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"Towards a Consistent Language Policy for the French Basque Country? Actors, Processes and Outcomes"

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the progressive implementation of a consistent language policy in the French Basque Country (*Iparralde*). In doing so, it questions how French Basque ethnolinguistic movements emerged and have been consolidated since the Second World War. According to our hypothesis, the rise of this policy was favoured by a combination of endogenous and exogenous variables, i.e., the new institutional capacities reached after decentralisation, the new relationship between ethnolinguistic movements and central state services, the establishment of stable territorial coalitions between civil society and local representatives, the new repertoire of collective action among activists (which was more peaceful), and the rise of cross-border relations between French and Spanish actors combined to favour the institutionalisation of a regional language policy in *Iparralde*.

KEYWORDS: Basque Country, France, Ethnonationalism, Language Policy.

INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the state of the Basque language (also called *Euskera*) in France. *Euskera* is one of the four non-Indo-European languages found in Europe, along with Finnish, Estonian, and Hungarian; it is mainly spoken in the Basque Country, a territory located on the Atlantic coast and straddling the border between Spain (also called *Hegoalde*, the southern or 'Spanish' side, in *Euskera*) and France (*Iparralde*, the northern or 'French' side).

More specifically, this article focuses on 'ethnolinguistic mobilisations' (LAPIERRE, 1988) for Basque language, i.e., the set of social and institutional actors mobilising for the protection and diffusion of *Euskera* through a specific language policy implemented at different levels: *status planning* (which intends to enhance the prestige of a given language by introducing its use in administration, the mass media, and so on), *acquisition planning* (to increase the number of speakers) and *corpus planning* (to create a homogeneous *koine*) (FISHMAN, 1974).

Thus, this study has a functional aim: it questions the actual state of the private and public mobilisation related to *Euskera* in France. In other words, after fifty years of ethnolinguistic mobilisation, have we assisted in the creation of an autonomous language policy in the French Basque Country? Furthermore, if the answer is yes, what factors have allowed this emergence?

We argue in this paper that such a process of institutionalisation has already begun in the French Basque country. Following the analyses of researchers in regional studies (COLE and LOUGHLIN, 2003; COLE and WILLIAMS, 2004; JONES and FOWLER, 2007), we assume that the promotion of lesser-used languages has been and is still favoured by an ongoing process of territorial institution-building. Nevertheless, we argue that this *endogenous territorial empowerment* approach is, on some occasions, incomplete and requires an *exogenous perspective* to be complete. The rise of an autonomous language policy in *Iparralde* is thus due to four main factors: the new institutional capacities obtained as a result of the new French decentralisation policy, a new relationship with central state services, the constitution of stable territorial coalitions between civil society and local representatives and a new repertoire of collective action favouring organised discussions. A fifth factor is that this new polity has been favoured by the rise of several cross-border links between *Iparralde*'s actors and their *Hegoalde* counterparts. From this perspective, *exogenous resources* have partially compensated for the institutional weakness of a set of actors.

This research has been funded by the French National Centre for Scientific Research (Programme *L'impact des partis nationalistes/régionalistes sur les modèles et les pratiques de gestion publique de la diversité territoriale en Europe, Centre d'Études Politiques de l'Europe Latine*, University of Montpellier I) and was undertaken in various steps. It began in 2002 with a series of interviews in France, which were followed by the establishment of contacts with Spanish-Basque institutions and social movements in 2004. Finally, the data were updated in 2008 and 2009 through new interviews. Grey literature and local newspapers were used as secondary sources.

This article is organised as follows. The first section presents the literature, the theoretical framework and the empirical data necessary for analysing the establishment of the Basque language policy in France. In the second section, we focus on the history of ethnolinguistic mobilisation since the 1990s, which we analyse using a set of five variables. Finally, brief conclusions are used to draw out the implications of such developments.

THE BASICS OF THE PROMOTION OF THE BASQUE LANGUAGE IN IPARRALDE

THE LITERATURE ON BASQUE LANGUAGE POLICY IN IPARRALDE

Literature on *Hegoalde* language politics and policy (with some comparisons with *Iparralde*) is already abundant (LINZ et al, 1986; TEJERINA, 1999; BAXOK et al., 2006; MESO, 2008). This is mainly due to the consistent language policy implemented in the Autonomous Communities of Euskadi and Navarre, where Euskera has enjoyed co-official status since 1982 and 1986, respectively. In contrast, the empirical study of the *Iparralde*'s Basque language policy only began in the early 2000s (AHEDO GURRUTXAGA, 2004; URTEAGA, 2004; AMADO BORTHAYRE, 2006). On the one hand, these analyses tend to reflect the rigid French policy, which formally precludes a national debate on the state of linguistic minorities; on the other hand, they also demonstrate that the French Republic is able to integrate some relevant arrangements at the local level. However, this research stopped in 2005, and only a few of the studies developed a comprehensive analytical framework focusing on variables that are able to explain the recent developments in language policy.

