

DILEMMAS OVER THE OFFICIAL STATUS OF ASTURIAN LANGUAGE

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Abstract

The Asturian language does not have official status in Asturias, although the Statute acknowledges its regional significance. The issue of official status is a subject of lively social and political debate. Supporters view recognition as crucial for the language's survival, while opponents highlight economic burdens and compulsory measures. The debate is situated at the intersection of political interests and linguistic rights.

This study explores the potential impacts of official status, institutional and legal obstacles, and the main arguments in the discourse.

Keywords: Asturias, Spain, minority rights, language rights, official language

1. Introduction

The status of the Asturian language has been the subject of debate in Spain for decades. Although the language is spoken by a large part of the region's population, its legal status remains uncertain: it currently lacks official status and is only recognised as part of the cultural heritage. The question of the co-official status of Asturian goes beyond the issue of language rights: it is also a deeper political and social dilemma.

The issue of official language recognition is sharply dividing public opinion and political parties. While some see it as an affirmation of cultural identity and the right to use one's mother tongue, others fear that official status would reinforce regional nationalism and place an economic and administrative burden on public institutions.

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2. Languages of Asturias

Asturias is an autonomous community in the northwestern region of Spain. It has a population of 1 012 117 people, of whom more than 350 000 speak Asturian.¹ In addition to Asturian, it is worth mentioning the presence of Galician in Asturias, which is known in the region as Eonavian-Galician or Galician-Asturian. The name Eonavian-Galician refers to the geographical and cultural roots of the language. The Eo-Navia region is located on the western border of Asturias, in the neighbourhood of Galicia. This area gave the name to the variety of the language spoken here. *The Eo* and *Navia* denote two rivers, which are the dominant geographical features of the region, and thus symbolically link this variety of Galician to the region. It is home to the largest Galician-speaking community outside Galicia, with around 50 000 people. The dialect spoken here has many unique features that distinguish it from Galician.²

Asturian is the result of the development of Latin in the Iberian Peninsula, along with Galician, Portuguese, Castilian, Catalan and Aragonese. It is spoken mainly in Asturias, but is also present to a lesser extent in León and Zamora. In the Portuguese municipality of Miranda do Douro, the language spoken is Mirandese, a variety of the Astur-Leonese linguistic group. Miranda has recently been recognised as an official language in Miranda do Douro.³ This is particularly noteworthy given that Portugal has traditionally followed a unifying language policy, recognizing only Portuguese as the official language. As a result, the recognition of minority languages remains rare. By contrast, Spain, which proclaims in its constitution that it is a multilingual country and that it protects cultural and linguistic diversity, does not grant official status to Asturian.

Asturian was the official language of the Kingdom of Asturias in the 8th–10th centuries. In the 13th–14th centuries, it was used as the language of administration for drafting various laws, regulations, decrees and notarial deeds. Due to the growing dominance of the Kingdom of Castile, Castilian exerted increasing pressure on the highly educated classes, which intensified by the 14th and 15th centuries. However, this influence did not reach the lower classes, who continued to express themselves in Asturian. The rise of Castilian and the decline of Asturian was a long-term process, caused by modernisation, urbanisation and the centralising language policy of the Spanish state. The dominance of Castilian steadily increased as it became the exclusive language of education, administration and economic life, while Asturian was increasingly relegated to a narrow sphere of private life, especially in rural communities.⁴

¹ Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2021. <https://www.ine.es/> (Accessed on: 20 February 2025).

² Xavier FRÍAS CONDE: A brief outline of current and historical sociolinguistics of the Galician language. In: Roberto BOLOGNESI (ed.): *Le convergenze parallele*. Condaghes, Cagliari, 2007. 55–69.

³ Law No 7/99 of 29 January 1999 on the official recognition of the linguistic rights of the community of Miranda <https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/detalhe/lei/7-1999-182838> (Accessed on: 17 February 2025).

