

GALICIAN LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY TODAY - CAN LEGAL PROTECTION AND PROMOTION SAVE A LANGUAGE?

1 Introduction

On 19 September 2023, José Ramón Besteiro, politician for the Socialists' Party of Galicia (PSdeG-PSOE), walked to the podium of the *Congreso de los Diputados* [the lower Chamber of the Spanish parliament] in Madrid and addressed the other members of the chamber in Galician.¹ The moment he opened his mouth, representatives from the far-right party *Vox* got up and left the room in protest, leaving behind the newly implemented translating devices. What made Besteiro's speech possible was a decision of the Bureau of the Congress of Deputies from 13 September 2023. According to that decision, Basque, Catalan, Galician, Aranese, Asturian, and Aragonese became co-official languages in the work of the Congress of Deputies. Besteiro's speech was the first time in Spanish history that a member of Congress spoke in the co-official language of an autonomous Community.

The language in question, Galician, is perhaps not the most obvious source of tension in modern-day Spanish politics; Catalan and Basque seem to stir more emotion and discontent. Yet its usage by Besteiro is the culmination of a process of oppression and resistance, where questions of cultural and national identity come hand-in-hand with the history of a community with distinct values and characteristics. After decades of oppression and negligence, today, Spain seems to be more committed to protecting these regional languages than probably

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¹ Lavozdeg Galicia. "Vox Interrumpió El Discurso de Besteiro En Gallego En El Congreso y Se Marchó Del Hemiciclo." *La Voz de Galicia*, La Voz de Galicia, 19 Sept. 2023, www.lavozdeg Galicia.es/noticia/espana/2023/09/19/congreso-estrena-uso-lenguas-cooficiales-pletos/00031695117680230210628.htm, accessed: 13.10.2024.

ever throughout its history. Recently, another significant development happened: in August 2023, during its presidency of the Council of the European Union, Spain asked to declare Basque, Catalan and Galician official EU languages. Although the request was put on hold by the Council of the European Union on 19 September 2023, this move marks a shift from previous Spanish policies, even though it was a set of unique domestic political circumstances that made it possible.²

Language is crucial to Galicia and for certain other Autonomous Communities of Spain. The aim of this paper is to provide a non-exhaustive snapshot of current Galician identity through the lens of language. In order to do this, the paper will juxtapose salient historical developments with a content analysis of relevant legislation in force. Given that language use and identity are perpetually evolving, this paper will provide a comprehensive overview of their current status and subsequent changes in this subject matter. It will then analyse the successes and failures of domestic legislation based on a recent assessment by the Committee of Experts of the Council of Europe.

The primary sources of this research are in Galician, Portuguese, and Spanish, complemented by some English language sources. The terms “Galicia” and “Galiza” are mutually interchangeable but preferred by different entities. The term “Galicia” is used both in Galician and in Castilian (Spanish) and is the preferred term by the *Real Academia Galega*, which regulates the Galician language as it is used in official documents and taught in schools in Galicia. It is also the term the Galician Autonomous Community prefers in its statutes. The term “Galiza” is also used in both Galician and Portuguese and is preferred by the *Associação Galega da Língua*, an association of scholars which is more connected with the *reintegracionismo* movement, which advocates for an alignment with Portuguese standards of writing. This study will use the English term “Galicia” in a neutral manner, refraining from

² After incumbent prime minister Pedro Sánchez called for early elections on 23 July 2023, the election results were inconclusive enough to provide regionalist/independentist political parties with leverage to pressure the newly established government with their political demands, including those pertaining to linguistic issues, in exchange for supporting the socialist minority governments other policies.

taking a position in the argument. The English term “Galician” will also be utilised for naming the language instead of Galego.

2 Historical Context

2.1 *Gallaecia and the Galician Kingdom*

Galicia traces its roots as a political entity to the 3rd century with the establishment of the Roman province of Gallaecia.³ Before the arrival of the Romans, this land on the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula was inhabited by Celtic peoples, among them the “Gallaecus” (in Galician and Portuguese, “Galaicos”) to which historians trace the modern name “Galicia/Galiza” and “Gallego/Galego” to.⁴

The decadence of the Roman Empire and the Germanic invasion of Western Europe led to the establishment of the Kingdom of Galicia, which took form as a Suevi⁵ entity and was later integrated into an Iberian Visigoth kingdom. It is important to note that this kingdom is regarded in the academic world but especially emphasized in Galician historiography as “the first kingdom to officially adopt Catholicism and to mint its own coinage”.⁶ While the historians who typically adhere to this stance can be considered partial due to their connections with the *rexurdimento* movement, this position gives insight into how Galician historians and thinkers regard Galicia and its identity: the origin of the Galician nation can be traced back to an ancient, legitimized medieval kingdom. Interestingly, during this Germanic period, kings and rulers, both Suevi and Gothic started styling themselves as “King

³ Smith 1996.

⁴ Blazquez 1989.

⁵ A Germanic people originating from the Elbe river region that overran the territory of Gallaecia in the early 5th century.

⁶ Xunta de Galicia. Consellería de Cultura e Turismo, et al. “Galiciana: Biblioteca Dixital de Galicia.” *Na. Biblioteca Dixital de Galicia > Consulta*, DIGIBÍS, 6 June 2011, biblioteca.galiciana.gal/es/consulta_aut/registro.do?control=BDGA20110019631, accessed: 13.10.2024.

of Galicia”⁷ indicating that the Community and importance associated to it already had some kind of identity worthy of a title.