This is a major problem because over the past thirty years, language politics have been the subject of a considerable amount of literature in the field of political sociology. Such a *corpus* can be divided into five main currents. First, some sociologists have centred their attention on the link between regionalist movements and language by focusing on the symbolic violence transmitted through language (BOURDIEU, 1982), on ethnolinguistic militancy (BOURDIEU and BOLTANSKI, 1981; TOURAINE et al., 1981) and on the language strategy of speakers (GRIN, 1990).

Second, political scientists and historians have analysed how the processes of state- and nation-building have converted regional languages into dominated idioms through the establishment of national economic markets, the development of the press and mass media and the construction of transportation infrastructures (HOBSBAWM, 1996; KLATTER-HOLMER and VAN AVERMAET, 2001; ROMAINE, 2002).

Third, regional studies specialists have demonstrated that the promotion of regional identities and minority languages did not always support separatist claims, viz. national minorities are not always language minorities and *vice versa* (BARBOUR and CARMICHAEL, 2000; O'REILLY, 2001). Consequently, language activists can follow very different paths to reach their goals (COLE and WILLIAMS, 2004; HARGUINDEGUY and BALLESTER, 2007).

Fourth, sociolinguists specialising in language policy have proposed interesting dichotomies to interpret the degree of constraint and the territorial extension of such policies; the distinction between 'territorial' and 'individual' language rights (SCHIFFMAN, 1996), the concepts of 'critical mass' and 'language rationalisation' (LAITIN, 1988), or the division of linguistic abilities into monolingualism, bilingualism and diglossia (FERGUSON, 1959) are useful tools for analysing the relationships between language and power.

Finally, justice theorists have identified three basic ideal types of relationships between the state and minority languages: a neutral relationship with all languages, as theoretically exists in the United States; the active promotion of all threatened languages, as in Canada; or the active support of just one language (or a few languages), as in France (TAYLOR, 1985; MAY, 2001; KYMLICKA and PATTEN, 2003).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: HOW TO INTERPRET CHANGES IN LANGUAGE GOVERNANCE?

Assuming that public policies do not appear as if by magic, we will focus on the power relationships established in *Iparralde*. Drawing on the analysis of COLE and WILLIAMS (2004) regarding the need to improve regional capacity building to defend vernacular languages, we argue that at least five essential factors (including endogenous and exogenous ones) must be taken into account to explain the recent shift in the governance of language issues in *Iparralde*.

The institutional capacities of territorial representative institutions are especially important in France, where the central state traditionally controls this issue, but are also critical in other European countries and regions like Wales or Flanders. The new legitimacy of municipal and regional representatives, provided by their election after the introduction of universal suffrage, and the transfer of money and competencies are essential for launching ambitious cultural policies. However, the concept of institutional capacities relies not just on the empowerment of existing institutions but also on innovation by creating inter-municipal organisations and public-private agencies that can allow regional governments to impose or modify a given language policy (HARGUINDÉGUY and BALLESTER, 2007).

In considering *relationships with central state services*, it is important to take into account the progressively loosening grip of European central state services on their territorial authorities, which demonstrates that Westphalian states are no longer able to respond to all of the claims of their citizens. Local arrangements have always existed, even under a strict regime of control by the central state. Nevertheless, the different waves of decentralisation have opened up a new political opportunity for ethnolinguistic actors (KEATING, 1998; ANDERSON and O'DOWD, 1999), e.g., by lowering the cost of access to European institutions and cross-border co-operation with neighbouring regions.

With regard to the *establishment of stable territorial coalitions between civil society and local representative institutions*, the question of struggle and co-operation is central in territorial governance issues. The capacity of territorial actors to create a stable coalition able to deal directly with state representatives is fundamental. Examples like the CELIB (*Comite d'études et de liaison des intérêts bretons*) in Brittany or the Welsh movement in Wales show that socio-economic agents, pressure groups and political representatives can shape their political opportunity structure. Obviously, this raises the issue of the integration of social activists into a more rigid institutional framework (HARGUINDÉGUY and COLE, 2009).

Regarding the evolution of repertoires of collective action, we may note that the concept of repertoire was originally defined as the whole set of means that a group has to make claims of different kinds on different individuals or groups. This notion has recently been re-used by political scientists (PASQUIER and SMYRL, 2002) to identify the regularities and changes in behaviour of the different actors involved in the governance of a territory, especially at the regional level. It is an essential parameter for understanding the institutionalisation of the *Euskera* policy in *Iparralde*, where a clear shift from street struggles to institutionalised discussion has been undertaken.