⁴ Ramón D'Andrés DÍAZ – Xulio Viejo FERNÁNDEZ: Rapport about the institutional obstacles to the normalisation of the Asturian language. In: Lorenzo SUÁREZ et. al. (ed.): *Bilingual socialization and*

3. The rise of the Asturian language

In the first half of the 20th century, Spain was marked by political instability and social tensions, which eventually led to the outbreak of civil war in 1936. The conflict lasted three years and ended in victory for the nationalist forces led by General Francisco Franco. From 1939, Franco imposed an authoritarian dictatorship aimed at Spanish unity and the consolidation of central power. Franco's dictatorship (1939–1975) was characterised by severe repression of minority languages and their associated cultures. During this period, the public use of any minority language was prohibited, and violations were punishable by fines.⁵

The early 1970s saw the emergence in Spain of movements for social change, promoting democratic reform and the recognition of cultural identity. These events coincided with the decline of General Franco's regime and the struggles of the various nationalities for autonomy. This included a renewed interest in the Asturian language. Initiatives were launched to strengthen the Asturian language in the fields of literature, education and culture.⁶ A series of events in the early 1970s contributed to the social and cultural development of Asturias. In 1969, *Los Amigos del Bable*⁷ was founded, whose activities were mainly limited to the collection of literary proposals and traditional songs, but one of its leaders, Lorenzo Novo, initiated the first Asturian Regional Language Assembly in 1973, which brought together language users and researchers, laying the foundations for the later language movement. In 1974, a section on *Conceyu Bable* was published in the Asturian Weekly, which won considerable support. This led to the creation of the legally recognised Asturian Language Council⁸, which, together with other Asturian associations, became the driving force of the Asturian language movement. The organisation saw language as a fundamental element of Asturian identity. It launched campaigns to promote the language in education, encouraged the press to use it, and promoted the literacy and cultural recognition of Asturian.⁹

In 1976, the Asturian Language Council also made political demands, such as the creation of a statute of autonomy. The movement resulted in the partial integration of the language into the education system and the emergence of a new generation of writers, known as the Rise. The process culminated in the establishment of the Asturian Language Academy in 1980, which became the institution responsible for language planning. The Academy's outstanding achievements include the creation of the Asturian Grammar (1998) and the Asturian Language Dictionary (2000). The most

bilingual language acquisition: *Proceedings from the Second International Symposium on Bilingualism*. University of Vigo – Galicia, 2002.

⁵ Jose Ignacio HUALDE et al.: *Introducción a la lingüística hispánica*. Cambridge University Press, 2010. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511808821>

⁶ DÍAZ – FERNÁNDEZ op. cit.

⁷ The English translation is *Friends of the Asturian language*. The term 'Bable' in the name of the organisation refers to the Asturian language.

⁸ *Conceyu Bable: Asturian Language Council*, own translation.

⁹ Xosé Lluís GARCÍA ARIAS: Breve reseña sobre la lengua asturiana. In: *Informe sobre la llingua Asturiana*. Academia de la Llingua Asturiana, 2002. 15–25.

important achievements of the movement are the recognition of Asturian in the Statute of Autonomy and the establishment of the scientific basis and literacy of the language.¹⁰

4. On the road to democracy: The language provisions of the Spanish Constitution

The arrival of democracy in Spain created politically favourable conditions for the protection and promotion of minority languages. The Spanish Constitution of 1978 recognises Castilian as an official language, while allowing autonomous communities to declare other languages as co-official in their own territory. Languages such as Catalan, Galician and Basque were then granted official status in their respective territories.¹¹ The Spanish Constitution names Castilian as the official language of the State and then states in the second paragraph of Article 3: *“The other Spanish languages will be official in the corresponding autonomous communities, according to the statutes of those communities.”*¹² The Statute of Autonomy of Asturias, however, does not recognise the official linguistic status of Asturias in its Article 4, stating instead that *“The Asturian language will be protected. Its use, dissemination in the media and teaching shall be promoted, always respecting local versions and the voluntary nature of learning. Asturias will regulate the protection, use and promotion of Asturian by law.”*¹³

In Asturias, Castilian (Spanish) is therefore the only official language, while Asturian is protected but does not have official status.

5. Reform of the Statute

In 1998, the Statute of Autonomy was amended, and the demand for the officialisation of the Asturian language once again became a central issue in the political arena, accompanied by mass demonstrations. In the end, the introduction of official status was not included in the new statute. In 1998, however, the Law on the Use and Promotion of the Asturian Language was adopted, which follows a more moderate approach.¹⁴

Article 4 of the Language Use Law states that *“Every citizen has the right to use and express himself or herself in the Asturian language, orally and in writing. ”* (...) *“The use of the Asturian language shall be considered valid in oral and written communication between citizens and the Autonomous Community of Asturias.”*¹⁵

¹⁰ Xulio Viejo FERNÁNDEZ: Asturian: Resurgence and impeding demise of a minority language in the Iberian Peninsula, *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 170, 1. (2004), 169–190. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl.2004.2004.170.169>

¹¹ FERNÁNDEZ op. cit. 169–190.

