

**DÓNALL Ó RIAGÁIN**  
Consultor independente

***Linguistic diversity in europe***

Europe is linguistically diverse but by global standards not all that diverse. As we can see from the table hereunder<sup>1</sup>, our European languages account for only 3.5% of the world's total 6,912 living languages.

<b>World's Living Languages</b>		
	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Asia	2,269	32.8
Africa	2,092	30.3
Pacific	1,310	19.0
Americas	1,002	14.5
Europe	239	3.5
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>6,912</b>	<b>100%</b>

As we are the world's richest continent *per capita* and as we like to think of ourselves as being highly cultured, we surely have a strong obligation to play our part in conserving the world's linguistic diversity.

**Why support Linguistic Diversity**

But is linguistic diversity important. Is not language an instrument of communication? What matter then what language we speak or if some languages die?

Language is a tool for communication. But it is a lot more than that. It is a repository for the collective thoughts and memories of a community. It is the finely honed tool of a people for expressing their most subtle thoughts, their most tender feelings and most brilliant ideas. It is the receptacle in which their literature (be it oral or written), their history, their folk memories, their fears, their dreams and hopes are recorded, stored and made available, not only for the living, but for coming generations. A language gives men and women a sense of peoplehood, of continuity and of a common identity. Each language is a unique window on the world. Our languages have enormous symbolic importance for us. They are undoubtedly the greatest manifestation of our human genius.

The argumentation for respecting and conserving linguistic diversity can be categorised under five garner headings:

---

<sup>1</sup> Ethnologue [http://www.ethnologue.com/ethno\\_docs/distribution.asp?by=area](http://www.ethnologue.com/ethno_docs/distribution.asp?by=area)

## 1. The Human Rights Argument

Language rights are an integral part of human rights . not a kind of optional extra. The argument was put very cogently by Fernand de Varennes when he said:

*There is often the mistaken view that the rights of minorities, or language rights, are part of a new generation of rights, or are collective in nature. This perception is both unfortunate and erroneous: unfortunate because it tends to consider language rights as less deserving than real human rights, and wrong because it fails to understand the actual sources of these rights.*

*To put it simply, most . if not all . of what are called today language rights derive from general human rights standards, especially non-discrimination, freedom of expression, right to private life, and the right of members of a linguistic minority to use their language with other members of their community. All of these are authentic individual human rights as generally recognised in international and European law.*

*The error which is too often perpetuated is based on the failure to see the larger picture of the phenomenon which has emerged in the last 20 or 30 years: that the treaties and other documents dealing with the rights of linguistic minorities are but a more detailed enumeration of the consequences of general human rights in specific situations. Just as there are many documents and treaties which have provided more detail as to the consequences of general human rights in specific sectors of society such as women and children, for example, there is a process providing more detail as to the consequences of general human rights in another specific sector of society, minorities.*

## 2. The Socio-economic argument

This is the line of argument one find most frequently in EU policy documents. Its main thrust is that knowing as many languages as possible is good for economic activity, foreign trade, tourism, mobility of labour etc. In fact it is now EU policy to encourage all its citizens to be able to speak at least two languages in addition to their mother tongue. For instance, we read in *Promoting language learning and diversity*<sup>3</sup> we read:

*In the context of the Lisbon strategy of economic and environmental renewal launched in March 2000, the Union is developing a society based upon knowledge as a key element in moving towards its objective of becoming the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world by the end of the decade*

## 3. The Biocultural Argument

This argument sees diversity worldwide in a holistic manner and argues that the threat to the earth's biological, linguistic and cultural diversity all interlinked and that they need to be addressed likewise. K David Harrison in *When Languages Die*<sup>4</sup> focuses on the essential question - what is lost when a language dies? What forms of knowledge are embedded in a language's structure and vocabulary? And how harmful is it to humanity that such knowledge is lost

---

<sup>2</sup> Language Rights: Human Rights . the International Experience . Fernand de Varennes in *Language & Law in Northern Ireland* . ed: Dónall Ó Riagáin [Belfast, 2004]

<sup>3</sup> *Promoting language learning and linguistic diversity* . An action plan 2004-2006q - European Commission [ Brussels 2004]

<sup>4</sup> *When Languages Die*q. K. David Harrison . Oxford, 2007

forever? We are all aware of what happens a community when its language goes into terminal decline and its culture starts to break down. The levels of alcoholism, drug abuse and breakdown of family life among some of the Australian Aboriginal and Native Americans peoples are but some very sad and painful reminders.