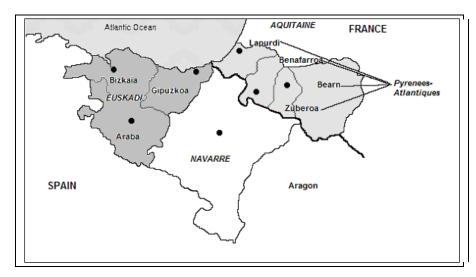
In terms of the *rise of cross-border* relations, while cross-border co-operation was still an 'exotic' activity until the 1980s, we have seen a dramatic increase in the number of euroregions, euro-provinces and euro-municipalities since the end of the 1990s (PERKMANN, 1999). Moreover, cross-border links are not limited to public representative institutions; many social movements have included them in their strategy, especially in the Basque country (LETAMENDIA, 2006;

MANSVELT BECK, 2008). This makes it important to think about the progressive re-scaling of politics and policy; in certain cases, traditional territories are no longer the best suited to provide new services; additionally, there is the effect of comparison induced by the proximity between two neighbours like *Hegoalde* and *Iparralde*. This endogenous variable must necessarily be taken into account if we are to understand the development of the *Euskera* policy in France.

LANGUAGE POLICY IN IPARRALDE: WHAT RESULTS HAVE BEEN OBTAINED?

Before exploring the process of language policy-making in *Iparralde*, we must observe what has been done until now. At first glance, the results are quite kaleidoscopic in the sense that some bilingual improvements have occurred in very specific niches (for example, in immersion education), while other sectors remain entirely in French (local administration, for instance). This is the result of an asymmetric process.

In terms of absolute numbers, Basque is mainly spoken in the autonomous communities of Euskadi (encompassing the administrative provinces of Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa, and Araba) and Navarre (a mono-provincial autonomous community). These political divisions approximately coincide with the four major dialectal sub-divisions of the Basque language in Spain. Basque is also used in France in the department of Pyrénées-Atlantiques, which is one of the five departments forming the Aquitaine region. Pyrénées-Atlantiques (formerly Basses-Pyrénées) is an administrative territorial sub-division created in 1790 by French revolutionaries who sought to group the Bearn (Occitanspeaking) area with the three French provinces of the Basque Country (Zuberoa, Benafarroa, and Lapurdi) to avoid irredentist and monarchist claims. These three provinces approximately correspond to the three dialectal areas of Basque in France (BAXOK et al., 2006). Following the Congress of Arantzazu (1968), a standardised Basque language (called *Batua: unified*) was agreed upon by the *Euskaltzaindia* (Royal Academy of the Basque Language), which was founded in 1919 by Basque intellectuals from France and Spain.



Map 1. Basque Country.

As the *IV Sociolinguistic Report of the Government of Euskadi* (Viceconsejería de Política Lingüística. Gobierno Vasco, 2006) states, the highest percentage of Basque language speakers can be found in Euskadi, in *Iparralde* and Navarre. While *Iparralde* is still losing speakers over the age of 65 (who represent almost 40% of the total speakers in the hinterland), the trend has changed, with new speakers appearing among the young thanks to efforts in the field of education. However, French remains the mother tongue for 72.3% of *Iparralde* inhabitants. While 41.2% of *Iparralde* inhabitants are favourable to the use of Basque, French is used in 77.4% of social interactions (e.g., business, family, administration). This is especially the case on the Basque coast, in large part because of the rapid urbanisation process taking place from the north of Bayonne to Saint-Jean-de-Luz, which attracts immigrants from the rest of France (Tables 1 and 2). It is also worth mentioning that there is a strong correlation between the ability to speak Basque and a feeling of belonging in the Basque Country, regardless of the territory or age in question (Viceconsejería de Política Lingüística. Gobierno Vasco, 2006).

	Bilingual	Passive bilingual	Not in contact with Basque	Total inhabitants
Hegoalde	25.5%	16.2%	58.3%	2,359,400
Euskadi	30.1%	18.3%	51.5%	1,850,500
Bizkaia	23%	19.4%	57.6%	
Gipuzkoa	49.1%	15.9%	35%	
Araba	14.2%	20%	65.8%	
Navarre	11.1%	7.6%	81.3%	508,900

Table 1. Proportion of Basque speakers in Spain (Viceconsejería de Política Lingüística. Gobierno Vasco, 2006).

	Bilingual	Passive bilingual	Not in contact with Basque	Total inhabitants
Iparralde	22.5%	8.6%	68.9%	230,200
Lapurdi (coast)	8.8%	5.4%	85.8%,	
Lapurdi (hinterland)	25.6%	11.3%	63.1%	
Zuberoa	55.5%	10.7%	33.8%	
Benafarroa				

Table 2. Proportion of Basque speakers in France (Viceconsejería de Política Lingüística. Gobierno Vasco, 2006).