¹² Constitution of Spain, 1978.

¹³ Statute of Autonomy of Asturias, 1981.

¹⁴ Academia de la Llingua Asturiana: *Informe sobre la represión y non reconocencia de los derechos llingüísticos n'Asturies*. 2013. <https://lafozdelpielgu.org/spip.php?article562> (Accessed on: 17 February 2025.)

¹⁵ Law on the Use and Promotion of the Asturian Language. BOE-A-1998-10126 <https://www.boe.es/buscar/pdf/1998/BOE-A-1998-10126-consolidado.pdf> (Accessed on: 21 January 2025). Emphasis mine.

6. Asturian as an official language: Arguments for and against

The question of the official status of the Asturian language is a highly divisive issue for public opinion and political actors. Proponents argue that official status would ensure the survival of the language, enhance its prestige and strengthen regional identity. They also believe that recognition is an important means of protecting cultural diversity, in line with the Council of Europe's European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. However, opponents point mainly to the economic consequences of official status, such as the high costs of bilingual administration and education. They are also concerned that the compulsory use of the language could impose a burden on non-Asturians speakers, which could fuel tensions in the region. Another argument against co-officialism is that Spain already recognises five co-official languages: Catalan, Basque, Galician, Valencian and Aranese. If Asturian joins them, other minority languages, such as those of Aragon and León, and the Romani (Caló) language could claim similar status. In October 2022, a major public demonstration took place in the Asturian capital Oviedo, where 10 000 people took to the streets to demand official recognition of Asturian.¹⁶ This event shows that the language remains a subject of intense debate and social discourse. While official status is seen by many as a pledge for the survival of the language, the everyday use of the language by the Asturian population is contested: it is not clear how many people actually use Asturian on a daily basis.

According to the Asturian Academy of Languages, official recognition is an essential condition for the preservation of the language, and this level of protection is essential for its long-term survival.¹⁷ The Asturian Initiative was founded to build social and political consensus for the recognition of the official status of Asturian. The association emphasises its independence: it does not accept state support and adopts a positive, constructive approach. The aim is to recognise the rights of the Asturian language within a constitutional framework.¹⁸

However, the fight for the official status of the language is not universally supported. The opposition is mainly represented by the Vox party, which is strongly opposed to state support for minority languages. In their campaigns, they often criticise the Asturian language issue on nationalist grounds, further polarising the social debate.¹⁹

The Platform Against Co-officialism is a movement against the co-officialism of Asturian and Galician-Asturians languages, which they consider to be an 'artificial

¹⁶ Stephen BURGEN: 'It's my mother tongue': the fight for a fifth co-official Spanish language. *The Guardian*, (2022). <https://tinyurl.com/2s48pk4d> (Accessed on: 21 January 2025).

¹⁷ Alicia HERNÁNDEZ: Dónde se habla el bable y por qué dicen que es un idioma "en peligro". *BBC News Mundo*, (2022). <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-internacional-59547573> (Accessed on: 18 February 2025).

¹⁸ Iratxe ROJO: Hay un conflicto lingüístico en Asturias porque existen casos de discriminación. *El Mundo*, (2021a). <https://www.elmundo.es/espana/2021/11/10/618649afe4d4d81068b45d9.html> (Accessed on: 21 January 2025).

¹⁹ BURGEN op. cit

language regulation' that would be imposed on the Asturian population by force.²⁰ There has been peaceful coexistence among Asturians between those who speak the language and those who do not, but they perceive the reform as 'forced learning' and 'compulsory use'.²¹

6.1. Support for the officialisation of Asturian

According to a study entitled *Youth and the Asturian language*, carried out by Isabel Hevia on behalf of the *Federation of Youth Associations*, 86% of young people in Asturias would support the official status of Asturian. Of the 114 408 young people aged between 16 and 29, 416 were interviewed in 53 municipalities.²² According to the research leader, the positive results show that young people play a key role in the survival and renewal of the Asturian language.