Figure 1: The Kingdom of Gallaecia



Source: *Gallaecia, mapa*. Wordpress.Com, Lliga Celta d'Asturies, <https://liligaceltadas-turies.files.wordpress.com/2017/08/gallaecia-mapa.jpg>, accessed: 15,11,2024

The Kingdom of Galicia continued to exist as an entity throughout the Muslim conquest after 711 and also during the *Reconquista*. Whether integrated into a caliphate or an early post-Arab Christian kingdom, the kingdom and its independent Catholic church with a seat in Braga and later Santiago de Compostela persisted.

A pivotal change occurred, however, in the years between 1091 and 1179. During this period, Galicia was part of the greater kingdom of Léon, ruled by Afonso VI. As a reward for help in military campaigns against the Moorish caliphates in the south, Afonso awarded the

⁷ Gemblacensis, Sigebertus. *Liber De Scriptoribus Ecclesiasticis*, 1030.

county of Portugal to Henry of Burgundy, as well as the hand of his daughter Teresa in marriage. This ultimately led to the political independence of the County of Portugal from the Kingdom of Galicia, which culminated in 1143 with the establishment of the Kingdom of Portugal under Afonso Henriques.

Figure 2: Christian Kingdoms of Iberia at the turn of the 12th century



Source: <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portugal>, accessed: 11.10.2024.

From that point on, the territories that we today call Galicia have been split politically from the territories of northern Portugal. While back then, the common language, “Galaico-Português”, spoken on both sides of the Miño river, was essentially the same and was used both by higher class nobility and the people; with the political separation, this connection was broken. Furthermore, over the next centuries, as Galicia lost prominence within the kingdoms of León and Castilla-León, the language in the north would also lose importance and become associated with poorer, lower-class people away from urban centres, while the Galician nobility would opt for Castilian. In Portugal, Galician-Portuguese language and culture continued to evolve and gained prominence as the language of both the court and people.

Ultimately, this process has continued throughout most of Galician history. In the north, this period is referred to as the “*seculos escuros*”⁸ (dark centuries) by Galician historians since Galician culture was put aside and literary tradition dropped immensely, making Galician an unstandardised, rural and disregarded language. The ramifications of this declining status culminated in 1833 when the Kingdom of Galicia (along with other Spanish kingdoms) was dissolved to create a centralised Spanish state.⁹ The consequence was the disintegration of Galicia into four provinces: A Coruña, Lugo, Ourense, and Pontevedra. This administrative division continues to this day.¹⁰

The mid-19th century was marked all over Europe with growing national feeling. As a consequence of this change, later, when the *Revolución Gallega* or *Levantamento Galego*¹¹ took place in 1846, a popular attempt was made to reinstate the *Xunta do Reino da Galiza*, the historical representative governing assembly of Galicia disbanded in 1834, and regain some independence from the new centralised and liberal Spanish state. Although this uprising was a failure as a whole, it is still regarded as a sign of continuous Galician identity and irreverence.

2.2 *The Rexurdimento*

A turn on the tide came during the second half of the 19th century with a revival period called the *rexurdimento* (resurgence). Romanticism, a major intellectual movement, put emphasis on regionalism and placed a positive value on regional traditions and languages. This period coincided with the Catalan *Renaixença* on the eastern flank of Spain, and was marked by, amongst other relevant events, the publishing of books in Galician, the usage of the language for poetry and music, as well as in newspapers. The beginning of the *Rexurdimento* is connected

⁸ Ponte Far 2010, 30.

⁹ Coronas González 2005.

¹⁰ Ley organica de Galicia art.2

¹¹ Villares 1985, 175.

to a banquet held in Conxo (Santiago de Compostela) on 2 March 1856, attended by many well-read students and workers.¹² It marked a turning point in Galician culture with initiatives to write, speak, standardise and create culture in the Galician language.

However, in contrast to this cultural revival, these decades were also marked by a mass emigration to the New World motivated by poverty and the collapse of traditional local industries. Emigration was not a novel occurrence for Galicia; however, between 1836 and 1880, its rate escalated from 2.5 to 3.9 per 1.000 individuals, establishing Galicia as the leading source of emigration from Spain, accounting for 10 % of the nation's population, while constituting approximately 40 % of those departing Spain during that time period.¹³

2.3 The Second Spanish Republic and the Franco regime

In 1931, Galicia became an autonomous region under the Second Spanish Republic, yet this status did not last long. After the February 1936 elections, Spain entered into political chaos, leading to the *coup d'état* of 17 July 1936 by Francisco Franco. The Galicia-born general started his revolt in Spanish Morocco, a protectorate of Spain at that time, but the army uprising rapidly spread to several regions of the country, including Galicia, which the rebels managed to secure in the first phase of the civil war and hold until victory. Although the region did not become a theatre of war between the Republicans and the Nationalists, the rebels executed several leading politicians and intellectuals, altogether some 4.700 people only in Galicia between 1936 and 1939.¹⁴ Galicia, like other regions, was deprived of its autonomy provided by the Constitution of 1931.

The following period, the subsequent *castellanización*, is nicknamed *longa noite de pedra* (long night of stone). The name refers to a book of

¹² Ponte Far 2010, 10.

¹³ Roel 1992, 189.