Because of the lack of a real regional language policy until the 1990s, the promotion of *Euskera* in France has been traditionally led by civil society organisations through different teaching and learning techniques. In the field of education, one of the first initiatives was led by the Catholic Church through the efforts of Bishop Gieure in the 1920s. After the Second World War, the Deixonne Act (1951) enabled the organisation of Basque courses three hours a week as a second (or third) language taught in public schools. In 1975, the Haby Law confirmed this provision, but at the same time, the Bas-Auriol Law made it compulsory to use French in business and in the mass media (to bolster the institution of *Francophonie*). Despite these limits, the reforms of 1982 and 1995 enabled the teaching of *Euskera* through 'Regional Culture and Language' courses in public schools. In 1982, the Savary decree allowed private, 'contracted-in' schools to teach regional languages if public schools were not able to do so. As a result, since 1982, the association *Ikas-bi* has administered a system of bilingual teaching in public schools, while *Euskal-Haziak* organises a

similar system in Catholic private schools. This bilingual training is seen as the first step toward a B.A. degree course in Basque, as proposed by the *Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour* (Pau and Bayonne) and the University of Bordeaux. Since 1969, a model of Basque learning by *immersion* has also been available, thanks to efforts of the *Seaska* Association and its *ikastola* schools (JACOB, 1994). In 1992, the Ministry of National Education recognised this initiative, and it restated the agreement in 2009 by co-funding part of the project. As expected, such official recognition of the *ikastola* generated debates between the supporters of this type of institutionalisation and those who prioritised the social movement dimension of the *ikastola* (BORTAYROU et al., 2005). The main association for adult language training in *Iparralde* is AEK (*Alfabetatze Euskalduntze Koordinakundea*: Coordination for Alphabetisation in *Euskera*), which organises courses, linguistic exchanges, and immersion training camps for French students in its Euskadi and Navarrese branches (ORONOS, 2002; BORTAYROU et al., 2005; ORONOS et al, 2008; GARAT and AIRE, 2009).

The presence of regional languages outside of the classroom has been greatly reduced because the Villers-Cotterêts regulation still imposes the use of French in the administrative and justice systems, as has been the case since 1539. This centralist *credo* was re-affirmed in 1992 with the addition of 'the language of the Republic is French' to the French Constitution (art. 2) and in 1994 through the Toubon Law implementing positive action measures to defend French against English in the public sphere. Despite these measures, road signs and postal addresses can be written in vernacular language. However, Basque is practically absent from private business in France.

Regarding mass media, we may note that the Basque station associated with the Radio France public network broadcasts daily programmes in Basque, although this is a recent and rather irregular initiative. However, many associated radio stations (Gure Irratia in Lapurdi, Irulegiko Irratia in Benafarroa, and Xiberoko Botza in Zuberoa) appeared in the 1980s and use Euskera as their first language. At the level of TV channels, the national public channel France 3 provides only short news programmes in Basque. However, the Spanish-Basque channels ETB 1 and 2 (Euskal Telebista, Basque Television) also broadcast their programmes to Iparralde and fund some correspondents in Bayonne (this delegation may soon be closed in the wake of the election to power of a non-Basque nationalist coalition led by socialists in Euskadi in 2009). Newspapers distributed in *Iparralde* are written in French with only a few exceptions (such as the daily newspaper *Berria* or the Christian-Democrat weekly Herria). On rare occasions, Sud-Ouest or La Semaine du Pays-Basque will publish short articles in Euskera. Even French Basque nationalist newspapers such as Enbata are written in French. For this reason, the example of Egunkaria is interesting: it is the only cross-border newspaper entirely in Basque available to Basque speakers living in Spain and France. Some publishing companies (Elkar for instance) support the diffusion of Euskera, but this is a difficult task because Basque-speakers represent a limited potential market, at least on the French side of the border (ORONOS, ETXEZAHARRETA and ARBELBIDE, 2008).

TOWARDS AN AUTONOMOUS BASQUE LANGUAGE POLICY: LANGUAGE AT THE CORE OF THE NEW TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE (1990-2010)

LOCAL INSTITUTIONAL EMPOWERMENT: HOW DID THE CAPACITY-BUILDING PROCESS AFFECT THE LANGUAGE ISSUE TRADITIONALLY ADDRESSED BY SOCIAL MOVEMENTS?

The debate over linguistic-cultural policy is at the heart of the structural shifts experienced in the context of French Basque Country territorial governance beginning in the late-1980s. Paradoxically,

following an initiative on the part of the prefect, i.e., the local representative of the central state, a series of mutual consultations connecting actors with very different backgrounds (civil society actors and elected representatives, Basque nationalists and non-nationalists, and so on) gave birth to a prospective scenario on the future of the French Basque country titled *Pays Basque 2010* (CHAUSSIER, 1996). As a result, and in accordance with the participative U-turn induced by the French decentralisation policy, new semi-public institutions soon emerged. The Basque Cultural Institute, the Country Development Council, and the Council for Elected Representatives were set up in 1989, 1994 and 1995, respectively (AHEDO GURRUTXAGA, 2005). These organisations were conceived as new debating arenas for elected officials and civil society representatives and as a compromise between nationalists and centralists as well as between civil society and political representatives.

