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# LET'S PROMOTE OVERSEAS REGIONAL LANGUAGES FOR BETTER SOCIAL COHESION

Historically, the languages spoken in Overseas France have suffered from lack of recognition within the French Republic. Overseas French Territories have not had the same histories, identities or fights to preserve their regional languages as Metropolitan France – a fact that must be taken into account. The issue of social cohesion arises in particular, as the languages of Overseas France are its peoples' mother tongues, used in everyday life. Implementation of special protection and transmission provisions should therefore be a priority lever of action.

Seventy-five Languages of France are spoken in the Overseas regions, each one of them belonging to a cultural heritage common to the whole country and to the cultural heritage of humanity as a whole. The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages defines them as: "Languages that are traditionally used within a given territory of a State by nationals of that State who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the State's population; and different from the official language(s) of that State; it does not include either dialects of the official language(s) of the State or the languages of migrants". The report attached to the Opinion takes a highly detailed look

at the issues specific to each regional linguistic basin.

The ESEC takes a clear position on reinforcement of teaching of regional languages, provision of teaching materials for such languages, promotion of traditional knowledge and intangible practices, support for multilingual artistic creation, and legitimisation of regional languages in public services.

For the ESEC, it would appear more than ever necessary to understand that in no case is the teaching of regional languages an obstacle to the learning and mastery of French – very much to the contrary. The Ministry of National Education must guarantee better conditions for education in these languages in order to improve pupils' success rates: education delivered in their regional languages must be more systematically provided to all pupils; schooling in regional languages must enable uninterrupted continuation of studies without the need to change school in order to follow regional language courses; the baccalaureate option must be maintained in conditions that do not put it into competition with other living language options; and continuation of regional language studies in higher education should be possible in all territories.



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Regional languages also play an essential role in the construction of identities in Overseas France. In this respect, ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages is an essential factor in recognition and legitimisation of the diversity of Overseas cultures and identities, which in no way threatens national unity. In the ESEC's view, it is the only way of their being legally taken into account in order to ensure real equality, in particular in access to rights and public services.

# THE ESEC'S RECOMMENDATIONS

## 👉 Recommendation no.1

As the ESEC sees it, every child should be given the possibility of learning to read and write in their mother tongue just as much as in French. Primary school classes should be systematically taught in the regional language as well as in French, and not only in certain schools. Lessons delivered in regional languages should be taught by teachers and native speakers trained in teaching methods suited to the languages in question.

## 👉 Recommendation no.2

The ESEC asks the Ministry of National Education to take full account of the issues involved in education in regional languages. Such education should be promoted in the eyes of families and teachers alike. Consequently, the Ministry should create dedicated budgets, teaching posts and training courses enabling pupils to be systematically provided with education in their regional languages in Overseas France.

## 👉 Recommendation no.3

In the context of the reform of upper secondary education and the baccalaureate, the choice between a foreign living language and a regional language risks undermining such education. The ESEC asks the Government to reconsider this aspect of the reform and reassess the role of the native languages spoken in Overseas France, giving them greater legitimacy in all educational streams from primary school to the baccalaureate.

## 👉 Recommendation no.4

The ESEC recommends that parliamentary assemblies enact a constitutional law enabling France's ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

## 👉 Recommendation no.5

The ESEC requests the Délégation Générale à la Langue Française et aux Langues de France (DGLFLF – General Delegation for the French Language and the Languages of France) to continue its work for recognition of Overseas France's regional languages and to recognise the "English Creole" spoken on Saint-Martin as a Language of France. The ESEC supports the upcoming Etats Généraux du Plurilinguisme (Estates-General on Multilingualism), set to be held on Reunion Island in 2021, 10 years after the Declaration of Cayenne.

## 👉 Recommendation no.6

The ESEC calls for creation of a "French Overseas Regional Languages and Cultures" National Day.

## 👉 Recommendation no.7

Translations should be encouraged in order to facilitate access to such essentials as healthcare, education, the police, the law and the justice system. Oral expression in regional languages can be ensured in public services' reception areas. It will also be possible to systematically translate signage and information and communication supports and tools into regional languages without contravening the legal obligations regarding the use of French in the administration.

## 👉 Recommendation no.8

Public employees assigned to Overseas France, teachers in particular, should systematically receive induction training enabling a better approach to the languages and cultures of the areas in which they work.

## 👉 Recommendation no.9

The ESEC calls upon local authorities to join forces with the State to develop policies supporting expression in regional languages. As far as possible, public communication documents should be published in French and in regional languages.

## 👉 Recommendation no.10

The ESEC recommends increasing the visibility and promotion of regional languages and cultures in the France Télévision Group and the maintenance of France Ô.

## 👉 Recommendation no.11

The ESEC calls for funds for support of cinematographic and audiovisual creation in regional languages to be set up by each local authority or region, in order to lend support to local public and private initiatives.