#### 4. **The 'Diversity is good' Argument**

This might be described as being related to Arguments 2 & 3 above. Most of us need no convincing that variety is good, is enriching and makes life interesting. With the loss of linguistic diversity, cultural diversity would inevitably go into decline and we would be faced more and more with a bland uniformity. The 'McDonaldisation of society' as Tove Skuttnab-Kangass one colourfully put it. This argument goes a step further than the socio-economic argument we already considered, an argument which emphasises the importance of knowing and being able to use different languages. This argument is that diversity is the fuel for creativity and that linguistic diversity is good for economic and social development. Adam Price in 'The Diversity Dividend' argues:

*'In the real world few problems can be said to be wholly economic in nature. Their economic aspects are inter-twined with their social and cultural dimensions. Culture is in the economy and the economy is in culture. And language lies at the root of both'*

#### 5. **The 'Respect brings peace' Argument**

Possibly because of a misinterpretation of the Biblical story of the Tower of Babel, an erroneous opinion<sup>5</sup> has been about for many centuries that the global proliferation of languages is somehow a penalty imposed on humanity and that some kind of global monolingualism would bring peace and harmony. Besides the fact that almost all monolingual societies have had civil wars, all historical evidence would suggest that a lack of respect for linguistic diversity has been the cause of many conflicts. Not linguistic diversity itself. There has been a linguistic dimension to almost all inter-ethnic conflicts we have seen in Europe in the past half-century e.g. the Südtirol in the 1950s, Corsica, Cyprus, Northern Ireland, the Basque country and, more recently, Chechnya. In contrast, where sovereign governments treated linguistic minorities reasonably well (e.g. the West Frisians in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Welsh in the UK, the Sorbs in the former DDR) one finds little evidence of alienation or conflict.

### **Language Communities**

European language communities may be categorised in many different ways but for the purpose of this paper, I think the following schema might be useful:

Those who live in communities that speak:

**A languages that are official state languages, that have many millions of users and that are used as languages of wider communication outside of Europe.** English and Spanish are the most obvious examples but French, Russian and Portuguese are other examples.

---

<sup>5</sup> 'The Diversity Dividend' Adam Price with Cairtíona Ó Tórná & Allan Wynne Jones [Brussels, 1997]

<sup>6</sup> In the Biblical narrative (v. Genesis 10.20), which precedes the Tower of Babel story, we read of the sons of Japheth and they are listed according to their countries and each of their languages. In short, linguistic diversity preceded Babel.

**B languages that are official state languages, are used by many millions of people but which are not widely used for international communication** German, Polish, Italian, Swedish, Greek, Czech, Hungarian etc. immediately spring to mind

**C languages that are official state languages but which have rather small (-2m.) communities of speakers** I immediately think of my own language, Irish, and also of Lëtzebuergesch, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese and even Slovene.

**D languages that are not the official state languages of sovereign states and which are normally categorised as regional or minority languages.** These may be spoken in one state only (e.g. Breton in France, Scottish Gaelic in the UK, Friulan in Italy, Sorbian in Germany) or in a number of countries (e.g. Catalan in Spain, France and Italy, the Sámi languages in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia). Their *de facto* and *de jure* status within different regions of the one state may differ considerably e.g. Catalan in Catalonia, Valencia and the Balearic Islands.

