weapon aimed at countering the growth of English in French public life and, in particular, in audiovisual communications (Loi, 1994, pp. 94-88).

In spite of all initial denials, this law increasingly appeared as being in the centuries-old tradition of a centralist linguistic policy aimed at the destruction of the languages of France. This became apparent in the light of the 1992 modification of Article 2 of the French Constitution. An amendment, endorsed by all political parties, inscribed that “French is the language of the Republic” in the Constitution. During the

parliamentary debates, some Members of Parliament tried to have the phrase 'in the respect of France's regional languages and cultures' inserted. The *Garde des Sceaux*⁶ formally opposed the motion. This refusal, promoted by the Government, strengthened the body of law against minority languages. From being previously tolerated, they became officially illegal (La Setmana, 1996b). A few months later the same article was used to justify the Government decision to exclude all regional publications not written in French from the help given to the weekly regional press that had been initiated in 1995.

La Setmana, a weekly newspaper written in Occitan, argued that such a decision violated freedom of expression. It categorically rejected this discrimination on the basis of the language used, adding that "la libertat de pensar, d'escriver e d'informar ne's pòt ps apariar dab ua volontat d'empachar l'expression d'ua cultura e d'ua lenga" (Grosclaude, 1996)⁷.

The Loi Toubon did not mention regional languages but the circular of 20 March, 1996, explaining the details of the law, specified that the use of French is compulsory for all audiovisual communications, publicity, business, and public meetings. It does not differentiate between regional languages and foreign languages, implying that Occitan, Breton, Catalan... are as dangerous to the survival of French as English may be. The ministry asked the administrations and all associations of Defence of French to do their utmost to ensure that the Loi Toubon be better upheld (La Setmana, 1996a). In April 1996, the Prefect of the *Pyrénées Orientales*⁸, in a circular sent to all the mayors in his *Département*, explained how the Loi Toubon had to be applied. The representative of the State declared that any infraction to the law meant that associations who, for example, organised congresses, colloquia or conferences, published reviews or signed contracts not in French, would have to repay part, or the whole of a grant they may have received. Outraged Catalanist groups protested and Miquel Reniu, Director of the Linguistic Policy of Catalunya, in a letter published in *Aviu*, the Barcelona daily, commented that "it was strange to see that the country that invented Human Rights did not respect them" (La Setmana, 1996c).

Throughout modern history the various regimes have used the education system as the major tool for the eradication of regional languages. The 1881-1882 education laws making primary education free and compulsory in France were an integral part of this policy.

Towards monolingualism

There were various economic and social reasons behind the introduction of compulsory free education in French in the 1880's, but political elements can also be found at the origin of this decision: compulsory schooling was the way to Francise, by force, populations that may not be considered as completely safe. After the 1870 defeat, French nationalism was redefining itself after the ensuing loss of Alsace-Lorraine to Prussia.

The members sent to the National Assembly were more and more radical, and eager to put in practice the ideas developed by the Jacobins between 1790 and 1794 in a number of reports on education presented to the various assemblies⁹. Jules Ferry, the architect of the policy, placed himself under the ideological patronage of Condorcet (Barral, 1985, p.92), and thought, like his ideological mentor, that National Education should not confine itself to the broadening of the mind but should be committed to rebuilding the national soul (Barral, 1985, p. 101).

The Radical Republic sent Jacobins to educate the masses and mould them into new citizens. There was no room for any language apart from French as all were convinced, like their predecessors, that this language was the only one able to achieve this purpose.

The early defence of linguistic plurality

Diglossia had slowly crept up since the Renaissance as French was increasingly perceived as the language of power but only touched a relatively small proportion of the population, mainly in the major cities. By the end of the 19th century diglossia was dominant: French was the "high" language and the regional language was the "low"

language. This explains why, since the 19th century, the questions of education, of the retention of the language and the culture, have always been central to the struggles of all minority groups in France.