¹⁴ Source: <https://nomesevoces.net/recursos/informes/1/informe-de-resultados-vitimas-galicia-1936-1939>, accessed: 13.10.2024.

poems of the same name, published in 1962, by Celso Emilio Ferreiro, in which he disagreed with the official cultural and linguistic policies of the Franco regime.¹⁵ The main feature was the limitation of Galician, which had already started at the time of the Civil War. On 18 May 1938, the Ministry of Justice banned the official use of any languages other than Castilian Spanish, while on 16 March 1939, the Under Secretary of Publishing and Propaganda declared the use of the regional languages forbidden. In the late 1930s and 1940s, there were not only many sources of law on the prohibition of the use of languages other than Castilian but also the social environment was unfavourable for the use of regional languages.¹⁶

Three significant institutions promoted Castilian during the dictatorship. The Roman Catholic Church forbade the use of Galician until 1969, despite the 1963 decision of the Second Vatican Council on the use of the local languages instead of Latin. Another institution promoting Castilian was public schooling, nationalised in 1936, where physical violence against Galician-speaking students and their ridicule for language use was frequent. Mass media of the time, i.e. TV and radio, also contributed to the strengthening of Spanish positions in Galicia.¹⁷ These all resulted in Castilian gaining importance in urban centres, but the language also entered remote rural areas. It was, therefore, the diaspora of Galician origin in South America that played a crucial role in the cultivation, preservation and modernisation of the language.

After 1950, however, oppression started to ease to some extent. First, the creation of publishing houses was allowed, which resulted in Galician reappearing in culture, although their activity and the cultural products in Galician often became subjects of degrading criticism.¹⁸ Changes continued in the 1960s, mostly still in the sphere of culture: the Galician Literature Day has been celebrated since 1963; the Department of Galician Language and Literature was created at

¹⁵ Source: <https://consellodacultura.gal/especiais/loia/historia.php?idioma=2&id=75>, accessed: 12.10.2024.

¹⁶ Rodríguez da Torre et al. 2016, 19-24.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

the University of Santiago de Compostela in 1965; and the Galego Language Institute came into existence at the same university in 1968. This institute advocated for the use of the original place names in Galician and the reinstatement of public education in Galician. Although permitted by the educational law of 1970 in elementary schools, this latter did not happen until the schoolyear of 1979/1980.

2.4 The democratic Spain and its constitution

The fall of the Francoist regime resulted in significant changes in Spain, and the new, democratic state had to become a decentralised one to counter former Spanish centralisation. This led to the adoption of the 1978 Constitution, which based the country on the system of autonomous communities, and was completed with two autonomous cities, Ceuta and Melilla, in the 1990s. The powers of these autonomous entities vary according to their preferences within the constitutional framework; thus, the Spanish model is based on asymmetric autonomies.

Figure 3: The administrative organisation of Galicia as per article Art.2 of the law 1/1981



Source: "Organización Administrativa de Galicia." Instituto Geográfico Nacional, Ministerio de Fomento. found at https://www.ign.es/espmap/figuras_spain_bach/pdf/Espana_Fig_02_texto.pdf, accessed: 15.11.2024.

For certain Autonomous Communities, including Galicia, language issues have become crucial to regulate. It was now legal since countering Spanish centralisation also meant the end of *castellanización*, which opened the way for Galicia and other autonomous communities to protect and promote their own languages. Para. 2 of Article 3 of the Spanish Constitution created the legal possibility to declare “the other Spanish languages” co-official in the respective autonomous communities. It is to be stressed, however, that this does not mean an equal status for those languages since no Spaniard is obliged to know any language other than Castilian Spanish.¹⁹ Inequality is also shown by the fact that currently, there are some 500 rules of different kinds at the state level that oblige the use of Spanish in various spheres of social life, but there is not a single one to oblige the use of Galician or any “other Spanish language”.²⁰

3 Language regulation concerning Galician

The co-official Galician is spoken today by some 2,000,000 people, among whom some 1,500,000 speak it as a native tongue. Besides Galicia, it is used in the western areas of Asturias, Leon and Zamora by their autochthonous populace. Furthermore, there are important Galician-speaking communities in cities such as Barcelona, Zurich, Montevideo and Buenos Aires.²¹ Due to the above-detailed historical developments, the first edition of the Orthographic and Morphological Norms of the Galician was published only in 1982 by the Royal Galician Academy and the Galego Language Institute. This was followed by a more complex edition in 1995 and a revised version in 2003, which is in effect to this day.²² Parallel to the language codification, the legal framework for its use was also developed on the national and regional levels. We will analyse the

¹⁹ del Valle 2000, 109.

²⁰ Ferreiro 2024.

²¹ See: Territorio no que se fala, at: <https://www.lingua.gal/o-galego/conhecendo/territorio-no-que-se-fala>, accessed: 13.10.2024.

²² Fernández 2003.

components of the regional legislation next, as we have previously reviewed the stipulations of the Spanish constitution.

3.1 The statute of the Autonomous Community of Galicia (law 1/1981)

In 1981, with the advent of democracy in Spain, the *Estatuto de Autonomía para Galicia*²³ was passed into law. In this organic law, some basic principles of the role of Galician identity and language were consolidated, of which it is important to highlight three.

First, in Art. 1 Section 1 the statute affirms Galicia as a “historical nationality”, and in Section 2 it declares the Autonomous Community of Galicia’s primary goal the “defending of the Galician identity and its interests and the promotion of solidarity between all of the Galician people”.

Second, in Art. 5, the statute affirms the Galician language as “the language proper to Galicia” and establishes it as co-official with the Castilian, stating that “all have the right to know and use both of them”. This is a significant step towards protecting the Galician language as it lays the groundwork for the teaching of Galician in public schools, and it guarantees the publishing of media and literature in this language. In Art. 5 Section 3, the organic law further instructs the Autonomous Community to “guarantee the normal and official use of both languages”, and it takes a step further by requiring the Galician public institutions to “promote the use of Galician in all areas of public, cultural and informative life, and make the needed means to facilitate its knowing available”. The wording of Article 5 clearly makes Galician the privileged language of the Autonomous Community and guarantees a positive right of all Galicians to use and learn the language.