**E languages which are official state languages in other states but which are in a minority position in the state in which the community lives** e.g. German in Belgium, Hungarian in Romania, Greek in Italy, Italian in Croatia.

**F non-territorial languages** i.e. the Gypsy and Jewish languages e.g. Sinti, Roma, Yiddish, Judeo-Spanish.

**G non-European languages which arrived with immigrants in recent decades**

Languages which fall into categories C, D, E & F are under pressure or even threat in many, arguably most, instances. It is on these languages that we must focus if we wish to conserve our continent's linguistic diversity.

### **Attitudes Towards Linguistic Diversity**

Some people would argue that the concept of the modern nation-state, as a sovereign entity, entitled to the allegiance of all its citizens, can be traced to the Peace of Westphalia in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Personally, I would favour the school of thought that claims that the true prototype of the modern nation-state was, in fact the first French Republic. At the time of the Revolution, France was not yet a nation of citizens: rather she was a federation of provinces<sup>7</sup>. It is estimated that only 30% of the French population spoke standard Île-de-France French at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The majority spoke a variety of what are now called regional languages. Occitan, Corsican (close to the language of Tuscany), Breton, Basque, a variation of Dutch, Catalan, varieties of German in Alsace and Lorraine, not to mention the *langues d'oïl* such as Gallo and Picard. This situation presented no great problem for the *ancien régime*. If the populace paid their taxes, participated in the occasional war and protested loyalty to the monarchy, then the King had no problem with his subject speaking whatever language they chose. The Revolution ended all of that. The people were now citizens, entitled to certain rights but above all owing their fealty to the State.

The modern nation-state was of its nature bureaucratic and also centralist. It attached great importance to having its influence extend into hitherto largely untouched domains of life. education, public administration and commerce. While the French revolutionaries started with a very liberal agenda they quickly switched to an authoritarian and centralist one, inspired by people like

---

<sup>7</sup> *The Ancien Régime in Europe*. E. N. Williams. London 1970

Abbé Gregoire. State and nation, citizenship and nationality, were perceived as being synonymous. One state, one nation and, of course, one language. Unity meant uniformity.

With the establishment of unified nation-states in Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom [to mention but some cases] during the 19<sup>th</sup> century one can trace the beginning of the decline for most of Europe's small linguistic communities. The only two political entities that were notable exceptions were the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires, where the sheer scale of linguistic diversity rendered the imposition of a monolingual policy impossible.

Hitler used (or misused) disaffected and alienated minorities to stir up trouble, justify invasions of other countries and subsequently obtain a degree of support in occupied territories. The existence of a substantial German-speaking population in Czechoslovakia . in the Südatenland - was his excuse for invading Czechoslovakia in 1938. Some members of ethnic groups who felt mistreated by their state governments (e.g. the Bretons in France, the Flemings in Belgium, the Croats in Yugoslavia, the Chechnyans, Ingushetians and Kalmyks in the Soviet Union) supported the invading German army. It should be said that only a minority, a tiny minority in many cases, collaborated in any significant way but this was enough for the victors to wreak vengeance on the minority populations in the aftermath of the war. The Soviets minorities I mentioned . the Chechnyans, Ingushetians and Kalmyks - were all deported to Siberia and most suffered terribly during their exile.

The outcome of all this was that minorities were considered to be bad news by most post-WW2 European governments. If we look at the records for the late 40s, the 50s and even most of the 60s we find that there was very little for minorities to celebrate. Linguistic diversity was seen as a problem rather than as an asset.

### **A New Dawn**

The first ray of light to appear on the horizon was the international Covenant on Civil or Political Rights<sup>8</sup>, adopted by the UN in 1966 but which did not come into force until 1976 . ten years later. Article 27 of the Covenant states that:

*In those states in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or use their own language.*

A very modest degree of recognition but nevertheless a first step!