In Provence, in the aftermath of the 1848 European nationalist Renaissances, a group of poets intent on keeping alive and rehabilitating the Occitan linguistic heritage founded the Felibrige (Jeanjean, 1997, pp. 27-38). Asked to enter politics, Mistral, the most brilliant writer in this group and winner of the 1904 Literature Nobel Prize, declined but while doing so, reaffirmed his ideal of a revival of the Provençal Nation quashed by Parisian centralisation (Rey, 1929, p. 37). He was the first to perceive the relationship between school and acculturation. In his Memoirs he explained he created this movement “to provoke the resurrection of the region natural and historical language against which all the schools are waging a war to the death” (Mistral, 1906, p.132).

But after 1870, nobody dared contest the policy of administrative and cultural centralisation.

The 1944 liberation was marked by a feeling of triumphant French nationalism, and the Occitanists who had fought alongside the Resistance, whatever their ideological preferences, fell into what Balzagues called “the trap of French Nationalism” (Balzagues, 1973). Because of the close ties they had with the French left, they could not accept in their midst any idea of separatist/ nationalist ideologies judged to be crimes against French unity.

The impact of decolonization (Jeanjean, 2001)

As Indochina, Algeria, Madagascar... rebelled against their French colonial masters in post-war France, books were published exploring the nature of colonisation: Octave Mannoni's *Psychologie de la colonisation*, Frantz Fanon's *Peau noire masques blancs*, Aimé Césaire's *Discours sur le colonialisme*, and Albert Memmi's *Portrait du colonisé* (Césaire, 1955; Fanon, 1952; Mononni, 1984 [first published in 1950]; Memmi, 1973 [first published in 1957]), spearheaded the intellectual soul-searching which led to a new nationalist push, not only in the

colonies themselves but also in some regions of France. In the 50's, influenced by this literature of the decolonisation, and more radical as a result, a group of Occitan militants, like their counterparts in other regions, started reappraising their own historical, social, and economic situation.

These new comprehensive studies on the nature of colonisation gave minority groups an understanding of the nexus between colonised and coloniser. The gulf separating the economic development of the north and south of France in the early sixties was widening rapidly. The analysis of the PNO (Parti Nationaliste Occitan - Occitan Nationalist Party) which equated Occitania's economy to an economic colonisation seemed justified¹⁰.

The events of May 68 brought new members and new impetus to these groups. Pressures from political and cultural organisations helped to slowly chip away at the monolithic centralist education system, both from within and from outside its organisation, but any advance was systematically opposed or undermined by those who opposed any change in the linguistic policy.

Occitanists and the left

In the 70's, some of the movements representing the minorities hoped to play a role within the broad left coalition and thus influence its regionalist policies. The Socialist Party was able, through a number of promises, to attract a good proportion of Occitan movements (Jeanjean, 1992, pp. 85-92). When the left came to power in 1981, the regionalist movements, along with some trade unions and associative organisations, believed that this victory was also theirs and expected to be rewarded for their help, but this was not forthcoming.

Early changes to the French education system

In 1951, the Deixonne law allowed for the first time the optional teaching of one hour of the "local languages and dialects in primary

and high schools" within the framework of the "organised activities" (Loi, pp. 51-46). These activities were abolished in subsequent reforms, rendering the law useless or inoperative.

Memoranda from some education ministers from both sides of the political spectrum followed: Alain Savary in 1982 and 1983, and François Bayrou in 1995 (Poignant, 1998, p. 11). During this period, Members of Parliament initiated bills, but none ever came up for debate. Promising a law placated the electorate who, by and large, was favourable to measures ensuring the survival of their language and culture. On the other hand, not putting this proposal up for debate avoided antagonising the Jacobin forces from both the Right and the Left. In particular, most trade unions in the education sector were strongly opposed to any change in the curriculum, which would undermine the monopoly of French in the system.

The vast majority of teachers viewed their mission as educators in the spirit of the French Revolution, that is, within the framework of the Nation-State, its centralism both political and linguistic. Therefore, trade unions and administrators combined at the local, regional or national levels to swat any attempt at promoting and/or improving the teaching of regional languages in schools.

Within the militant movements two analyses emerged: for some it was impossible to conceive of a reconquest of their language within the framework of the State Education system. For others however, to envisage anything outside the State system was ideologically unthinkable. They considered that the militants' efforts should be first channelled towards improving the structures, and changing the philosophy, of the national organisation of education.

