



19th March 2007

## **20,000 Rally to Promote Occitan Language**

Thousands of people congregated in Béziers on 17th March to promote the Occitan language in a rally organised by the collective body Anem ! Oc! Per la lenga occitana! According to the police, about 18,000 people in all were present (though the organisers say that it was more like 20,000) to show their support for a movement to ratify the European Charter on Regional and Minority Languages. France is one of the few countries who has yet to ratify the charter which would call for greater efforts to include Occitan in administrative, educational and cultural life. Roughly a hundred representatives from the town halls, general and regional councils covering 32 departments in France, Spain and Italy were also present to lend their support for Occitan. According to Dominique Voynet, presidential candidate for the Green Party, there is no other part of France which is more supportive of its regional language and culture, and said that “we believe in a pluralist, mixed, multicoloured France which recognises her past and the plurality of cultures which founded it”.