Towards the end of the 70s things started to stir at European level. At its first meeting in Galway, Ireland, in October 1975, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, adopted a declaration , known since as the

---

<sup>8</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR) A.G. res.2200A (XXI), 21 U.N. GAOR Supp.(No. 16) at 52, UN Doc. A/6316 (1966), 99 U.N.T.S. 171, entered into force March 23, 1976.

Galway Declaration<sup>9</sup>. The Declaration includes a number of demands of a linguistic and cultural nature, not only on the Council of Europe but also on member-state governments. These include Article 6, a call to:

*Take the necessary measures for the protection and revitalisation of the languages and cultures which are often threatened by extinction in ethnic peripheral communities.*

Echoes of this can be found in the Bordeaux Declaration, adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in early 1978. The Parliamentary Assembly was to adopt a Recommendation on the educational and cultural problems of minority languages and dialects in Europe in 1981<sup>10</sup>. The *rapporteur* was a Catalan member, Cirici-Pellicer.

Nine days later, again in Strasbourg, another and more important development was to take place . the adoption of the Arfé Resolution by the European Parliament. This was the first step by a European Communities institution to explicitly support linguistic diversity, including so-called lesser used languages.

### **The European Communities/European Union enters the picture**

The European Communities in their early decades had little or no language policy. Indeed it was only with the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty in 1994 that we find any direct reference to education or culture in the treaties. The treaties state in what languages official and authentic versions of the treaties exist. It is in Council Decision 1/1958 that we find the official and working languages of the communities listed.

The first signs of interest in the future of the Communities regional and minority languages appeared in the European Parliament in 1979. On 28 September of that year a motion for resolution was tabled by Gaetano Arfé MEP, and a number of other Socialist members, all of them either from France or Italy, on a Charter of Ethnic Minorities. Less than a month later, a further motion for resolution was tabled by a compatriot of mine, John Hume MEP, and co-signed by a Socialist deputy from all of the member states, calling for the drawing up of a Bill of Rights of the Regional Languages and Cultures of the Community. Although at first sight both motions for resolution seemed very similar, there was in fact a very profound underlying difference in approach between them. Whereas the Arfé Motion for Resolution speaks of the demands for autonomy, of ethnic and linguistic minorities the Hume Motion for Resolution side-steps issues such as ethnicity and autonomy and rather refers to this diversity being again one of the main sources of the vitality, richness and originality of European civilisation. In the event the European Parliament decided to have two different reports drawn up . one on the rights of ethnic minorities and the other on the promotion of regional and minority languages. Gaetano Arfé MEP, a former professor of history in the University of Firenze and a highly respected

---

<sup>9</sup> Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe . First Convention of the Authorities of European Peripheral Regions . Galway (Ireland) . 14-16 October 1975

<sup>10</sup> Recommendation 928 (1981) on the educational and cultural problems of minority languages and dialects in Europe, adopted during the Parliamentary Assembly Debate on 7 October 1981 (18<sup>th</sup> Sitting).

parliamentarian, was appointed *rapporteur* of the report on languages whereas the Legal Affairs Committee of the Parliament appointed a German Christian Democrat, Mr. A Goppel, to prepare a report on European legislation on ethnic groups. Hume expressed the opinion to me on a number of occasions that an approach based on ethnicity would never meet with success because it would of its nature trigger a substantial political reaction. He believed, however, that an approach based on language and culture would strike a chord across the political divide and stood a very good chance of being accepted. Hume's assessment of the situation proved to be correct. The Arfé Report and accompanying motion for resolution came before the plenary session of Parliament in October 1981. The Goppel Report on the other hand never got past committee stage nor did a subsequent attempt to prepare such a motion for resolution, prepared by Graf Stauffenberg MEP and later by Siegbert Alber MEP.

The Arfé Resolution called on the member state governments and on regional and local authorities to enact a number of measures to support and promote regional and minority languages, particularly in the domains of education, mass communication, public life and social affairs. The motion was adopted by a comfortable majority . 80 votes in favour, 18 against and 8 abstentions. The only political block that voted almost solidly against the resolution was the English Tory group. Most of the 80 votes in favour came from the centre and left groupings, especially the Socialists.