Working for changes from within

However modest the reforms may have been, they encouraged those who believed that changes could and should happen within the public service. The Occitans arranged themselves within Regional Centres for the Teaching of Occitan (CREO), which organised grant

applications for making teaching material, for creating new teaching positions, or for professional training. They also discussed how to deal with the education trade unions and the parents' associations opposed to their projects.

The 1982 decentralisation laws had also transferred some of the cultural and education responsibilities from the State to the Regions and the Departments. In Languedoc-Roussillon, a cell was established to set up a regional linguistic and cultural policy. Various scientific investigations and surveys have shown the importance of Occitan in the Region (Hammel, 1996; Hammel & Gardy, 1994). Between 60% and 70% of parents would like their children to have contact with Occitan, confirming surveys carried out in other regions of France.

The 1982 Savary Memorandum made possible the establishment of bilingual education as it stated that "some teaching may be done in the regional language as an experiment" (Circulaire, pp. 82-261). In 1989, the first bilingual Occitan / French nursery school was established in Albi, followed by one in Saint-Affrique (La Dépêche, 1989).

In his book (Petit, 1985) – and further articles - Jean Petit has shown the advantages of multilingualism at an early age. As they are still naturally present in most regions, regional languages are seen as the best opportunity to achieve bilingualism.

Some structures were to be put in place in Occitania and other regions, but their efficiency, their potential, was again often curtailed by the resistance found in the administration and the National Education System. Trade Unions, hierarchy and P&C organisations made any real change difficult.

Working on the outside

Aware of the staunch opposition to regional languages in the public system, some militants decided to create their own bilingual schools, using immersion methods by which the regional language was not only a subject to be studied but also the language used for teaching.

In 1969, the first *Ikastola* was started by the Basques. Now around 2000 students are being taught in the various primary and secondary schools. The same progression can be seen in the *Diwan* schools in Brittany, the *Calendretas* in Occitania and the Catalan *Bressolas*.

These schools were established on the same basis as the State schools: a free and secular education. The emphasis on bilingualism and modern pedagogical methods, using the latest findings in child psychology, made these schools attractive to a wider range of parents than the initial regionalist militants. They all joined forces to establish the Institute of the Languages of France (*Institut Supérieur des Langues de la République Française*) in order to provide a common teachers' training programme for staff employed in such minority language schools throughout France (La Setmana, 1998).

When Mitterrand was elected as French president in 1981, the founders of the first *Calendretas* were certain that those schools which had been set up on the republican principles of state education - free and religion-free - would be rapidly integrated into the State Education.

In 1983 Alain Savary proposed a choice to the *Ikastolas*, *Diwan*, *Calendretas* and *Bressolas*:

- 1) Adopt the statute of private schools within the parameters of the 1959 Debré law within which the State takes over the responsibility for the teachers; or
- 2) Sign a convention, which is in keeping with the integration process of the schools in the state system but only pays for half the teachers' salaries.

All opted for the second option despite the fact that it was financially less attractive.

The application of the convention was slowed down by the administration. In December 1985, because elections were due a few months later, the teachers already employed were integrated into the State Schools.

The *Conseil Constitutionnel* quashed this decision. Confronted with numerous demonstrations, one month before the 1986 legislative elections the ministry sent a fax offering integration within the framework of the experimental schools' scheme.

After the elections the new Minister, René Monory, refused to pursue this policy and offered the statute of private schools to the minority language schools. Financial problems compelled the *Diwan* schools to accept. The others refused.

Following another change of government, Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, aware of the Occitan culture, asked for even more reports. The 1998 Poignant Report urged the Prime Minister "to step out of the hypocrisy" (Poignant, 1998, p.11). Poignant pointed out that during the previous school year (1996-1997) 330,000 students had enrolled in some regional language courses, more than 5,000 of those in associative schools using immersion methods, and that the demand could not be satisfied because of a lack of funded positions and a lack of space (Poignant, 1998, pp. 16-17). The Report made several suggestions, but the Education Minister, Claude Allègre, refused to open new negotiations, or even act up on already signed agreements.

By the time he was sacked, the situation of some schools and teachers had been left very desperate.

Jack Lang's second ministry

On 27 March, 2000, Jack Lang was appointed as Minister for Education "to give back its impetus and its confidence in the national Education"¹¹ and cautious hope was restored to representatives of minority languages as the ministry doors were opened to them once more.