²³ Congreso de los Diputados. Ley Orgánica 1/1981, de 6 de abril, de Estatuto de Autonomía para Galicia. (BOE Núm. 101, de 28 de abril de 1981). 1992. Imprenta Nacional del Boletín Oficial del Estado. Available at: <https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-1981-9564>. Accessed: 13.10.2024.

Third, in Art. 2, the organic law establishes matters of exclusive jurisdiction of the Autonomous Community. Amongst these, we can find fairs and market halls,²⁴ organisation of its institutions and self-government,²⁵ various juridical aspects of territorial organisation²⁶ and the “*promotion and teaching of the Galician language*”.²⁷ This means that Galician-elected bodies have sole jurisdiction over matters that directly impact Galician day-to-day life, culture and economic resources. The fact that the law mentions teaching and the promotion of Galician as a matter of exclusive jurisdiction means that the Autonomous Community of Galicia is exclusively obliged to promote Galician in a way in which the central Spanish government cannot intervene, giving it autonomy over a pivotal aspect of Galician identity.

3.2 The Law of Linguistic Normalization

A crucial legal document regulating the use of Galician is the Law of Linguistic Normalization, adopted in 1983 by the Galician Parliament. This not only reiterates the co-official status of the two languages but also encourages the use of Galician in all spheres of life. The already mentioned unequal status between the Castilian and the regional languages, however, becomes clear again if we look back to the history of this law. In its first adopted version, in Article 1 par. 2, the Galician lawmaker imposed the obligation for all Galicians to know Galician and the rights to use it. The Spanish Government, however, challenged the law before the Constitutional Court, which annulled the aforementioned rule in 1986.²⁸

In Art. 6 Section 2, the law emphasises that the administrative actions in Galicia will be valid and will produce their effects regardless of

²⁴ *Ibid.* Art 27, 16.

²⁵ *Ibid.* Art. 27, 1 and 2.

²⁶ *Ibid.* Art 27, 2, 3, 10, and 11 amongst others.

²⁷ *Ibid.* Art 27, 20

²⁸ del Valle 2000, 110.

the official language used, while Art. 6 Section 3 stipulates that public authorities of Galicia will promote the use of the Galician language, orally and in writing, in their relations with citizens. Art. 10 declares that Galician toponyms will have the sole official form in Galician and that it is up to the *Xunta de Galicia*, the regional government, to determine the official names of Galician toponyms.

3.3 Further Galician legislation regarding language usage

The functioning of the local administration is regulated by Law 5/1997 on the Local Administration of Galicia.²⁹ Art. 7 Section 1 declares Galician as Galicia's own language and the language of local administration, yet Section 2 provides equal rights for local authorities to use Spanish. Furthermore, Art. 7 Section 3 states that the *Xunta of Galicia* will ensure the incorporation of Galician in local administration, especially through training programs for officials working there. Similarly, Law 1/2008 on the Galician Civil service,³⁰ amended by Law 2/2009 exclusively for this purpose, reiterates the equal status of the two co-official languages.³¹ In Art. 35 of the Law 1/2008, the legislator states that the administration will guarantee the constitutional and linguistic rights of Galician citizens, both to the Galician, as Galicia's own language, and Castilian, the official language in Galicia.

Considering the digital development in Art. 7 Decree 201/2011 on regulating the presence of the General Administration and the regional public sector of Galicia on the Internet obliges public administration to provide equal access to online contents and services both in

²⁹ Ley 5/1997, de 22 de julio, de Administración Local de Galicia. Available at: <https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-1997-21040>. Accessed: 13.10.2024.

³⁰ Decreto Legislativo 1/2008, de 13 de marzo, por el que se aprueba el texto refundido de la Ley de la función pública de Galicia. Available at: https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2008-11791. Accessed: 13.10.2024.

³¹ Ley 2/2009, de 23 de junio, de modificación del texto refundido de la Ley de la función pública de Galicia, aprobado por el Decreto Legislativo 1/2008, de 13 de marzo.

Galician and Spanish,³² yet Section 3 requires Galician to be the default navigation language. The role the regional administration plays in promoting Galician in the digital world is of extreme importance since the digital-online presence of Galician is very limited, with less than 0.1% of websites using it.³³

Law 2/2012 on the general protection of consumers and users in Art. 11 point i. generally compels competent authorities to ensure the use of any of the official languages of the Autonomous Community.³⁴ In contrast, detailed regulation of language is articulated in Chapter VI. According to Art. 45 Section 1, the language of communication by the competent administration is to be Galician unless the addressee of the communication expressly asks for Spanish, the other co-official language. Written communication to Galician consumers must be in one of the co-official languages as specified under Art. 45 Section 3, yet there is no obligation to label and advertise products or services in Galician. As a consequence of this and in conformity with Art. 46 Section 2, all labelling of products, advertising, offers, promotions or commercial communications carried out in Galicia can be done in any of the official languages of the Autonomous Community of Galicia.

3.4 Language use in regional public education

Language of schooling has long been debated in Galicia. Even the regional PP (PPdeG)³⁵ government found it important to promote Galician when they elaborated a General Plan of Galician Normalization in the mid-2000s. In 2007, a leftist-Galician nationalist coalition

³² Decreto 201/2011, do 13 de outubro, polo que se regula a presenza da Administración xeral e do sector público autonómico de Galicia na internet. Available at: https://www.xunta.gal/dog/Publicados/2011/20111028/AnuncioC3C1-211011-7835_gl.html. Accessed: 13.10.2024.

³³ Sánchez et al. 2023, 143-144.

³⁴ Lei 2/2012, do 28 de marzo, galega de protección xeral das persoas consumidoras e usuarias. Available at: <https://www.xunta.gal/dog/Publicados/>.