This process of institutionalisation had concrete consequences in terms of territorial planning, but it also had collateral effects on language policy. In 1997, the French Basque Country was officially recognised as a 'pays' in accordance with the 1995 Law on Territorial Planning (Loi du 4 février 1995 d'orientation pour l'aménagement et le développement du territoire); such designation is thought to promote local economic development through the existing territorial networks. As a result, the first territorial contract was signed in 1997 between local authorities and the state, and a Specific Agreement for the Basque Country (Convention spécifique Pays Basque) was ratified among the state, regional and local authorities for the 2000-2006 programming period. This partnership was renewed in early 2000, when a new prospective consultation process (Pays Basque 2020) began in 2005 that in 2008 generated a Territorial Contract on Local Development between the state and the territorial authorities. As a whole, this new form of territorial governance was largely open to civil society, especially with respect to issues usually managed by activist circles (e.g., local development, agriculture, environment, culture and language).

In parallel with the changes occurring in territorial governance, the question of the Basque language and culture progressively changed from a social issue into a public problem and then into a political problem (Lascoumes et Le Galès, 2007). First, in 1984, a Centre Culturel du Pays Basque (Cultural Centre for the Basque Country, CCPB) was created to encourage the general diffusion and production of cultural events (including theatre, painting, and music in French and Basque). Second, to respond to the growing mobilisation of nationalists, local elected officials and language activists, the CCPB split in 1988. It reappeared as a 'generalist' cultural institution (the Centre d'Action Culturelle de Bayonne et du Sud-Aquitaine, i.e., Centre for Cultural Activity of Bayonne and South-Western) on the one hand and as an institution more specialised in Basque cultural matters (the Institut Culturel Basque, Basque Cultural Institute) on the other hand (LABORDE, 1999). The Basque language was thus promoted by the Basque Cultural Institute, the three educational networks of Basque teaching schools (immersive, public bilingual and private bilingual), and the AEK alphabetisation network. However, despite the creation of these new tools, the fragmentation of language governance rapidly emerged as a problem. Institutional actors and activists thus asked for a specific institution that could implement the incipient linguistic policy, an institution that would be distinct from the cultural one to avoid the dilution of funding and initiatives.

As a result, the institutionalisation of a linguistic policy *per se* became possible. For the first time in France, the Basque language was included in a territorial development project within the *Schéma d'aménagement du Pays Basque* (Territorial Scheme for the Basque Country) in 1996-1997; then, there was the Specific Agreement (*Convention Spécifique Pays Basque*) among the state, the Aquitaine Region and the Pyrénées-Atlantiques *département* in 1999-2000. Among other measures, AEK benefited from gaining its first official recognition as a vocational training body

through the Specific Agreement. Public and third sector actors met around a common program of subsidies for promoting linguistic operators (2000-2004) under the leadership of a newly created semi-public organisation: the Council for the Basque Language (grouping the central state, the Aquitaine region, the Pyrénées-Atlantiques department and the Council of Elected Representatives). Moreover, as early as 1999, the General Council of the Pyrénées-Atlantiques also opened a new internal subdivision dedicated to linguistic policy, both for the Basque and for the Occitan languages. In January 2005, the Council for the Basque Language was converted into the Public Office for the Basque language (*Office public de la langue basque*, OPLB). The OLPB was supposed to play a double role by supporting and coordinating the supply of and demand for courses on *Euskera* and 'in' *Euskera*, and by promoting the use of the language in society with the help of public authorities.

At that point, the promotion of *Euskera* was no longer the sole province of a nucleus of social activists but instead constituted a specific policy programme led by public institutions. New developments occurred in 2000 when this new policy began to include sociolinguistic expertise. In 2000, the Specific Agreement (*Convention spécifique Pays Basque 2001-2006*) referred to Fishman's 'reversing language shift' concept as a potential theoretical basis for a new linguistic policy in the French Basque country (COYOS, 2004 and 2008). The threefold approach of language recuperation (motivation/knowledge/use) was developed by Spanish Basque sociolinguist José Ma; Sanchez Carrion "Txepetx" was also introduced in *Iparralde*, notably by the French Basque sociolinguist Baxok (2008), who was himself familiar with other linguistic debates such as the Canadian one.

The new division of labour between language and cultural policies produced by this intensive process of institution-building raised some questions about the existing institutions. For instance, until that time, mediation between the ethnolinguistic activists and public authorities had been assumed by the province of the Basque Cultural Institute for cultural matters and by Ikas in the field of Basque teaching. Within the new framework, the Basque Cultural Institute had to determine its status and its function: should it remain a publicly funded association or become a public body? More generally, what did 'Basque culture' mean in this new context (did it refer to Basque-speaking cultural production, any cultural production made by Basque artists, or any cultural production carried out in the Basque country)? In that sense, the 2005 survey on Basque culture and identity was an attempt of the Basque Cultural Institute to measure these representations in the wider public opinion (Baxok et al., 2005).

In any case, in December 2009, four years after its foundation, the OPLB was able to do a first balance of its activity (MOLLE, 2009). Good results were obtained concerning language transmission, notably concerning bilingualism in primary education and the starting linguistic policy at the local municipal level. Budget consolidation was guaranteed for 2010, despite very bad economic circumstances. For its planning for 2010-2016 the OPLB admitted, in line with all of the sociolinguistic surveys, that its action had to be re-directed towards the social and public uses of language and not only towards its transmission (TABERNA, 2009).