Primary education

In a press conference on 20 June, 2000, Lang explained his vision for primary school education. It included the idea that within five years every child should learn two other languages, one in high school and one started in primary school. As early as their first year in high school, students

were to be capable of being taught at least one subject in a language other than French. Migrant and Regional languages were specifically identified as under-valued and in need of special consideration. Along with the traditional introductory and bilingual courses already in place in the State Education system, Lang was considering the immersion method favoured by the minority language schools.

During another press conference, held on 4 September, 2000 to mark the beginning of the school year (Lang, 2000a), Jack Lang confirmed his earlier statements, stating that 100 new bilingual classes had been opened in regional languages for that year. He also flagged the signing of a Convention between the State and the Alsace Region, and the Departments constituting that Region.

Convention in Alsace

This Convention was signed on 18 October, 2000. In his presentation, Jack Lang confirmed the five-year timetable for the teaching of languages in French schools (Lang, 2000b). He also gave undertakings regarding the setting up of adequate linguistic training facilities for primary school teachers through exchanges with Germany and courses in the IUFM¹².

2001, marked as the Year of Languages in Europe, gave ample opportunities to Jack Lang to reaffirm his beliefs in establishing France as a multilingual society, necessary to dealing with the multilingual and multicultural European reality.

In a major speech on 25 April, 2001, Jack Lang reaffirmed his commitment to regional languages and alluded to negotiations taking place with *Diwan*, the Breton immersion schools. These led to the signing of an agreement aimed at integrating them into the public education system on 28 May, 2001.

This convention firstly determined that the teaching of a regional language should be conducted using the immersion method, accepting that all activities in the school should be conducted in the regional language, with a gradual introduction of French in the classroom (Lang, 2001). It specified that such a program should lead to the students being

as competent in the target language as in French and as competent in French as those attending a monolingual French school. Between 1994 and 2000, school inspections and various tests had verified that the level of competency in French achieved in immersion schools was at least equal to the level achieved in monolingual French schools. This had been closely monitored at the entrance to High School and in the *Brevet* results¹³. It was therefore agreed that the pedagogical methods would be maintained.

Opposition from organisations in the education system

On 3 October, 2001, the five organisations¹⁴ composing the CNAL¹⁵, the national committee of action for public education, decided to appeal to the State Council, asking for an injunction on the implementation of the integration of the *Diwan* schools. It argued that immersion in Breton “is contrary to Article 2 of the French Constitution stating that French is the language of the Republic” (AFP, 2001b) and contrary to the Toubon law which states that “French shall be the language of instruction, work, trade and exchanges and of the public services”¹⁶.

The CNAL also started challenging all decisions made by local and regional administrations regarding their funding of regional language schools.

The State Council suspended the implementation of the agreement, and of the May, July and September 2001 decrees or memoranda. The AFP dispatch announcing the result further commented: “In the name of the oneness of the Republic, one century after the forced Francisation of children in the French countryside, the main argument of Jules Ferry’s schooling is being used again by the defenders of the public school, seriously harming the agreement reached after long negotiations” (AFP, 2001a).

In Brittany, the decision was met with an uproar. All political and cultural Breton organisations expressed their dismay and the feeling of being betrayed (Le Télégramme de Brest, 2001b). Most Breton members

of Parliament supported the Minister, and members of the regional and the local assemblies want more power given to the Region, as this appears to be the only way to ensure that some progress is made. Calls for demonstrations have been sent and the independentist movement Emgann denounced the "objective attack against Breton" as a denial of the democratic process" (Le Télégramme de Brest, 2001a).

In December, 2003, the Education Ministry published the number of CAPES places – and hence of teaching positions within the public sector - that would be allocated for 2005. There were only 4 positions for Occitan out of 6640 compared to 13 in 2003 and 17 in 2004, numbers already very inadequate. Students of various regional languages preparing this competitive examination discovered only a month before the beginning of their exams that their chances of getting a place had been vastly reduced without prior warning or discussion. At the same time the Bordeaux and Rennes academies (educational districts) announced the discontinuance of several positions. In Aquitaine, 22 positions were lost (21 in Occitan representing 80% of the current total and one in Basque). When these statistics became known, calls for demonstrations were issued by all cultural associations and were relayed by some education unions. They took place on 4 February, 2004, and petitions were handed to the local representatives of the Education hierarchy.

