

## PRESENTATION

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The Decision 1934/2000/CE of the European Parliament and the Council, dated 17<sup>th</sup> July 2000, declared 2001 as European Year of Languages. Its basic aims are to promote awareness among citizens of the importance of the cultural and linguistic diversity within the European Union as a part of its collective wealth, and to encourage the learning of languages as a key to the personal and professional development of people.

The Catalan language is a cultural heritage asset and an element of identity shared by Catalonia and the Balearic Islands, with which they have made a valuable contribution to European and universal culture over the centuries in their own, original voice. Catalan is part of European linguistic and cultural heritage and without this Europe would be different from what it is. It would undoubtedly be less rich and less plural.

In this sense, the policy of support for the Catalan language implemented by the governments of Catalonia and the Balearic Islands, often without proper understanding or sufficient solidarity on the part of Spanish and European institutions, has successfully contributed to the preservation of Europe's linguistic diversity and to its collective heritage.

Because of a range of historical circumstances and due to very well known political and demographic reasons, neither the Catalan language, nor the culture which is expressed through it, are sufficiently well known in the Spanish state or in Europe, something which hinders the language's recognition.

The governments of the Balearic Islands and Catalonia have decided to implement a range of moves in order to commemorate jointly the European Year of Languages from the standpoint of the Catalan language. To this end, they have resolved to provide information

on some of the basic points of the Catalan language, and also on Aranese, in the European context.

Catalan is fully adapted to the needs of modern-day society as is borne out by the fact that it is ranked nineteenth in the world in terms of language presence on the Internet. Furthermore, the language is steeped in a rich literary and cultural tradition and has a great creative capacity, being the tenth most translated source language in the world. The total number of residents in the territories where it has official recognition make it the seventh most important language in the European Union, and its demographic weight is greater than the official languages of six of the states who are set to join the Union in the next few years.

Although Catalan is not an official language of the EU, it is in fact the official language in one sovereign state, Andorra, and together with Castillian Spanish, it is the official language in three autonomous communities in Spain. Moreover, on 11<sup>th</sup> December 1990, the European parliament approved a resolution recognising its value.

Added to this, within Catalonia, the land of the Aran Valley has its own language, Aranese, a variant of Occitan, which receives institutional recognition and support.

We believe that this study, promoted jointly by the Catalan and Balearic Islands governments, will contribute towards a greater knowledge of the reality of Catalan and help to place it within the European context so that it may become more valued as an indispensable part of Europe's cultural heritage.

JORDI VILAJOANA  
Minister of Culture  
Generalitat de Catalunya  
(Catalan Government)

DAMIÀ PONS  
Minister of Education and Culture  
Govern de les Illes Balears  
(Balearic Islands Government)