³⁵ Partido Popular de Galicia, the Galician affiliate of the Spanish Partido Popular.

(PSdeG-PSOE³⁶ and BNG³⁷) introduced Galician as the only language in non-mandatory-nursery schools between the ages of 0 and 3 to counter the loss of the Galician. In 2010, the new PP government introduced a one-third rule for elementary schools, implying that 1/3 of the subjects were to be taught in Spanish, Galician, and English.³⁸ This latter, however, was denounced as anti-constitutional by the Constitutional Court since no one is obliged to learn any other language than Castilian Spanish.

Currently, the Decree 79/2010 of the *Xunta de Galicia* regulates language use in public education.³⁹ Art 4 Section 1 guarantees the equal acquisition of competence in the two official languages of Galicia. In practice, this means, according to Art 6 Section 3 and 4, that in primary education, the subject of Natural, social and cultural environment is taught in Galician, while Mathematics is in Castilian, and the rest of the subjects in either Galician or Castilian in a way in which the same %age of weekly hours is ensured. In high schools, the subjects of Social Sciences, Geography and History, Natural Sciences, Biology and Geology are taught in Galician, while Mathematics, Technology, Physics and Chemistry are in Castilian (Art. 7 Section 3). Grammar and literature are taught in Galician and Spanish (Art 12 Section 2), respectively, while in breaks students are allowed to use any of the two official languages according to their preference (Art 12 Section 3).

Despite this legislative framework, however, the experience shows a decline in language knowledge among schoolchildren: a survey conducted between 2018 and 2020 in Ames municipality, Santiago de Compostela region, showed that 11.5% of the first-grade students coming from a Galician-speaking family renounced the family language

³⁶ Partido de los Socialistas de Galicia-PSOE, the member party of the national Partido Socialista Obrero Español in Galicia.

³⁷ Bloque Nacionalista Galego, a leftist Galician nationalist political party.

³⁸ Skobel 2010, 17-18.

³⁹ Decreto 79/2010, de 20 de mayo, para el plurilingüismo en la enseñanza no universitaria de Galicia. Available at: https://www.xunta.gal/dog/Publicados/2010/20100525/Anuncio17BE6_es.html. Accessed: 13.10.2024.

in their first contact with the school.⁴⁰ Of course, this is only one particular example, but as we will see in Chapter 4, general knowledge of Galician is constantly declining.

3.5 The evaluation of language policy on Galician according to the Council of Europe

On 9 April 2001, Spain ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML), which also concerns Galician. Galician is protected under the Charter not only in Galicia but also in the Principality of Asturias and the Autonomous Community of Castile and Leon, under the denomination of Galician-Asturian in both. According to the latest evaluation, the main challenges arise on the side of the state, but there are also regional laws that contradict Spain's international commitments. It is imperative, however, that the rules and regulations of the autonomous communities conform to the established Spanish constitutional framework. Thus, any incompliance with those obligations might be caused by the Spanish constitutional system itself, which the autonomous communities cannot modify.

The Sixth Evaluation Report of the ECRML on Spain was published on 24 September 2024.⁴¹ As far as the Galician-related parts of the Committee's evaluation are concerned, the undertakings of Spain are fulfilled in terms of Art. 7, objectives and principles, and Art. 12, cultural activities and facilities. When it comes to education (Art. 8), judicial authorities (Art. 9), or economic and social life (Art. 13), the undertakings are partially, and in the cases of administrative authorities and public services (Art. 10) and media (Art. 11) are mostly fulfilled. Overall, there has been a significant decrease in language usage since the fifth evaluation in 2021 in the field of judicial authorities and a more moderate one in the fields of economic and social life.

⁴⁰ Ferreiro 2024.

⁴¹ Committee of Experts of the ECRML 2024.

Regarding education, due to the bilingual approach adopted by the Decree of 79/2010, Spain's undertakings to make education available in Galician cannot be considered fulfilled. The current report does not discuss this issue in much detail, but the previous fifth report specifically criticised Decree 79/2010.⁴² In this reference, the committee stated that *"not all the limitations to teaching in Galician have been removed"* and that because Spain ratified Article 8.1 ai, bi, ci, di of the Charter, it is to ensure that *"education must be provided in Galician as the medium of instruction"* (point 52). Since the Decree only attempts to guarantee Galician as the co-official language, and the numerous reports by the Autonomous Community demonstrate that the implementation of this principle is rather limited across various levels of public schooling, the Committee finds that *"the existing legal framework is contrary to Spain's undertakings"* (point 52). In the sixth evaluation report, the recommendations of the experts for education are the following: the removal of the limitations preventing Galician from being used as a medium of instruction for science subjects, the ensuring that education in Galician is available at all appropriate levels, in accordance with the ratification instrument, the provision of a proportionate presence of Galician at the pre-school level in important urban centres, and the development of teaching materials in Galician for technical and vocational education, including distance learning.