Another poll, commissioned by the Citizenship Party, found that 66% of Asturians do not support the officialisation of the Asturian language. Of the 1 004 people surveyed, 51% said that granting official status was completely unnecessary, while 15% said it was 'not worth it' because of the expected economic costs. Overall, the results show that two thirds of Asturians are somewhat opposed to the officialisation of Asturian. Detailing the results, only 11% support official status wholeheartedly, while 23% think that although it could be supported, it is not timely at the moment. When analysed by political affiliation, 52% of socialist voters oppose the official recognition, while 35% do not think it is the right time. Among the Citizenship Party voters, the proportion of those who oppose the introduction of the official status reaches 79%. Party representatives stress that the results support their view that there is no social demand for the introduction of the official status.²³

According to data from the *3rd Asturian Socio-Linguistic Survey* (Euskobarómetro) in 2017, 53% of Asturians support the recognition of the language as an official language. Of these, 40% fully agree, while 13% are partially in favour. The percentage of those opposed is 25%, of which 18% strongly oppose and 7% are partially opposed.²⁴

The different figures on the support for the officialisation of Asturian can be attributed to several factors. It is worth considering who carried out the data collection. The

²⁰ Iratxe ROJO: Plataforma contra la Cooficialidad del asturiano: "No queremos llegar a los enfrentamientos que vemos en otras comunidades. *El Mundo*, (2021b). <https://www.elmundo.es/espana/2021/11/01/617e64c321efa0636d8b45de.html> (Accessed on: 21 January 2025)

²¹ ROJO (2021b) op. cit.

²² EL COMERCIO: Un estudio refleja que el 86% de los jóvenes asturianos apoya la cooficialidad. *El Comercio*, (2018). <https://www.elcomercio.es/asturias/estudio-refleja-jovenes-asturianos-apoya-cooficialidad-20181023153831-nt.html> (Accessed on: 15 July 2025).

²³ Josu ALONSO: Un 66% de los asturianos no quiere la oficialidad, según una encuesta de Ciudadanos. *Cadenaser*, (2021). https://cadenaser.com/emisora/2021/09/21/ser_gijon/1632243596_863542.html (Accessed on: 21 January 2025).

²⁴ Jordi PALMER: Los datos: un 53% a favor de la oficialidad del asturiano. *El Nacional.cat*, (2018). https://www.elnacional.cat/es/politica/datos-favor-oficialidad-asturiano_238074_102.html (Accessed on: 21 January 2025).

results may be influenced by whether a political party or an independent organisation commissioned the poll. In the former case, the wording of the questions or the sampling may be biased. The size and representativeness of the sample also play a role in shaping the results: a sample of 400-500 people, such as in the youth study, may not reflect the views of the whole population, while a survey based on a representative sample of more than 1000 people may be more representative.

6.2. Report on co-officialism

Asturian President Adrián Barbón's top political priority is to make the Asturian and Eo-Navian languages official, which has recently caused the administration serious problems. A report commissioned by the Asturias government has been made public, but has been kept secret since December 2020, despite requests from several parties to see the data. The report was produced at a time when the reform of the Statute of Autonomy was being discussed.²⁵

The report, prepared by eminent jurists and academics, states that the formalisation would oblige all public administrations to administer their affairs in Asturian and would make the language compulsory at various levels of education. This clearly contradicts Barbón's promise of 'moderate officialism'.²⁶ Barbón had previously referred to a kind of 'uncoerced', 'flexible' bureaucracy. He stressed that the bureaucracy he wanted to introduce would not oblige the population to use the language and would take account of social needs.

The report also analyses the economic impact of the measure under three possible scenarios: depending on the degree of formalisation, the costs could range between €18.1 million and €172.7 million, while the number of jobs created could vary between 394 and 4 114.²⁷

According to the government, the report is only an information document, not a formal action plan, and therefore has not been communicated to parliamentarians. Adrián Pumares, representing the Asturias Forum, sharply criticised Barbón, accusing him of not having acted with sufficient transparency, as he said the report would have been key to the negotiations. People's Party leader Teresa Mallada went further, saying Barbón had 'deceived Asturias' and that the government had concealed the existence of the document because it proved that the idea of 'moderate officialism' was not feasible. The People's Party has therefore called for a parliamentary inquiry into the matter. The Vox party, which most strongly opposes granting official status to the language, has even spoken of treason and called for Barbón's immediate resignation. Although it proposed a motion of censure to the People's Party, the party rejected it because it did

²⁵ Iratxe Rojo: El informe secreto sobre la oficialidad de la lengua asturiana se vuelve contra Adrián Barbón. *El Mundo*, (2022). <https://www.elmundo.es/espana/2022/02/16/620be6bfe4d4d8f9018b45ad.html> (Accessed on: 21 January 2025).