New Federalism: Regionalisation and the EU

From opposition...

The regionalist movements rejected the various proposals put by both the right and the left on regionalisation, seen as a purely administrative restructuring manipulated by Paris.

The organisations representing the political minority movements also initially opposed the Common Market and European integration. European unification, a condition *sine qua non* of the Marshall Plan, was only a step towards a greater concentration of capital, as European companies, not being able to compete, would be taken over by the

Anglo-American trusts. The concentration of capital and of industry would lead, in the name of efficiency and rationalisation, to a greater concentration around some economic centres such as the triangle Genoa-Turin-Milan, or the Rhine valley while the excentric regions such as Brittany or Occitania, already under-developed, would see their economic situation worsen even more.

Slowly at first, the attitudes changed and now all the major regionalist movements have embraced the European Union.

The editorial in the Winter 97-98 edition of *Lo Lugarn*, the magazine published by the PNO, announced the changes in strategy and policies of that political organisation and summarised its evolution on the European question: for nearly thirty years it had opposed, in principle, the construction of Europe, calling for a boycott of the 1984 elections, but in 1994 it favoured a federalist Europe based on regionalism - the other side of the same equation, as, in France, the question of Europe cannot be separated from the question of regionalism.

...to enthusiastic support

It is true, as claimed by most regionalists, that regionalism was first decided, organised and manipulated by Paris and did not take into account the linguistic, cultural and historical identities of the regions. Nonetheless, the 1982-1984 laws of decentralisation gave the regions a leading role, enabling them to formulate a regional plan. The inter-regional cooperation was encouraged and extended to encompass an international dimension as the Regional Council was empowered to organise regular contacts with the foreign decentralised regions with which they had a border. This legislative framework led to several meetings between the Presidents of several Occitan Regions and Jordi Pujol, President of the *Generalitat of Catalunya*. As a consequence, a Euroregion comprising Languedoc-Roussillon, Midi-Pyrénées and Catalunya was created in 1991.

Occitania was not only opening up on an economic level, but was also culturally less isolated.

The reconquest of their language and of their culture by the Catalans, following the coming to power of the Nationalists, had a direct impact north of the border. In French Catalonia, "economic pressure and the cultural and political importance of Barcelona are causing changes in the attitudes of the French Catalans: the language of the people is becoming the language of commerce and power, as it recovers and rediscovers its lost prestige. A new dynamic can bring about economic development in a Euro-regional and European market that is much more favourable to the interests of French Catalonia" (Arrels, 1992, p. 106). This influence was also being felt in Occitania, which had close linguistic and historical links with *Catalunya* (Jeanjean, 2003) and was then developing new economic ties such as the creation of the Euro-region uniting *Catalunya*, Midi-Pyrénées and Languedoc-Roussillon. Cultural agreements were put in place as evidenced by the founding of the CAOC (Cercle d'Ageramanament/Afrairament Occitano-Catalan), a cultural organisation established by the present government of the Generalitat and working at bringing Occitania and Catalonia closer.

The collapse of the Communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe and the civil war in Yugoslavia ensured that the question of minorities was given a high priority on the European agenda. It was one of the main issues at the Copenhagen Conference on the Human Dimension of June 1990, and agreement was reached on a list of rights to be conferred to minorities (Benoît-Rohmer, 1996). The OSCE, the Council of Europe and the European Union now coordinate their efforts with a view to developing a coherent system for the protection of minority rights in spite of the disagreements encountered on defining the nature and even the very concept of a "national minority".

These actions on the legislative level, the establishment of support structures such as the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages and the financial help given to projects promoting minority languages have ensured that the small minority of Occitanists who could see the European potential in the late 1980's became a vast majority by the mid-1990's. The intransigence of French governments, whatever their

political colour, when dealing with the minority question in both the international and national arenas, has hastened this shift¹⁷.