Things started to happen quickly following on the adoption of the Arfé resolution. At a colloquy, held in Brussels in May of the following year, the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages was established. It sought to speak and act at European level on behalf of the EC's small language communities. Its general aim was to conserve and promote Europe's lesser used languages, together with their attendant cultures.

Thanks to the efforts of Arfé and Hume, a small budget line for regional and minority languages and cultures was included in the EC budget. This amounted to only 100,000 ECU, as the euro was then called, in its first year. By the time it was abolished in 1998, it had grown to "4m. Over the years thousand of projects for language promotion received funding from this line.

An Intergroup Committee for Minority Languages, comprising members from different political groups, was established in the European Parliament in 1983. I am happy to report that it is still functioning.

In 1983 also, a second resolution from Arfé was adopted. This strengthened the provisions of the first one. Over the years, further reports were prepared by interested parliamentarians and motions were adopted;

Kuijpers (1987)

Killilea (1994)

Morgan (2001)

Ebner (2003)

Bernat Joan i Mari (2006)

## **Problems and a Reorientation of Policy**

Things might have continued to develop positively had not the former British Government (i.e. that of John Major) not taken a case against the European Commission to the European Court of Justice in 1996. The thrust of the British case was that the Commission had no legal right to spend money on a particular programme as it was not the subject of a legal act, agreed by the Commission, the Parliament and the Council.

Ironically, neither the legal point at issue nor the particular programme in contention, which related to combating social exclusion, had anything to do with language. However, the Court found in favour of the United Kingdom and ruled that no monies could be allocated to projects if these projects did not form part of a programme, agreed by the three main Community institutions. The Court delivered its verdict in early June 1998 and the immediate effect was that over a hundred budget lines, whose legal bases were doubtful, were blocked. Over the ensuing few weeks, over half of these were unblocked when the legal services of the Commission satisfied themselves that each programme had a satisfactory legal basis. Among those to remain blocked was Budget Line B3-1006 (Regional and Minority Languages and Cultures).

Why then not enact a legal act to establish a multiannual programme to support lesser used languages? The problem was more of a political one than a legal one. Any legal act would need as its base Article 149 (Education) and Article 151 (Culture). Article 151 is problematic in that any decision emanating from it has to be a unanimous decision. It was almost certain that one or more member states would oppose such a programme and would therefore veto it.

2001 was the European Year of Languages, which was jointly organised by the EU and by the Council of Europe. It sought to raise the awareness of Europeans to languages, be they major or minor ones. The object being to have all European speak two languages in addition to their mother-tongue. All in all, the European Year of Languages was successful and popular. It also gave an opening in that linguistic diversity became more politically acceptable as a concept.

Towards the end of the year, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on regional and lesser used languages. The main mover was Eluned Morgan, a Welsh Socialist member but it received cross-party support. Its main message was to continue the work initiated during the European Year of Languages:

*Calls for the Commission to build on the work done as part of the European year of Languages (2001) towards a multiannual programme on languages before the end of 2003, and to earmark funding within this programme for regional or lesser used languages.*

In a number of subsequent speeches, the then responsible Commissioner, Vivien Reding, a Luxemburger, said that she believed the way forward for lesser used languages was mainstreaming i.e. participating in language programmes in general rather than having separate one. She did not comment on the fact that the more important actions [e.g. Lingua] excluded most of the lesser used languages and that most of the activities covered were of little relevance to lesser used language communities.