RELATIONS WITH THE CENTRAL STATE: DOES THE STATE ACT IN THE SAME WAY AT THE CENTRAL AND PERIPHERAL LEVELS?

The relations with central state services played a significant role in the growing autonomy of the Basque language policy in France. At first glance, the institutionalisation of a cultural and linguistic policy in the Basque Country benefited from the process of decentralisation in the French state since 1982. By changing the scope of territorial governance, the decentralisation process gave more

latitude to local authorities and provided new opportunities for local civil society actors. In that sense, the new French Basque form of territorial governance should be seen as constituting much more than what scholars of Basque nationalism have called 'cosmetic decentralisation' (MANSVELT BECK, 2005) or a 'private type of institutionalisation' to compensate for the noncreation of a specific Basque department (LETAMENDIA, 1997). First, the creation of the 'pays' Pays Basque in 1997 was not counter to the French decentralisation policy. On the contrary, the Basque experience has always been seen as a virtuous example of local development, and it has inspired the national policy of the 'pays' led by the central state. Second, the territorial institutionalisation of the French Basque Country, far from being controlled or inspired by Basque nationalists, was rather the result of a permanent compromise between different political leaders (the French right and centre-right, the socialist party, the greens and Basque moderate nationalists) and socio-economic milieus. Third, over the past ten years, the new French Basque territorial institutions have had tangible effects on territorial governance, especially in linguistic and cultural matters. The efforts of the Country Development Council to negotiate consensual territorial contracts involving the state, the Regional Council of Aquitaine, the General Council of the Pyrénées-Atlantiques and local authorities constitute evidence of its will to include and recognise all of the actors of Iparralde.

The mobilisation in favour of the Basque language also benefited from the debate over the legal regime of language minorities created in France in the late 2000s. A debate on regional languages took place in the French National Assembly and in the Senate on 7 May 2008. On 21 July 2008, the French Constitution was revised despite harsh opposition led by different pro-French interest groups like the *Académie française*, and the sentence 'regional languages are part of the French national heritage' was included in article 75-1. However, the legal status of regional languages remains hazy. In May 2008, Culture Minister Christine Albanel announced that the government was preparing a law project on regional languages while still refusing to ratify the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages of 1992. A few months later, in December 2009, Immigration and National Identity Minister Eric Besson stated that he was opposed to a law on regional languages. As expected, this paradoxical situation provoked the immediate mobilisation of language activists around the country. Despite such political dithering and the relatively low level of interest paid by the French national mass media, linguistic issues were given an opportunity to enter into the state governmental agenda, even if in a marginal way.

TERRITORIAL COALITIONS: DID CIVIL SOCIETY AND POLITICAL REPRESENTATIVES GENERATE STABILITY WITH RESPECT TO LANGUAGE ISSUES?

The process of institutionalisation of an autonomous Basque language policy in France was also the result of the changes that occurred in the territorial coalitions.

First, at the French level, the recent politicisation of the linguistic issue gave a new impetus to the strategic coalitions between representatives of the different French regional or minority languages, such as the FLAREP (*Fédération pour les langues régionales dans l'enseignement public*, whose members come from Brittany, Alsace, Occitany, Corsica, Catalonia and so on) in the public education system or the Interregional Meeting for Minority Cultures and Languages (*Rencontres interrégionales des langues et cultures minoritaires*).

Second, new coalitions appeared in the French Basque Country. The most visible is probably the network that groups the local public institutions and the associative actors via the mediation of the OPLB. Such a partnership is the result of the participation of members of civil society in the Advisory Council of OPLB (the *Aholku batzordea*) from the beginning of the project. As a new

territorial institution managed collectively, the OPBL also provided a new career opportunity for local politicians and activists (HOURCADE, 2007). The presidency of the OPBL was assumed, for instance, by Max Brisson, a right-wing elected member of the departmental General Council. Thus, the consolidation and institutionalisation of territorial expertise regarding factors such as language, culture, and local development constituted an entryway not only for moderate Basque nationalist activists, but also for the state local representatives and for French politicians looking for new political legitimacy and new strategies for accessing a plurality of mandates and responsibilities at the local level. Other coalitions have appeared besides the OPLB. One of the most important is the *Hiru sareak* (the three networks) community, which connects the three bilingual and immersive educational networks (the *ikastola*, public and private-Catholic bilingual systems). Its creation responded to the demand by parents for increased investment in Basque language education since the number of children studying in Basque increased from 2907 in 1993 to 6149 in 2004 (BETBEDER, 2006).