²⁶ In the original language, it is called *oficialidad amable*. Translated into English as 'flexible' or 'moderate' official recognition/status. It denotes an official status that is not coercive or imposing, but flexible and adaptable.

²⁷ Rojo (2022) op.cit.

not have the necessary majority. Nor were the supporters of officialdom satisfied. The Podemos party said that the content of the report was very positive, especially in terms of job creation, but they were puzzled by the silence. The United Left recognises that officialism will require economic sacrifices, but would be beneficial in the long term. However, they consider the publication of the report to be bad timing.²⁸

6.3. Consequences

The publication of the report has further polarised the political scene in Asturias, deepening the divisions between pro- and anti-establishment parties. The government's explanation has not dampened tempers, and the debate has become a central issue in the 2023 elections. Although President Adrián Barbón had earlier promised that Asturian language skills would not be a condition for the competitive exams for doctors and nurses.²⁹ The report says that Asturian language skills should be recognised in public service competitions. The teaching of Asturian would become compulsory at different levels of education. This would require adequate language training for teachers, which is not currently provided. A transition period of five years is proposed to achieve the required level. At least 50% of content in public media should be provided in Asturian. Institutions and their subordinate companies must publish all documents – decisions, regulations, autonomous legislation – in bilingual form. As regards the economic impact, three possible models have been outlined. The maximum model is estimated to cost €172.7 million and create 4 114 new jobs. The minimum model outlines a cost of €18.1 million and 394 jobs, which is close to the government's plans. Under the moderate model, the official Asturian language would cost €55 million and create 1 300 jobs.³⁰

7. Case studies on the use of Asturian

Case studies of Asturian language use highlight the legal, political and social situation of the language, as well as the obstacles and opportunities that arise in everyday use.

According to the Asturian Academy of Languages, there have been several occasions when NGOs have been unable to formalise the Spanish government's delegation in Asturias because they have submitted their documents in Asturian. For example, in 1985 the Association for the Defence of the Asturian Language, in 1987 the National Students' Council, in 1989 the Language and Education Group, several theatre groups

²⁸ Rojo (2022) op.cit.

²⁹ A competition (*oposición* in Spanish) is a selection procedure for a public sector job, used in Spain and other countries. The aim of the competition is to ensure the selection of the most suitable candidates in a fair and transparent way.

³⁰ Rojo (2022) op.cit.

and cultural associations were unable to register. In addition, documents written in the Asturian language were not accepted in the Delegation's register.³¹

These cases are reported only by the Asturian Language Academy and are neither confirmed nor denied by other sources. No information is available on what developments in the cases have taken place or whether there have been any further consequences.

7.1. Use of Asturian in public administration

In Case 27/2010 of 25 February 2010, the Constitutional Court ruled on the use of Asturian in public administration. The proceedings were initiated by the Council of the Administrative Court of Oviedo, following a complaint by an Asturian government employee. The complainant complained that his application for a staff permit, which he had submitted in Asturian, had been rejected. The application was lodged with the council in charge of the presidency, where he worked.³²

The administration justified the refusal on the grounds that Article 4(2) of the Law on the Use and Promotion of the Asturian Language only applies to communication between citizens and Asturias. It does not, according to them, cover civil servants when they contact the administration on official matters. The first paragraph of the article states that *“Every citizen has the right to express himself or herself in the Asturian language, orally and in writing”*. The second paragraph states that *“The use of Asturian in oral or written communication between citizens and Asturias shall be considered valid for all purposes.”*³³

According to the legal challenge body, the second paragraph of Article 4 of the law does not comply with the regulatory framework on language rights. This is because, without the recognition by law of the co-official status of Asturian, the autonomous community cannot regulate an essential element of that status. According to the judiciary, this provision would create a kind of ‘de facto co-officiality’, as it would recognise Asturian as having full legal validity in communication between the administration and citizens. The Constitutional Court finally concluded that the objection was unfounded. The law does not grant citizens the right to choose the language of administrative proceedings, but merely obliges the Asturian administration to process documents received in Asturian.³⁴

³¹ Academia de la Llingua Asturiana: Informe sobre la represión y non reconocencia de los derechos llingüísticos n'Asturies. *La Foz del Pielgu*, (2013). <https://lafozdelpielgu.org/spip.php?article562> (Accessed on 17 February 2025).