As mentioned briefly above, the most considerable regression occurred at judicial authorities, where the situation had already been the worst. In point 283 of the report, the experts assessed that the existing legislation does not guarantee that courts may conduct proceedings (criminal, civil or administrative matters) in Galician at the request of one of the parties. Therefore, Articles 9.1.ai, 9.1.bi and 9.1.ci of the Charter are not fulfilled. They continued that while it is formally possible to use Galician for a person accused in criminal proceedings or for a litigant in civil or administrative proceedings, the implementation of such rights in practice is not ensured. Thus, Articles 9.1.aai, 9.1.bii and 9.1.cii are only formally fulfilled. The judiciary is an extremely monolingual

⁴² Committee of Experts of the ECRML 2021.

sphere in Galicia: in 2019, different Galician judicial bodies produced a total of 330.956 documents, out of which only 145, i.e. 0.04 %, were written in Galician.⁴³

The experts also noted that while Galician legislation is always published in the two official languages, the Official Gazette of the state stopped being published in Galician in 2021; therefore, Article 9.3 is partly fulfilled. The fifth evaluation report was wordier in this question, too; then, the committee recommended the amendment of the Organic Law 6/1985 on the Judiciary explicitly to ensure the use of Galician in judicial proceedings at the request of one of the parties (point 53). In the sixth report, the experts call for immediate action to ensure that legislation guarantees that courts conduct criminal, civil and administrative proceedings in Galician at the request of one of the parties and take actions to ensure that this is met in practice. They also urge the development of software providing for the possibility to use forms, models or documents in Galician to effectively assist in the judicial process, enabling advanced judicial analysis, as well as providing citizens with channels of communication with the justice administration in Galician, and the re-establishment of the Galician version of the Official Gazette of the state.

In terms of Art. 10 of the Charter, the main challenge remains the unwillingness of state administrative bodies to process documents and files or accept complaints in Galician (point 284 of the sixth report). This problem was highlighted also in the fifth evaluation, which emphasised that by then, the state had started to take more seriously its obligation to train state administration employees in co-official languages however, with a low success rate, only some 30.3% of the enrolled public officials finished the course (point 19). Despite the official recognition of the importance and use of co-official languages in the public sector, this provision has not been put into practice in a way that would ensure the increase in the level of proficiency of regional or minority languages in that sector (point 21 of the fifth evaluation report), and therefore minority speakers have more limited

⁴³ Ferreiro 2024 *op. cit.*

access to face-to-face public service administration than the Spanish speakers (point 23). The sixth report also mentions that they were not in a position to conclude whether public service employees who have knowledge of Galician can request to be appointed in the territory in which this language is used (point 284).

The experts also stated that in social care facilities, Galician is only formally used in signage and documentation, and health personnel are not trained to provide care in Galician. Therefore, Article 13.2.c is not fulfilled. Article 13.2.e is also not fulfilled as far as the state authorities are concerned, as information concerning the rights of consumers which fall under their competence is not made available in Galician (point 286). Interestingly, as far as local and regional authorities are concerned, the Committee of Experts was not in the position to conclude as no information has been provided on the availability of the rights of consumers in Galician, which can be understood as a criticism of the implementation of the above-mentioned Law 2/2012 on the general protection of consumers and users.

4 Galician Language: Changes in Knowledge and Prestige

While Castilian language facilitates opportunities for mobility inside Spain and to Latin America, promoting improved living conditions and social mobility, Galician is frequently perceived as a language that restricts mobility, perpetuates poverty, and reinforces a lower social status. Since this causes a kind of “self-hatred” among some of the native speakers, therefore the regional authorities intend to act proactively in promoting the Galician.⁴⁴ A relatively new phenomenon in this respect is the increased importance of the Portuguese, as detailed under Chapter 5.

Despite the Xunta’s attempts, the knowledge of Galician has been decreasing, and so has its social role. In 1992, Galician was predominantly spoken by elderly, rural, and uneducated individuals. Approximately

⁴⁴ del Valle 2000, 110-112.

80.6% of the population over 65 spoke the language, compared to only 36.7% of those aged 25 and younger; 85.8% of rural-born individuals as opposed to 16.7% of urban-born people; and 92.6% of the uneducated, compared with 19.1% of university graduates.⁴⁵ A 2004 survey found that there were some advancements in language knowledge in certain urban centres; nevertheless, towns were still mostly Castilian-speaking centres. The highest share of those being able to speak Galician was in Lugo (40%) and Santiago de Compostela (35.1%).⁴⁶ In 2018, the share of those speaking well Galician was higher in some cities than in Galicia in general but is still low: 37.7% in A Coruña, 43.6% in Ourense, and 39.4% in Lugo. The use of Galician is still more widespread in certain remote areas.⁴⁷

The latest data on language use are from 2023, which show a radical change in the linguistic landscape of Galicia. While in 2003, some 43% of the population always used Galician, and 18% used more Galician than Spanish, the share of those who always or dominantly used Castilian was only 38.3%. In 2023, the share of those always speaking Galician dropped to 24.4%, those who used more Galician than Spanish diminished to 21.8%, and those using exclusively or dominantly Spanish increased to 54.8% combined.⁴⁸ These data show for the first time that Castilian speakers form a majority in Galicia: at the time of the previous data, in 2018, some 51.2% of the population used exclusively or dominantly Galician, while 47.3% used Spanish.⁴⁹ The language change impacts all cohorts: 83.8% of the children between 5 and 14 mostly or always used Castilian in 2023, a sharp increase from 74% in 2018. The share is only 32.1% of those over 65, some 48.2% of those

⁴⁵ González 2007, 30.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 44, 63-64.