Third, despite their easy access to the policy process, these new coalitions cannot prevent the organisation of demonstrations by language activists against the current Basque language policy. At the margins of the institutional debate, cultural pro-Basque associative movements (e.g., Behatokia, the Observatory; Euskararen Gizarte Erakundeen Kontseilua, Council of Basque Civil Society Organisations; Euskal Konfederazioa, Euskal Herrian Euskaraz, In Basque in the Basque Country; AEK) remain very critical, even regarding the OPLB. According to these ethnolinguistic movements, the use of language experts and socio-language statistics by public authorities only contributed to depoliticising the debate and excluding social movements from the negotiations. Moreover, the cross-border movements Euskararen Gizarte Erakundeen Kontseilua and AEK repeatedly argue in favour of the legal recognition of the Basque language by the French state and a specific department for the French Basque country as two necessary conditions for any successful linguistic policy. In the minds of radical ethnolinguistic activists, these two conditions are intimately linked: an efficient language policy should make compulsory the learning and use of Basque (e.g., the generalisation of the Basque language supply at school, the imposition of linguistic quotas in the mass media and the normalisation of the use of the Basque language in the socio-economic sectors) (RENTERIA, 2009). Following this critique, a common department would be necessary to ensure that citizens adopt the necessary language policy measures. As a full member of the OPLB, the French state logically refused until now to support any compulsory dimension of this nature and maintained the principle of free choice.

REPERTOIRE OF COLLECTIVE ACTION: FROM THE STREET TO THE NEGOTIATING TABLE?

Regarding the repertoire of collective actions of territorial actors participating in the Basque language policy, a shift from street struggles to discussion with authorities has been undertaken. This means that on the one hand, a new generation of actors accepts that it must participate in institutional *fora* and official discussions with local, regional and state representatives. Meanwhile, on the other hand, the repertoire of collective actions of Basque language defenders remains partially based on traditional tools of protest like popular demonstrations, petitions, sittings and events.

During the 2007-2010 period, this classical repertoire of contention was used on two occasions. An initial series of campaigns was directed towards the French state and requested a change in the state's policy regarding regional languages and the officialisation of *Euskera*. These mobilisations, like the huge *Deiadar* demonstration held in Bayonne on 24 October 2009, benefited from

significant support from the social movement but was also backed by local elected officials and socio-economic milieus not exclusively from the *abertzale* (Basque nationalist) sphere. Nevertheless, some of these actors also criticised the new territorial institutions, as illustrated by the demonstration held in November 2007 in front of the OPLB by the cross-border association *Euskal Herrian Euskaraz* to condemn the weakness of the actual language policy and the current institutional framework of the French Basque Country (ANÓNIMO, 2007). Finally and subsequently, the ongoing institutionalisation of a language policy in the French Basque country also provoked an increase in the intensity of the defensive French nationalist and Jacobin reaction, especially in the Basque coastal zone (THOMAS, 2005).

CROSS-BORDER CO-OPERATION: DOES THE SOUTH COMPENSATE FOR THE NORTHERN LANGUAGE POLICY WEAKNESSES?

Cross-border mobilisations constitute an important cause of the rise of an autonomous language policy in the French Basque Country. The North-South linguistic mobilisations benefited from the increase in cross-border cooperation between Spanish and French Basque actors beginning in the mid-1980s, notably when Spain joined the European Community.

A survey conducted in the mid-1990s of the projects funded by the Aquitaine-Euskadi Common Fund showed evidence that among the great many proposed projects, the cultural and linguistic ones attracted more actors from Euskadi and the French Basque Country (ITÇAINA et al, 1997). However, several projects met with difficulties during their implementation because of the institutional asymmetry between the partners. The French official counterpart of the Basque Autonomous Community was not the French Basque Country, which had no institutional representation before the mid-1990s, but rather the Aquitaine region. Letamendia (1997) stressed the double gap existing between the co-operation of equivalent institutional bodies and the collaboration of Basques acting based on a common identity. First, institutional relations between Euskadi and the Aquitaine region are affected by a deep financial asymmetry because the budget of the Basque Autonomous Community is more than ten times greater than that of any French region. Second, a gap also exists between the perception of the Regional Council of Aquitaine (controlled by right or left-wing French parties since 1986) and the Autonomous Basque Community (ruled by Demo-Christian Basque nationalists of the PNV-Basque Nationalist Party from 1980 to 2009) with regard to interregional co-operation. While the former supports the maintenance of strong nationstates, the latter favours a deeper process of devolution leading to a new deal between central states and regional governments.

The new model of territorial governance in the French Basque Country considerably helped to surpass the limits of the traditional, official cross-border relationships. As expected, the creation of the 'pays' Pays Basque and the subsequent launching of the OPLB (co-funded by the Euskadi government) in 2005 intensified the cooperation between public authorities: the Southern regional government had an institutional counterpart in the North.

