

## 12.1.2017 PROTOCOL TO ENSURE LANGUAGE RIGHTS

185 measures across seven areas: fundamental rights, administration, education, socio-economic issues, toponymy, media, and culture. The protocol adopted on 17 December 2016 in Donostia/San Sebastian defines a new “roadmap” for all those, particularly in Europe, who are fighting to save their languages and the cultural diversity of Europe.

Twenty years on from the Barcelona declaration which defined “language rights”, this protocol marks a new step forward, the effective implementation of these rights. It was drawn up on the initiative of a number of non-governmental organisations: LinguaPax, PEN International, CIEMEN, ELEN, ECMI, UNPO, etc. All the cultures of Europe were present during the drafting process for the protocol. Micheli Leccia of Parlemu Corsu represented us at the official signing in San Sebastian/Donostia on 17 December, during an event which also marked the end of Donostia’s year as a European Capital of Culture.

The capital of the province of Gipuzkoa in Euskadi had chosen to promote Europe’s minority cultures during the year that it was a “European capital”, and, in partnership with UNESCO it organised a three-day keynote conference on the theme, held at the imposing Kursaal conference centre. This centre was packed with participants who had spent the year getting involved in cultural events and working towards the drafting of this protocol which is to relaunch collective action for a Europe of diversity. European Capital of Culture 2016, Donostia, is now the capital of minority languages in Europe.

This protocol can be downloaded from the Basque organisers’ site [protokoloa.eus](http://protokoloa.eus). Available in five languages, Basque, Spanish, English, French and Catalan, it revisits every existing text from the UN, Europe and UNESCO.

Its contents are exhaustive and cover all the measures required, as catalogued on the basis of the experiences of the many organisations involved in its drafting, in order to create the conditions for the effective protection of “minoritised” languages and, for the most threatened of them, to seek action to ensure that they do not join the list of “extinct languages” listed by UNESCO each time that it publishes its *Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger*.

The Basque language is particularly appropriate to host this mobilisation of the languages of Europe. It is one of the very few to have climbed back up the slippery slope and shed its tag of an endangered language through thirty years of language policies which have ensured that the younger generations return to it.

During the conference, François Alfonsi, former MEP and rapporteur for the European Parliament for a document on this subject supported by 92% of MEPs, was invited to take part in a discussion on the action that Europe needed to promote in this area. This discussion took place in the presence of the Basque authorities including Inigo Urkullu, lehendakari of the Basque Autonomous Community, and leading dignitaries from UNESCO present to promote the policy of protecting cultural diversity in Europe and worldwide.

“Cultural diversity and natural biodiversity are part of the living heritage required for the sustainable development of our societies” stated the report approved by the European Parliament. In consequence Europe needs to promote the same principles: define the territories where there is an

endangered language (using the principle used to define Natura 2000 zones for endangered species), set up measures financed directly from Brussels (along the lines of the Life programmes on natural diversity), and apply horizontal policies in these territories for incorporation into all the other policies (in the same way that biodiversity is incorporated into the common agricultural policy, development regional policy, fisheries policy, etc.)

This discussion was followed by speakers from the Basque government presenting the concrete results of thirty years of language policy, backed up by graphics and statistics, and from UNESCO representatives who attended in numbers in support of the Donostia/San Sebastian initiative.

Paul Bilbao, president of Kontsuela, the Basque organisation which coordinated the event, spoke in conclusion: “even though we are small communities, if we we unite, we have an enormous capacity for action”. In the wake of the events in Donostia, on 17 December a new day dawned for languages and linguistic diversity in Europe.