Reality of the jurisdiction/competency regions/EU

The relationship between the EU, the states and the regions has changed: there are in Europe local communities which simply do not have administrative powers, but in 7 countries out of 15, regions do have legislative power. This includes all the major countries neighbouring France: Germany, Belgium, Spain, the UK, and Italy. The European Council meeting in Laeken, held on the 15 and 16 December, 2001, for the first time in an official document of the European Council alluded to the legislative competencies of Regions (Alirol, 2002).

In 1995, a group of political parties representing the major minorities within France created the *Fédération Régions et peuples solidaires* (RPS). Its charter states that the federation:

- Encourages cultural diversity and promotes linguistic and cultural identities, officialising regional languages;
- Fights against Parisian centralism and the Europe of States;
- Promotes federalism in France and in Europe, on the basis of the region or community;
- Allows people divided by state borders to regroup within the process of European unification (Charte RPS).

In the 2002 legislative elections, for the first time, the RPS presented 108 candidates in 41 departments¹⁸.

The issue of the Nation has become the new dividing factor in French politics. The European elections, held in June 1999, showed that around 29% of the electorate had voted for lists considered as “*souverainistes*”. These “sovereignists”¹⁹ now polarise the political

debate on the question of the Nation, by-passing the traditional political partition. Both the Republican Left, led by Chevènement, and the anti-European Right, with Pasqua as its main leader, considered that the developments taking place in Europe since the Maastricht Treaty, and the ensuing European integration, threatened the very identity of France. "Sovereigntists" from both the Right and the Left pretend to defend the French Nation against Brussels, the Gallic tradition against American imperialism, the Nation-State against supra-nationality, the integrity of the territory against the legal and moral rights of international intervention (Thénard, 1999).

Both Chirac, pushed on his right by the hard sovereigntist Le Pen, and Jospin, pushed by the equally hard sovereigntist Chevènement on his left, decided to portray themselves as "soft sovereigntists".

Between the two rounds of the French presidential elections Chirac had mentioned a great reform of the structure of powers and true transfer of responsibilities to the regions but it was too late. On 5 May 2002, Chirac had been re-elected for a few hours when the FNLC (National Front of Liberation of Corsica) celebrated the 26th anniversary of its creation by ending the truce in place since 1999. On 9 May, it claimed responsibility for 22 bombs, mainly in Corsica, but also at the taxation offices in Marseilles and the army barracks in the Paris suburb of Neuilly (Forcari, 2002a).

Both President Chirac's and Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin's inaugural speeches to Parliament mentioned the necessity of reforms in the Constitution and the decentralisation laws, and highlighted the issue of Corsica. Corsican nationalists rejected the vague projects presented as inadequate, and a back step from the Matignon agreement reached between the Jospin government and the members of the Corsican assembly (Forcari, 2002b).

Conclusion

Following the decisions taken by the Conseil d'Etat and the Conseil Constitutionnel in recent years²⁰, organisations promoting

minority languages have little hope of seeing their calls for equity and justice heard within the French political and administrative framework. They are increasingly seeking the support of European institutions.

In 1995, political organisations representing diverse French minorities started the *Fédération Régions et Peuples Solidaires de France* (Federation of Associated Regions and Peoples of France) which joined the *Alliance Libre Européenne* (ALE) / European Free Alliance (EFA). The EFA regroups minorities from the EU and has elected representatives in the European Parliament. The decision of 28 October, 2002 by the *Conseil d'Etat* to stop the integration of the *Diwan* schools in the French education system led the 9 Members of the European Parliament of that group to submit to the European Parliament a resolution stating that "this situation is so contrary to the European values of linguistic and cultural diversity and respect for minorities, that the European Parliament cannot allow a Member State, even one as powerful and prestigious as France, to flout these values with such impunity" (EFA News, 2003).

Following the big demonstration, which took place on 22 March, 2003 in Rennes in favour of the defence of Breton, the Cultural Council of Brittany decided to appeal to the European Court of Human Rights against the linguistic discriminatory nature of the French legislation (La Setmana, 2003).

The *Sindicat Occitan de l'Educacion* (SOE)²¹ appealed to the "European Committee of Social Rights of the European Council against the Perben law which disallows selected union organisations from contending professional elections" (SOE, 2003, p.9). The administration systematically invalidates their candidacy on the pretext that this union is not representative.

