

# The Basques fight for Basque as educatio language

*We hope to be able to organize another ICEC colloquium in the European Parliament in June 2022. The theme is education and language. To know better the sensitivities but also the difficulties we will bring you in the coming months contributions about the (harassed) education systems in the different ICEC countries. Matter of knowing what's going on and what's going on with us perhaps also hangs over our local heads. We start with the Basque Country. The text is from the hand of Josu Albero, ICEC spokesperson for the Basque Country.*



Dear friends of ICEC, in this article I will briefly describe the different linguistic models in force in the Basque Country, and their implementation in the different territories of the Basque Country.

It should be mentioned first of all that the Basque Country (Euskal Herria, in the native language) is divided into three political administrations, and each of them has its own educational model. There is, therefore, no single model for the whole country. The three parts of our country are:

1. the Western Basque Country, the Basque Autonomous Region (Euskadi) with the provinces Araba, Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa. This region has a population of approximately 2,200,000 inhabitants;

2. the Eastern Basque Country or Nafarroa / Navarre with a population of about 600,000 inhabitants;
3. the Northern Basque Country or Iparralde populated by about 300,000 inhabitants).

The first two parts (together named Hegoalde) are under Spanish administration; the third (Iparralde) under French administration.

## Western Basque Country

The Basque language was forbidden in education from 1936 to 1975, during the Spanish dictatorship of General Franco. In spite of this, from the middle of the 20th

century, people committed to the Basque language and culture created schools (in the form of parents' cooperatives) for the education of their children exclusively in the Basque language. These schools, called 'Ikastolak', operated in almost clandestine conditions, circumventing the iron control of the authorities of the Franco regime. From 1966 onwards, Franco's dictatorship softened the linguistic repression a little, and the ikastolas grew exponentially. In 1970 (still under the dictatorship) there were already about 120 ikastolak (most of them in the Western Basque Country), and about 12,000 students studying entirely in Basque.

After almost 40 years of dictatorship, the Western Basque Country recovered its institutions and its government in 1979. One of the priorities of the new Government was the normalization of the Basque language, harshly persecuted during the dictatorship of General Franco.

The Government of the Western Basque Country immediately took on the competences in the area of Education, and in 1982 enacted the law for the Normalization of the Use of the Basque Language. A year later, in 1983, it established three linguistic models valid for all educational centers, both public and private:

- Model A: entirely in Spanish, except for the compulsory subject of Basque language.
- Model B: bilingual, in Basque and Spanish.
- Model D: totally in Basque language, except for the compulsory subject of Spanish language.

Parents could choose the linguistic model they wished for their children. The public centers had to offer the 3 models, and the private ones could choose the models to offer. The Ikastolak, obviously, only worked with model D.



Since 1983, there has been a very clear tendency towards education in model D. This model was in the minority at the beginning, in 1983, but it is currently the majority model, not only in ikastolak, but also in public and private schools. Model B, and specially model A, are increasingly in the minority, which shows that parents are opting for schools that educate entirely in the Basque language.

So low is the proportion of students studying in Spanish-language or bilingual models that many schools no longer offer these models, because of the low demand. In the more Basque-speaking areas of the Western

Basque Country, all schools now operate exclusively in the D model.

In the compulsory education stage (up to 16 years of age) these are the percentages of students enrolled in the different models:

- Model D: 70%
- Model B: 20%
- Model A: 10%.

In the infant stage (6 years old) model A is almost non-existent:

- Model D: 80%
- Model B: 15%
- Model A: 5%

At the University, in 2018, 52% of the students studied their degrees in Basque language. Practically all university degrees can be studied in Basque language. Let us remember that in the Western Basque Country only 33% of the population is Basque-speaking.

The Government of the Western Basque Country is drafting a new Education Law, which it intends to implement during the current legislature. The draft of the law foresees that there will be only one educational model, in Basque language. In this way, the current system of 3 linguistic models would disappear.

#### **Eastern Basque Country or Navarre:**

As in the Western Basque Country, in Navarre the Basque language was also forbidden during the dictatorship of General Franco. Around 1960 the first Ikastola appeared there. In 1982, after the dictatorship, the Government of Navarre was formed. In 1986 the Law on the Basque Language appeared, much less ambitious than that of the Western Basque Country. It must be said that while in the Western Basque Country the government has almost always been in the hands of Basque nationalism, this has not been the case in Navarre.

There are four school linguistic models in Navarre, which the parents of the students can choose:

- Model G: exclusively in Spanish language.
- Model A: all in Spanish language, except for the Basque language subject.
- Model B: bilingual, in Spanish and in Basque language
- Model D: exclusively in the Basque language, except for the Spanish language subject.

In the compulsory education stage (up to 16 years of age) these are the percentages of students enrolled in the different models:

- Model G: 58%
- Model A: 15%
- Model B: 2%.
- Model D: 25%



The weakness of model B (bilingual) in Navarre must be emphasized.

The percentage of Basque speakers in Navarre is 15%. In the northern areas of Navarre, where the Basque language is most widely used, model D is hegemonic in schools.

#### **Northern Basque Country or Iparralde:**

22% of the Basques in the North Basque Country speaks Basque. In this area of the Basque Country, under French administration, the Basque language has no legal recognition. It must be remembered that the only official language in France is French. That is the only language in which teaching has traditionally been offered in public schools.

The first ikastola appeared in Iparralde in 1969. It must be said that the ikastolak were the first schools in France to offer a 'regional' language immersion system. The model was later copied in Brittany, Occitania and Northern Catalonia.

The Northern Basque Country was thus a pioneer in France in offering schools of immersion in its own language. And it is also the territory of the French state where most pupils study exclusively in the "regional" language. Indeed, at the Primary Education stage (up to the age of

12), 15% of the children study in Basque, in the ikastolak of The North Basque Country (38 ikastolak, with about 4,100 pupils). Let us compare these data with other territories of France:

- Iparralde: 15% of the pupils study exclusively in the native language (in the ikastolak).
- Northern Catalonia: only 2% of the pupils study in the native language
- Brittany: only 1% of the pupils study in the native language
- Occitania: only 0.2% of the pupils study in the local language

In Corsica, Alsace and Westhoek (the Dutch-speaking territory), there are no schools in the native language.

In addition, 27% of the children in the North Basque Country also study in a bilingual model, in public and private schools in the territory.

Recently, teaching in Basque has also been authorized in some public schools in the North Basque Country, but only at the level of pre-school education (3 years old). This is a novelty, since in France, teaching in "regional" language has never been authorized in public schools. There are 19 schools in Iparralde where this model is in operation, and the number is increasing every

year. A recent ruling by the French courts, however, may jeopardize this model in public schools.



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