⁴⁷ Enquisa estrutural a fogares. Coñecemento e uso do galego. Resumo de resultados 11/10/2024. Instituto Galega de Estatística https://www.ige.gal/estatico/html/gl/OperacionsEstruturais/PDF/Resumo_resultados_EEF_Conecemento_galego_2023.pdf 14-16, accessed: 13.11.2024.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁹ Datos básicos da lingua galega - Competencia e usos. Available at: <https://www.lingua.gal/o-galego/conhecendo/competencia-e-usos>, accessed: 13.11.2024.

between 50 and 64, 62% of those between 30 and 49, and 71.3% of those between 15 and 29, a sharp increase again from 62.6% in 2018.⁵⁰

The family's role in transmitting Galician is diminishing: around 90.2% of the population in Galicia over 65 years acquired the language within the family, whereas only 64.2% of people aged 5 to 29 did likewise.⁵¹ Approximately 32.4% of the generation aged 5 to 14 have minimal or no understanding of Galician, reflecting an increase of over nine percentage points since 2018,⁵² and a rise of sixteen percentage points since 2008.⁵³ This 32.4% is nearly double the regional average,⁵⁴ indicating the accelerated pace of language loss. These findings, however, contradict other data indicating that 44.3% of the Galician population consistently and an additional 9.5% predominantly speak Galician to their children.⁵⁵

Literacy in Galician has persisted at a low level, notwithstanding prior improvements: a survey conducted in 2003 indicated that between 1992 and 2003, there was a significant increase in the number of individuals proficient in reading and writing in Galician;⁵⁶ however, the percentage has not changed significantly since, recorded at 28.1% in 2003 and 29.5% in 2018.⁵⁷ This provides an explanation for why Spanish is used extensively in writing: in 2023, some 82% of the populace used Spanish, and 61.4% of those who orally always used Galician.⁵⁸

⁵⁰ Enquisa estrutural a fogares, 2024, 4., Enquisa estrutural a fogares. Coñecemento e uso do galego. Resumo de resultados 27/09/2019. Instituto Galego de Estatística, https://www.ige.gal/estatico/html/gl/OperacionsEstruturais/PDF/Resumo_resultados_EEF_Galego_2018.pdf, 4.

⁵¹ Enquisa estrutural a fogares, 2024, 3.

⁵² Enquisa estrutural a fogares, 2019, 2.

⁵³ In 2008, some 16.3% of children under 15 did not speak Galician. See: Ferreiro, 2024 *op. cit.*

⁵⁴ Enquisa estrutural a fogares 2024, 2.

⁵⁵ Persoas segundo a lingua na que falan cos seus fillos. Galicia e provincias, [https://www.ige.gal/igebdt/esq.jsp?ruta=verPpalesResultados.jsp?OP=1&B=1&M=&COD=3047&R=0\[all\]&C=T\[1:0\];1\[all\];9912\[all\]&F=&S=&c=0206004](https://www.ige.gal/igebdt/esq.jsp?ruta=verPpalesResultados.jsp?OP=1&B=1&M=&COD=3047&R=0[all]&C=T[1:0];1[all];9912[all]&F=&S=&c=0206004), accessed: 13.10.2024.

⁵⁶ Skobel 2010, 16.

⁵⁷ Datos básicos da lingua galega - Competencia e usos, <https://www.lingua.gal/o-galego/conhecendo/competencia-e-usos>, accessed: 13.11.2024.

⁵⁸ Enquisa estrutural a fogares 2024, 6-7.

In public situations, there is a balance between Galician and Spanish when talking, yet Spanish clearly dominates at work.⁵⁹ In media, the dominance of Spanish is more striking. Only 18.5% of Galicia's population watches television, and only 15.1% predominantly listens to the radio in Galician, while 93.3% primarily uses Spanish online, and 95.2% reads books mainly in Spanish. The only, partial exception is social media, where the share of mostly or exclusively Galician language users is 17.4%,⁶⁰ however, this tendency is again declining, having been 26.3% in 2018.⁶¹

5 The Galician Language and the Portuguese Query

The Galician language has two main academic entities. The first one, the Real Academia Galega, the Galician Royal Academy is the official regulatory body of the Galician language. A consensus reached by its academics is that, after the political division between Galicia and Portugal with the approximation of the first to the Castilian Kingdom, *"the incommunication between the south and the north provoked that the linguistic varieties of the territories differed, giving place to two different languages: Portuguese in the south and Galician in the north"*.⁶² In the view of the Academia, the Galician gained a distinct and individual characteristic that is particular to the Autonomous Community of Galicia due to the approximation to the Castilian language. Because of this, the standardised Galician promoted by the Real Academia tends to prefer Castilian phonetic spelling, as well as vocabulary.

The *Associaçom Galega da Língua*, the Galician Language Association, is an influential association of scholars and civic entities that takes a very different stance. Their thesis is that it makes more sense to think of the Galician as the expression of the Portuguese language in

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶¹ Enquisa estrutural a fogares 2019, 12.

⁶² O Idioma." *Real Academia Galega*, academia.gal/lingua/idioma, accessed: 13.10.2024.

the territory of Galicia, as demonstrated by their official stance: “*the reintegrationist strategy works over the basis of Galiza, Portugal and Brazil sharing the same language, in Galiza known as Galician and internationally known as Portuguese*”.⁶³ In their view, standardised Galician should aim to approximate standardised Luso-Brazilian. *Reintegracionismo*, as this movement is called, proposes using Portuguese-oriented orthography and morphology by recuperating Galician-Portuguese writing standards and interpreting new ones.⁶⁴

Overall, these different positions regarding the Galician language reflect the feeling that Galician and Portuguese identities are not so distant. The renowned Portuguese writer and academic Fernando Venâncio, in his work “*Assim nasceu uma Língua*” (Thus a Language Was Born), proposes an experiment. If a villager would travel from Ortigueira to Olhão, the first one in the very north of Galicia’s northern coast, while the other in the southern Portuguese Algarve coast, at some 900 km distance from each other, would he understand the other when speaking his Portuguese-Galician mother tongue? If he would, why would the two identities be so different?⁶⁵

Officially, the Galician authorities consider the two languages separate according to Law 1/2014 on the use of the Portuguese language and the connection to the Lusophone world.⁶⁶ In its Preamble, the legislator presents Portuguese, a language born in ancient Gallaecia, which is currently the official language of nine sovereign states, including the economic giant of Brazil, and that of Macau, China, but also the working language of twenty international organisations, including the European Union. According to the legislator, the teaching and learning of the Portuguese, mutually intelligible with Galician, could provide wide access to Galicians in cultural but also in economic areas abroad.

