

Tibet - plans to make Chinese the main language of instruction

European Parliament resolution of 25 November 2010 on Tibet – plans to make Chinese the main language of instruction

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on China and Tibet, in particular its resolution of 10 April 2008 on Tibet¹,
- having regard to Rule 122(5) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas respect for human rights and freedom of identity, culture and religion is a founding principle of the European Union and a priority of its foreign policy,
- B. whereas the People's Republic of China has expressed a desire for harmonious ethnic relations among all 56 ethnic minorities,
- C. whereas on 19 October 2010 approximately 1 000 ethnic Tibetan students marched through Tongren, also known as Rebkong, peacefully opposing a plan to establish Mandarin Chinese as the main language of instruction in schools in the region; whereas on 23 October 2010 the protest spread to Qinghai province and Beijing, where 400 Tibetan students studying at Minsu university staged a demonstration,
- D. whereas the Tibetan language, as one of Asia's four oldest and most original languages, is a fundamental catalyst for Tibetan identity, culture and religion, but also, together with Tibetan culture as a whole, constitutes an irreplaceable part of the world's heritage; whereas the Tibetan language, the testimony to a historically rich civilisation, is a fundamental and irreplaceable element of Tibetan identity, culture and religion,
- E. whereas languages express the social and cultural attitudes of a community, whereas the shared language of a community is a key determinant of culture, and whereas languages convey very specific social and cultural behaviours and ways of thinking,
- F. whereas it has been established that mother-tongue bilingual education is the most effective path to successful bilingualism for Tibetans, and whereas this 'model 1 bilingual education policy' has consistently led to the highest college placement rates for Tibetan high school students across the Tibetan region,
- G. whereas in elementary, middle and high schools in all areas covered by the Tibet Autonomous Regional government, the Tibetan language is gradually being replaced by Chinese, and official documents are usually unavailable in Tibetan,
- H. whereas changes to education policy would limit the use of the Tibetan language in schools, since all textbooks and subjects, except for Tibetan and English language classes, would be in Mandarin Chinese,

¹ OJ C 247 E, 15.10.2009, p. 5.

- I. whereas the People's Republic of China, along with 142 other countries, voted to adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples on 13 September 2007, Article 14 of which states that 'indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning',
 - J. whereas, owing to the dominance of the Chinese language, there is growing anxiety over job prospects among graduate students in Tibetan areas as, according to the petition signed by teachers and students, most Tibetan students have never been in a Chinese-language environment and therefore are not able to communicate in Chinese,
1. Condemns the increased crackdown on the exercise of the cultural, linguistic, religious and other fundamental freedoms of Tibetans, and stresses the need to preserve and protect the distinct cultural, religious and national identity of the six million Tibetan people and to address concerns about the repression and marginalisation of the Tibetan language, which underpins Tibetan identity;
 2. Notes the concerns about the attempts to devalue the Tibetan language, and stresses the fact that if there is to be successful bilingual education, Tibetan must be the domestic language;
 3. Calls on the Chinese authorities to implement Article 4 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China's and Article 10 of the Law on Regional National autonomy which guarantee 'the freedom of all nationalities to use and develop their own spoken and written languages';
 4. Urges the Chinese authorities to support a genuine policy of bilingualism, whereby all subjects, including maths and science, are allowed to be taught in the Tibetan language, teaching of the Chinese language is strengthened, and local authorities and communities are empowered to make decisions on the language of instruction;
 5. Considers that every ethnic minority has the right to preserve its own language and writings; takes the view that a fair bilingual education system will contribute to better cooperation and understanding when Tibetan people learn Chinese, with Han people living in Tibetan areas at the same time being encouraged to learn the Tibetan language;
 6. Stresses that, with the introduction of Chinese as the primary language of instruction, the quality of education for the vast majority of middle-school Tibetan students would suffer significantly, and that school subjects should therefore, as is most appropriate, only be taught in the Tibetan mother tongue;
 7. Calls on the Chinese authorities to make every effort to lessen the linguistic and cultural disadvantages faced by Tibetans in urban employment, albeit in ways that do not undermine Tibetan language and culture;
 8. Calls on the European Commission, the HR/VP and the Member States to urge the Chinese Government to ensure, firstly, that the right of peaceful expression by students is respected and that the relevant authorities address their grievances substantively and appropriately, and, secondly, that the 2002 'Regulations on the Study, Use and Development of the Tibetan Language' are properly implemented, in accordance with the Law of Regional Ethnic Autonomy;

9. Asks the Commission to report on the use of the fund requested for the support of Tibetan civil society in China and in exile in the framework of the 2009 budget (EUR 1 million), and stresses the need to preserve Tibetan culture, particularly in exile;
10. Calls once again on China to ratify the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, and deplores the often discriminatory treatment of ethnic and religious minorities in China;
11. Asks the Chinese authorities to provide foreign media access to Tibet, including the Tibetan areas outside the Tibet Autonomous Region, and to abolish the system of special permits being required;
12. Calls on EU diplomatic representatives in Beijing to visit the region and to report back to the Council and the HR/VP on the current situation with regard to the education and language issue;
13. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the Government and Parliament of the People's Republic of China, and His Holiness the Dalai Lama.