Following a wide-ranging public consultation process in 2002, the Action Plan 'Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity', published in 2003, was the

first comprehensive statement by the Commission of its vision for the teaching and learning of languages, including, notably the view that:

*Learning one lingua franca alone is not enough. Every European citizen should have meaningful communicative competence in at least two other languages in addition to his or her mother tongue.*

It went on the note that:

*It would be illusory to believe that European programmes could bear the main burden of promoting language learning and linguistic diversity; nor should they: the funding allocated to them can never take the place of direct investment at national, regional and local level in educational infrastructure, in appropriate class sizes, in the training of teachers, or in international exchanges, for example.*

The Action Plan committed the Commission to undertaking a series of new actions with the aim of encouraging Member States also to extend the benefits of foreign language learning to all citizens, to improve the quality of foreign language teaching, and to create an environment more propitious to foreign language learning.

### **The Present and the Future for Linguistic Diversity in the EU**

The EU's current education programme is called the Lifelong Learning Programme (2007-2013). One of its key activities relates to languages and language learning. And under the LLP all languages are equal. Language learning and linguistic diversity are now official aims.

With its most recent enlargement, the EU created the position of Commissioner for Multilingualism. The current incumbent is Leonard Orban, a Romanian.

Article 2.3 of the Lisbon Treaty states of the Union:

*It shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and shall ensure that the European cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced.*

One might ask what the word 'respect' implies . a passive respect of a pro-active one? And is there some unstated reason for the omission of any reference to language in the second half of the sentence, which places a definite obligation on the Union, purely coincidental? Language is part of culture. Is it covered by the term 'cultural heritage'?

Article II . 22 of The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the Union we find a similar reference:

*The Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity.*

We should also note that the Union now has 23 official and working languages in comparison to 6 for the UN.

### **Council of Europe**

Interesting developments were taking place in the Council of Europe in parallel to development in the European Community or Union.

In 1984 a Public Hearing on the regional and minority languages of Europe was held in Strasbourg with the ultimate aim of which is to propose a Charter of European

regional and minority languages as was stated in the letter of invitation. The organisers were the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, a Council of Europe institution. The hearing was attended by around 250 of small linguistic communities and was eminently successful. One might say that it was at this gathering that the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages was conceived. The preparation of the Charter was a slow and protracted process. A text was eventually developed by the Standing Conference and this was then endorsed by the Parliamentary Assembly. It then went before the Committee of Ministers i.e. the foreign ministers (or their representatives) from the member states of the Council. We were all aware that this was ~~an~~ make or break time. As it happened, the Committee of Ministers neither accepted nor rejected the draft charter but set up a committee, comprising mostly representatives of the member state governments to rework the text. This committee was called CAHLR (Comité ad hoc Langues Régionales) and it worked from 1989 until 1992. It was an exciting time as new democracies from central Europe (e.g. Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland) were joining the Council. [I was honoured by being invited to be an observer delegate with permission to speak but not to vote]. Acceptance would require a two-thirds majority of ~~the~~ votes. We were conscious that some states were implacably opposed. The choice facing those strongly in favour of a charter was to press for an excellent one that would be almost certainly rejected or a good one that might just about get through. We opted for the second choice. The text was finally accepted by 21 of the Council's then 28 member states and opened for signature on 5 November 1992. The Charter became the first ever international legal instrument to protect regional and minority languages. It has now been signed by 33 European countries, 23 of which have already ratified it.

The Charter is unusual in that it does not speak of *minorities* or even *language communities*. It speaks only of *languages*. It does not confer rights on any person or group. Rather it places obligations on ratifying states. States have to provide reports on implementation measures at three-yearly intervals and their reports have to be put into the public domain. Bodies or association legally established in a State may draw the attention of the committee of experts to matters relating to the undertakings enter into by the State under Part III of the Charter. The reports are examined by a committee of experts [COMEX] which in turn reports to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

In 1995 the Council of Europe adopted the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. This is a rights-based document which deals with a wide range of rights. Article 10 declares the right of members of national minorities ~~to~~ use freely and without interference his or her minority language, in private and in public, orally and in writing. 43 states have signed it and 39 have ratified it already. The Framework Convention has two major weaknesses, however. It does not define what a ~~national~~ minority is. The monitoring mechanism is very weak. Ratifying states must submit periodical reports but unlike the Charter, there is no provision for facilitating complaints from relevant bodies, nor is there any committee of experts to carry out inspections.