The debate that takes place at present in France concerning the law forbidding the wearing in schools of apparent religious signs, shows the growing strength of "anticommunitarism" particularism or multiculturalism, "perhaps the most reviled term in French republican vocabulary" (George, 2002, p. 61). Corsicans, Bretons... regionalists

are seen as part of religious and ethnic organisations that are challenging the French common good, the unicity of the Republic enshrined in the first article of the Constitution, and therefore undermining the French democratic process (Mace-Scaron, 2001).

As this feeling is widely shared by both the Right and the Left of the political spectrum, there is little hope of ever seeing a government willingly redress the blatant inequities of the centuries-old French linguicide policies. It is therefore certain that pressure will have to be exerted. Will it be peaceful and legal through the European Courts? Or will it be through a resumption of bomb attacks?

Notes

1. Statistics 2004: the major regional languages spoken in France are: Occitan (with between 3,5 and 5 million speakers), Alsatian (1 – 1,7 million), Breton (200,000), Corsican (170,000), Catalan (100,000 – 150,000), Basque (70,000). As the result of recent migrations, languages such as Arabic (1,5 – 2,200,000), Italian (380,000), Spanish (350,000), Polish (190,000) are also spoken but they present specific issues outside the scope of this study. Recent debates in the French parliament seem to suggest that politicians, when shaping official policies, treat migrant languages with the same contempt they treat regional languages.
2. In Great Britain, the first of several acts of legislation dealing with England's annexation of Wales known as the Acts of Union took place in 1536. Its provisions were very similar, as it stated that the intention was "to utterly extirpate all and singular the sinister usage and customs differing from" the English laws.
3. Of the Pre-eminence of the French Language.
4. A more detailed study on the linguistic policies of the Revolution can be found in de Certeau, 1975.
5. One of the months of the Revolutionary calendar.
6. Minister of Justice or Lord Chancellor.
7. "Freedom to think, to write and to inform cannot be coupled with a will to prevent the voicing of a culture and of a language".

8. Département (administrative entity) covering the French Catalan-speaking region
9. Talleyrand, Condorcet, Romme, Lakanal, Daunou, Sieyès, Le Pelletier et Bouquier, in particular, proposed various projects, cf. Parias, 1981.
10. This analysis was included in a paper given at the APSA conference in Canterbury (New Zealand) 27-30 September, 1998 and published for a while on the University of Canterbury website at: <http://www.pols.canterbury.ac.nz/ECSANZ/papers/%20jeanjean.htm> and then reproduced by Ben Vautier on his web site: <http://www.ben-vautier.com/2000/occitanie.html> with acknowledgement of its origins.
11. Press conference held 20 June, 2000.
12. Institut Universitaire de Formation des Maîtres (Teachers' Colleges).
13. Examination taken at the end of the 4th year of High School.
14. DDEN (délégués départementaux de l'éducation nationale) – The National Education Department delegates FCPE (Fédération des Conseils de parents d'Elèves des Ecoles Publiques). One of the parents' association La Ligue de l'enseignement (Education League) UNSA-éducation (Teachers' Union) SE-UNSA (Teachers' Union).
15. Comité National d'Action Laïque.
16. Law No. 94-665 of 4 August, 1994, relative to the use of the French language, Article 1.
17. As examples: France refused to ratify Article 30 of the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of Children which stated that children belonging to minorities had the right to be educated in their own language. More recently, in July 1999, France refused to ratify the European Charter on minority languages as the Constitutional Council deemed it unconstitutional.
18. Partit occitan (Occitania), Union démocratique bretonne, Frankiz Breizh (Brittany), Inseme per l'Avvene (Corsica) EAJ-PNB and Eusko Alkartasuna (Basque), Bloc Català, and ERC (Catalunya), Union du peuple alsacien (Alsace), Mouvement Région Savoie (Savoy) were represented plus the candidates from the Savoy League worked in conjunction with the federation.
19. People who do not want to see any transfer of power away from the French government to the European Union.

20. The Conseil Constitutionnel decreed on 15 June, 1999, that the European Charter for Minority Languages signed on 7 May was contrary to articles 1 and 2 of the French Constitution. It also ruled, as did the Conseil d'Etat, against the integration to the French Education system of the Breton *Diwan* schools.
21. Occitan Union in the Education.

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