³² Nicolás BARTOLOMÉ PÉREZ: The jurisprudence on the Asturian language. *Lletres Asturianes*, 131, 1. (2024), 116–123. <https://doi.org/10.17811/laa.131.2024.116-123>

³³ Law on the Use and Promotion of the Asturian Language. BOE-A-1998-10126 <https://www.boe.es/buscar/pdf/1998/BOE-A-1998-10126-consolidado.pdf> (Accessed on: 17 February 2025).

³⁴ Alberto ARCE JANÁRIZ: *Sinopsis del Estatuto de Asturias*. 2003. <https://app.congreso.es/consti/estatutos/sinopsis.jsp?com=65> (Accessed on: 18 February 2025).

7.2. Use of Asturian in elections

The Central Election Commission has rejected a complaint by the political party *Andecha Astur* against an earlier decision by the Asturias Election Commission. The party had wanted to ensure that in the 2019 elections in Spain, the ballot counting commissions were informed that voters could vote in Asturian, in order to avoid the unjustified invalidation of votes. However, the electoral commission refused to do so because the application was not submitted in the official language. According to the reasoning of the commission, the use of languages by the electoral commissions is regulated by Law 39/2015 of 1 October³⁵, which states that the official language in public institutions is Spanish. Co-official languages may be used in autonomous communities, but in the case of Asturias, Asturian does not have such status. According to the Statute of Autonomy, the language must be protected and promoted, but its use is not compulsory and it is not an official language. The Electoral Commission also referred to the fact that Asturian is only considered valid for communication between citizens and Asturian institutions under the 1998 Law on the Use and Promotion of the Asturian Language. The Commission also decided that the party's application could not be accepted because the document submitted was long and difficult for the Election Commission to understand.³⁶

7.3. Use of Asturian in the Legislative Assembly

The legal status of the Asturian language has also been on the agenda recently. An important milestone was the Constitutional Court ruling 75/2021 of 18 March 2021, which declared the 2020 reform of the Legislative Assembly of the Principality of Asturias constitutional. The amendment was adopted by the plenary session of the Council on 1 July 2020. It allows the use of the Asturian language in the Asturian Legislative Assembly, so that members of the Government Council, officials, civil servants and everyone else can freely use the language in the Assembly.³⁷

The Parliamentary Group of the political party Vox challenged the new wording of Article 3 of the Statute before the Constitutional Court, considering it unconstitutional for two main reasons. Firstly, it was claimed that the amendment violated Article 3.2 of the Spanish Constitution and Article 4 of the Statute of Autonomy of Asturias by attributing to Asturian a status similar to that of a co-official language, thus allowing its widespread use in the Assembly. Second, it pleads infringement of the second paragraph of Article 23, according to which, for those Members who do not understand Asturian, the amendment prevents them from exercising their parliamentary control

³⁵ Act No 39/2015 on the Common Administrative Procedure of Public Institutions, 1 October 2015 BOE-A-2015-10565 <https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2015-10565> (Accessed on: 18 February 2025).

³⁶ *La Vanguardia: La Junta Electoral Central desestima un recurso de Andecha Astur sobre el derecho al voto en asturiano*. 2019. <https://tinyurl.com/yjvwfkhn> (Accessed on: 18 February 2025).

³⁷ Judgment No 75/2021 of 18 March 2021. BOE-A-2021-6621. <https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2021/04/23/pdfs/BOE-A-2021-6621.pdf> (Accessed on: 18 February 2025).

and supervisory functions. This article states that the functions of the Assembly include legislative work and control of the government. Vox argues that if the use of Asturian is allowed in the Assembly, it could create problems for those members who do not understand the language. According to their interpretation, this could hamper the efficiency of parliamentary work, in particular the performance of control and oversight functions.