⁶³ “Wiki Reintegracionista Da Agal.” *Pt_agal – FAQ Reintegracionismo e AGAL*, 5 Dec. 2018, agal-gz.org/faq/doku.php?id=pt_agal, accessed: 13.10.2024.

⁶⁴ Carvalho 2015, 4.

⁶⁵ Venâncio 2024, 197.

⁶⁶ Ley 1/2014, de 24 de marzo, para el aprovechamiento de la lengua portuguesa y vínculos con la lusofonía, https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2014-5487, accessed: 13.10.2024.

The *Xunta de Galicia* is therefore committed, among others, to include Portuguese in the curriculum and to implement Directive 2007/65/EC to allow for the accessibility of television and radio broadcasts between the Autonomous Community of Galicia and the Republic of Portugal on a reciprocal basis. The challenge, however, remains that Spanish provides a key to an even broader geographic area.

6 Galician National Identity

This leads us to the question of conceptualisation of the Galician national identity as a whole. In 1933, the European Congress of Nationalities classified Galicia as a nation.⁶⁷ The current Statute of the Autonomous Community also classifies Galicia as a historical nation and creates mechanisms for the state to protect and promote this nation and identity through symbols like the flag. Today, through the *Xunta de Galicia*, Galicia is a member of the European national minority umbrella organisation, the Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity (NPLD), which is an international recognition of Galicia being an entity.⁶⁸ The recognition, however, is absent from the Spanish constitutional order, which considers Galicia, Catalonia, and other entities as historical nationalities.

A good expression of Galician identity occurs during football matches between Celta de Vigo and Deportivo de La Coruña. The stadium is filled with blue and white, the colours of the Galician flag, and the Galician anthem⁶⁹ “*Os pinos*” (The Pines) is sung as the players enter the pitch. Ultimately, Galician national identity can be traced to the long history of the Community, with roots in medieval and Roman times. National symbols such as the colours of Saint Jacob and the figures of the anthem further cement this feeling of belonging

⁶⁷ Perez 2022.

⁶⁸ Source: <https://npld.eu/members/>, accessed: 13.10.2024.

⁶⁹ Redacción. “El Himno de Galicia Se Despide de Balaídos.” *Faro de Vigo*, Faro de Vigo, 5 May 2018, www.farodevigo.es/deportes/2018/05/05/himno-galicia-despide-balaídos-16006957.html, accessed: 13.10.2024.

and unity. These phenomena show that the Galician identity exists, yet language, considered generally a core component of ethnic identity, has been continuously fading to play a pivotal role in it.

This can also be seen in the results of the Galician Parliamentary elections in February 2024. Then the winner, centrist, simultaneously Spanish and Galician nationalist Partido Popular de Galicia (PPdeG) won its biggest victories in those municipalities where the percentage of the Galician speakers was the highest, while the leftist Galician nationalist Bloque Nacionalista Galego (BNG) obtained its best scores in mostly Spanish-speaking areas. The explanation lies partially in the fact that the already Spanish-speaking part of the populace, especially the urban population and younger voters, regrets the loss of Galician and feels a kind of nostalgia for it, while the elder, still Galician-speaking rural population has no such remorse and votes for PPdeG.⁷⁰

7 Conclusions

Galicia, a constitutionally recognised historical nationality of Spain, has shared linguistic roots with Portugal. Due to historical events, the separation of the territories north and south of the Miño river, and the incorporation of Galicia into a dominantly Spanish-speaking state, distinct Galician and Portuguese identities evolved, although there are some, even at academic level, who argue that the two languages and communities are the same. The Galician establishment, as presented, devoted itself to developing a distinct identity, even though they saw a chance to break out from economic backwardness by promoting Portuguese.

The quest for linguistic equality between Galician and Castilian Spanish has a long history, and today equal status is ensured by legal documents. This equality, however, is rather formal: despite the laws

⁷⁰ Pena, Marcos Pérez - Pardo, Miguel: *Lingua e voto: o PP arrasa onde máis galego se fala; o BNG imponse onde menos se usa.* (28 February 2024) [praza.gal https://praza.gal/politica/lingua-e-voto-o-pp-arrasa-onde-mais-galego-se-fala-o-bng-imponse-onde-menos-se-usa](https://praza.gal/politica/lingua-e-voto-o-pp-arrasa-onde-mais-galego-se-fala-o-bng-imponse-onde-menos-se-usa), accessed: 13.10.2024.

adopted by the Galician authorities, mainly the regional Parliament but also the Xunta, Spaniards are obliged, by the Constitution, to know only the Spanish language, not the languages of the historical nationalities. Another aspect here is that the hands of the authorities of the autonomous communities are tied by the Spanish Constitution, resulting in that they cannot regulate language use or policy in contradiction with the fundamental law of the country.

The status of a language always has to be seen through different lenses. It is not only the current legislative framework that decides the prestige of a language but also history. After long centuries of socially lower status, by the time formal equality was achieved, the Galician had lost ground in the regional society and had become associated with poverty and social detachment. The democratic Spain provided a legal framework for declaring Galician co-official in Galicia, but even the constant efforts of the regional authorities proved inadequate in stopping or even slowing the loss of ground for Galician. In 2023, for the first time, the local vernacular became a minority language in Galicia, although the language remains standing, and its extinction is not an imminent threat. The Galician identity, however, appears to be increasingly dissociating from the native language.

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