

18.6.2015. David against Goliath

The Occitan language demands respect, and gets it

“*Que n’i a pro d’estar mespresats*” – enough of this contempt: by going on hunger strike under this angry banner, displayed in the windows of the Aquitaine assembly building that houses his office and spread via the social networks, David Grosclaude, president of the Partit Occitan, has succeeded in pushing back the scorn shown by the State.

The Jacobin rejection of regional languages makes no geographical or political concessions. It is a constant that expresses the fundamental nature of a State that wishes to dispose of the languages that express the culture and identity of different peoples.

In Corsica or the Basque country, it has taken the pretext of political violence but it refuses to grant co-official status to the language even when the violence ceases and the elected Assembly of the Corsican people is near unanimous in its deliberations. In Occitania, there is no political tension, just a desire to preserve all that can be preserved of a rich history and culture. But yet again it’s a “nyet”, and a forceful one.

David Grosclaude’s action won out against the State’s stubborn refusal: after a week-long hunger strike with substantial support locally, in the Béarn and in across the whole region of Aquitaine, as in the other “regions with a strong identity”, starting with Corsica where the Territorial Assembly offered its unanimous support, he obtained the letter signed by the ministers concerned confirming the creation of the public agency for the Occitan language requested by the regional councils of Aquitaine and Midi-Pyrénées, which had until then been blocked for want of a ministerial decision.

Subsequently François Hollande overruled the objections of Manuel Valls and directly nominated Christiane Taubira, Minister of Justice, to prepare a constitutional reform to allow France to ratify the European charter for regional and minority languages. With this momentum for a reform of the constitution via the Congress of Versailles in order to ratify the European charter for languages, we also hope to include constitutional recognition of the special nature of Corsica compared with the mainland regions.

David Grosclaude’s success must also be seen in its context, that of the regional elections. Up to the highest reaches of established power, there is still need to take account of a pro-Occitan electorate that can turn a Occitan region upside down. He therefore received support from several Socialist Party MPS and senators from the two regions, Aquitaine and Midi-Pyrénées.

RPS and the European Free Alliance offered their full support to David Grosclaude. In Corsica the Femu group won unanimous support for a motion in the Corsican Assembly (see opposite), and a delegation were in Bordeaux at the key moment of the mobilisation for a press conference intended to broaden his action. Late yesterday evening, David received the letter of confirmation from the ministers in due form, and it was to announce this success that we were around him on this sixth and final day of his hunger strike.

Republican disrespect is finally in retreat in Occitania. By the end of this parliament, the Occitan language will have a public agency responsible for the decisive policies required for its survival; five years of work by the regional elected representatives of the Partit Occitan which the machinery of the State wanted to bury.