The Constitutional Court rejected the appeal and ruled that the reform is in line with the Spanish Constitution. In its reasoning, it explained that Asturian is not an official language and that the amendment to the Statute does not confer this status on it, as its use is limited to the Assembly. The Constitutional Court's reasoning is based on the recognition of the Asturian language in the Statute (Article 4) and its development by law (Law on the Use and Promotion of the Asturian Language), as well as on Article 3(3) of the Constitution.³⁸

The Constitutional Court also referred to the provisions of Articles 7 (Part II) and 10.2 (Part III) of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages of the Council of Europe. Article 7 contains objectives and principles for the protection and promotion of regional and minority languages, such as taking firm action to preserve and promote them and encouraging the use of minority languages in public and private life, both orally and in writing. The second paragraph of Article 10 provides that regional and local authorities should ensure the use of minority languages in official documents, in disputes and in various areas of public administration, where the number of speakers so justifies.³⁹

The court also found that the amendment of the Statute did not violate Article 23.2 of the Statute, as it requires the Bureau of the Assembly to ensure the conditions of accessibility for the exercise of the rights of Members. An important element of the judgment is that it recognises Asturian as the native language of Asturias. While this may seem self-evident, it was not previously explicitly addressed in the Statute or the Law on the Use and Promotion of the Asturian Language. The Statute does, however, refer to the Asturian language and contains the basis for the regulation of its protection, use and promotion. The recognition of multilingualism in the Statute of Autonomy does not necessarily imply the granting of official status to the local language.

This judgment confirms the possibility that there may be languages in Spain which, although they do not have official status, have a legal basis which gives speakers certain linguistic rights.

7.4. Use of Asturian in local government

Article 8 of the Law on the Use and Promotion of the Asturian Language gives local governments in Asturias the opportunity to ensure the linguistic rights of citizens and to

³⁸ Article 3(3) of the Constitution states that *"the richness of the different linguistic modalities of Spain is a cultural heritage that will be the object of special respect and protection."* Emphasis mine.

³⁹ The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages adopted by the Council of Europe in 1992. <https://rm.coe.int/1680695175>

develop specific plans for the local use of Asturian. In this context, some municipalities have for decades been implementing language policies that promote Asturian and Galician-Asturian languages. A good example is the regulation of the municipality of Nava, which adopted a local decree in 2001 on the official status of Asturian.⁴⁰

However, the term ‘official nature of the Asturian language’ does not comply with the requirements of the second paragraph of Article 3(2) of the Spanish Constitution. In addition, the fact that some municipal regulations were drafted exclusively in Asturian posed a problem. Judgment 902/2005 of 3 June 2005 of the Supreme Court of Justice of Asturias clearly stated this, and this was later confirmed by Judgment 4171/2008 of 4 July 2008, following an appeal against the original decision.⁴¹

These judgments have also annulled local language policy regulations in several municipalities. As a result, the declaration of the official status of Asturian in the municipalities of Morcín, Llaviana, Bimenes, Llanera, Casu, Castrillón and Llangréu was annulled. These declarations of official language status at local level were of symbolic rather than practical importance. However, on the basis of the second paragraph of Article 3 of the Constitution and Article 4 of the Statute of Autonomy of Asturias, these decrees were annulled. According to the reasoning, only the Statutes of Autonomy are empowered to grant official status to a language and therefore the municipalities did not have the power to take such decisions.

8. Conclusion

The question of the official status of the Asturian language goes beyond the linguistic dimension: it is closely intertwined with regional identity, economic planning and political strategy. Proponents stress the importance of protecting cultural heritage and preserving minority languages, while opponents point to the high costs of bilingual administration and education, as well as legal obstacles. The issue is creating political tensions and presents a major challenge to the Asturian government. Officialising the language would require substantial institutional reform, but in the long term, it could enhance the prestige of the Asturian language. However, public support remains uncertain: opinion polls have produced mixed results, making it unclear what proportion of the population would support granting the language an official status.

Regarding the use of language in public administration, the Constitutional Court has ruled that citizens do not have the right to choose the language of administrative procedures, although documents submitted in Asturian must be processed by the authorities. Although some local authorities have supported the use of the language for decades, they cannot legally declare its official status. Initiatives to expand language use often face institutional obstacles. A good example is the rejection of an initiative that would have allowed voters to vote in Asturian. This case also shows that the current status of the language severely limits its use in official fora. On a positive note,

⁴⁰ BARTOLOMÉ PÉREZ op. cit.

⁴¹ Unfortunately, judgments are only available from secondary sources. BARTOLOMÉ PÉREZ op. cit.

the recognition of the use of Asturian in the Assembly is a positive development. This is a step towards preserving linguistic diversity and making it more visible.

The status of the Asturian language remains precarious and politically divisive. Although measures have been taken to protect and promote the Asturian language, legal and political obstacles to its official recognition remain in doubt.

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