The cross-border linguistic relationship can be described in general terms of support from the Southern actors directed towards the Northern ones. Such support took two forms: transnational associative networks organised on a Basque 'national' basis and institutional support from Southern public bodies for Northern associations. Among social movements cooperating across the border, Amado Borthayre (2006) distinguished between those that aim to lobby the representative institutions to reinforce the current language policy (*Euskal Herrian Euskaraz*, *Kontseilua-Euskal konfederazioa*, public bilingual schools parents' associations) and the social movements that propose an alternative policy model. Far from limiting themselves to lobbying, the latter considered

themselves as creating real educational and social alternatives. Significant examples are the immersive associative schools (*ikastola*), the association called the AEK offering Basque lessons to adults, or the Basque Summer School (*Udako Euskal Unibertsitatea*). All of these experiences share four characteristics: a) their activity and structure are transnational; b) their internal organisation is based on democratic principles of collective decision-making and horizontal power-relations; c) many of these initiatives depend on Southern Basque financial resources (which reproduces at the civil society level the institutional asymmetry we stressed earlier); and d) they use Europe as a tool for enhancing cross-border collaboration *and* promoting *Euskera*, notably via the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages. These networks showed a high learning capacity with respect to the European norms and programmes. As evidence, in 2009, the federation of the *ikastola* from both sides of the border created a European Cooperative Society to facilitate mutual help between the *ikastolak* from Euskadi and Navarre and Iparralde, thus mobilising both the new European norms and the institutional opportunities related to social economics, minority languages and cross-border relationships.

Regarding the support provided by *Hegoalde* authorities for *Iparralde* associations, these relationships took at least two forms. First, the Southern autonomous government (from the 1990s until at least 2009, when it was controlled by the PNV and its allies) intervened in the French Basque Country by funding educational networks and the Basque-speaking media. Second, new public policies were set up jointly by public institutions from both sides of the border. The foundation of a cross-border radio station (*Antxeta irratia*) in Txingudi illustrates this point. In the same vein, sociolinguistic surveys were conducted on both sides of the border beginning in 1996 by the Basque government in association with Navarrese and French Basque actors. More generally, cross-border collaboration ranked among the three priorities of the Basque Country Development Council in their *Pays Basque 2020* prospective programme, together with territorial reciprocity (between the coastal zone and the inner countryside) and sustainable development.

CONCLUSION

France is usually portrayed as a monolingual country where regional differences have disappeared. This is a partial vision of a much more complex situation. As we have seen, some regions have maintained their own local cultural features despite the cultural centralisation policy exerted by the central state. From this point of view, the case of the French Basque Country is particularly interesting because language policy issues are debated by a broad range of very different actors, from political representatives to radical nationalists.

Drawing on these data, we can state that an incipient autonomous Basque language policy is now being implemented in *Iparralde*. Obviously, such a language policy cannot be compared with the long-standing programmes that have existed in *Hegoalde* since the 1980s. The respective financial aspects are extremely different, and there is a great degree of legal constraint imposed on *Hegoalde* citizens regarding the learning and speaking of Basque. In any event, this policy innovation must be considered a real novelty in the context of the Fifth French Republic.

The rise of this policy has numerous causes. As stated at the beginning of this paper, the rise of this policy was favoured by a combination of endogenous and exogenous variables, i.e., the new institutional capacities reached after decentralisation, the new relationship with central state services, the creation of stable territorial coalitions between civil society and local representatives, the new and more peaceful repertoire of collective actions of activists and the rise of cross-border

relations between French and Spanish actors combined to favour the institutionalisation of a regional language policy in Iparralde.

Some questions remain unresolved. The first one is related to the degree of autonomy that French actors are disposed (and able) to reach with respect to the Spanish-Basque government and social movements. The future of funding, the creation of a new Basque department and the agreement of the central state actors remain unknown. The incremental style of this language policy reflects the continuous changes of relationships among the different actors in the game. In sum, progress can be made only when local actors reach an agreement at the same time that a devolution-friendly leader is appointed as the head of the Ministry of Education or the Home Affairs Minister. However, as we have demonstrated, such a policy window is only open for a while.

The second question involves the actors of the current Iparralde language policy. In this paper, we focused on the complex bargaining between several civil society and political representatives; however, it seems that the recent professionalisation of language issues has already tended to 'rationalise' the attributions of different policy actors. In other words, it is probable that the high number of actors participating in this policy sub-system will dramatically decrease within the next few years. This could provide some stability to this issue after ten years of constant change.

Another important question relates to the possible consequences for the French Basque Country of the political shift in the Basque autonomous government that occurred in March 2009. The defeat of the nationalist party PNV after 30 years at the head of the Basque executive can have at least two consequences. First, according to a path-dependent mechanism, the new non-Basque nationalist coalition led by the Spanish Socialist Party could decide to follow the policy trend of the PNV by maintaining its support for *Iparralde* media, schools and cultural projects. Second, in the context of budget reduction and the harsh opposition between Basque and non-Basque nationalists, the new *Euskadi* executive could choose not to add more fuel to the fire. This means that it could centre its future policy on domestic issues like health, housing or transport and that it could stop (or weaken) its logistic support for French actors promoting the Basque language.

Finally, from a more theoretical viewpoint, it could be interesting to test our hypothesis of 'compensation for institutional weakness by exogenous variables' in alternative fields. At first glance, this hypothesis could work in the case of Catalan, or even in the Irish border region, where we find a configuration similar to that in the Basque Country, with a common language and institutional and social ethnolinguistic mobilisations across the border.

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