



RESOURCE 11

Letter to the King on the separation of Wallonia and Flanders

On 15 August 1912, the renowned Belgian lawyer, politician and writer Jules Destrée wrote a letter to the then king, Albert I of Belgium, defending the French language and culture within that country. Destrée argued that language and identity are closely linked. Here is an extract from his letter:

*'But more characteristic and even more decisive proof of the fundamental duality of your kingdom, more compelling than that which can be deduced from the land, the landscapes, activities, temperaments and beliefs, is the **language**. (A language is a treasure accumulated through the ages by a human community. It incorporates the memory and echo of its morals, its beliefs and its pains. It awakens among those who speak it confused impressions harking back to uncertain days of early childhood on maternal knees, and beyond that, to connections with ancient ancestors. There is mystery in the attachment to language because it stems less from our reasoning being than from our deep unconsciousness. And it is only when one conceives the problem thus, when one reflects on one's millions of tenuous roots disappearing into the furthest reaches of the past, that one understands the sanctity of a language, and how delicate and unsolvable by simple processes of intelligence are the questions raised by its use.)'*

Destrée used language as the ultimate argument for identity when he wrote later in the letter: *'(You reign) over two peoples. There are, in Belgium, Walloons and Flemings; there are no Belgians.'*

From the 1920s, a series of laws were passed recognising Dutch and German as Belgian national languages in addition to French.

Source :["Les Belges, leur histoire" website](#)

'If you are Spanish, speak Spanish'



This sign features a political slogan used in Spain during the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco (1939-1975), together with the face of Franco himself. The sign reads:

'If you are Spanish, speak Spanish'



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The sign was used to discourage the use of the Catalan language mainly in Catalonia after its takeover by Franco's army both in the last phase of the Civil War in 1939 and after the war. Restrictions on the use of Catalan had already been imposed at other periods in Spanish history.

Source: Wikimedia commons

“La langue de la République est le français”

‘The language of the Republic is French’

In 1992 the French government amended its constitution to read ‘La langue de la République est le français’. There are, however, many minority languages in France, one of which is Breton, spoken in Brittany. The Breton language is seen as an important marker of identity in this region and those who speak the language see its preservation as vital for future generations. Preserving the language however is not welcomed by everyone in France with many feeling that linguistic diversity would negatively affect the identity of the nation and lead to ...

‘a Balkanisation of France’ (former French Interior Minister, Jean-Pierre Chevènement)

‘the dislocation of the French identity’ (newspaper Le Figaro)

Source: [Jon Henley, 27.06.1999, The Guardian](#)