Another important Council of Europe document is Protocol No. 12 to the European Convention of Human Rights and Basic Freedoms. Article 1.1 of this Protocol states that:

*The enjoyment of any right set forth by law shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, **language**, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.*

20 States have signed the Protocol and 17 of them have ratified it.

### **OSCE and other bodies**

The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities has teams of experts compile sets of Recommendations. These Recommendations were based on existing international legal instruments. The two most relevant, from the perspective of this paper are The Hague Recommendations Regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities (1996) and The Oslo Recommendation Regarding the Linguistic Rights of National Minorities (1998).

Other bodies, such as the Committee of the Regions, an EU institution, and the Assembly of European Regions have published a number of recommendations concerning linguistic diversity and language rights.

It should also be noted that a number of important language acts were enacted by various states, autonomous regions and even local authorities over the past 30 years, not least here in Spain.

### **Eastern Europe**

The second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century also saw changes in the language situation in Eastern Europe. Lenin, while believing that ultimately all humankind would speak the same language, expressed views on the rights of linguistic minorities characterised by democratic sensibilities, quite advanced by the standards of his times. He unambiguously stated the necessity for the State power to prevent linguistic diversity from being repressed within public communication and education. Under Lenin, work began on providing written forms (mostly based on the Latin alphabet) for hitherto unwritten languages: the mother-tongue was introduced into the schools, and publishing in the national languages increased rapidly. At first, Stalin also opposed the idea of a special role for Russian, and his regime saw the greatest number of non-Russian languages functioning in the widest range of domains<sup>11</sup>. [We should not forget that Stalin was a Georgian, not a Russian!]

However, the rise of state nationalism signalled a return to Russian, and a rise in its legal status. Indeed, the languages which had only recently acquired a Latin-based alphabet were changed to a Cyrillic base, in order to facilitate the learning of Russian. Further blows to the national languages were the elimination of many of their native intelligentsia in the purges, the destruction of national cultural treasures and the closing of cultural institutions.

Under Khrushchev, a radical shift occurred in favour of Russian, the language of inter-nationality communication and of cooperation of all peoples of the USSR. Russian was increasingly used in primary education and official correspondence. Brezhnev's policies represented a continuation and intensification of these policies.

It goes without saying that small ethnic groups accused of collaboration with the invading Germans enjoyed no linguistic or cultural rights. In the case of the Kalmyks, who were deported to Siberia from 1943 until 1957, their language went into sharp decline during their years of exile as they were scattered over a wide area and mixed with other deportees and native peoples. Even on their return, the Kalmyk language was taught only after school hours as an optional subject. Chechnyan was not allowed to be taught at all in Chechnyan schools, a fact that the Western media seemed to have overlooked when commenting on the cause of the conflict there!

---

<sup>11</sup> v. The changing status of Russian in the Soviet Union. Isabelle Kreindler [The Hague, 1982]

When the Communist era came to an end and things started to change, a new era of hope dawned. But the new day has not been as bright as first thought. In the new Constitution of the Russian Federation, enacted in 1993, Russian is declared to be the official state language on all of its territory. (Article 68, Section 1) Each republic has the right to instate its own official language, to be used alongside Russian in administrative and state business (Article 68, Section 2). Section 3 states that "The Russian Federation guarantees all its peoples the right to the preservation of [their] native language, and to the creation of conditions for its study and development. Moreover the Constitution mandates that the federal state bear some responsibility for training specialists in those languages of the Federation which do not have their own government"<sup>12</sup>.

All very commendable on paper! This devolution of authority and responsibility worked well in those republics where the autochthonous or native population is in a majority position or, at least forms a very substantial minority e.g. Tatarstan, Bashkortostan. The problem is that the autochthonous population in very many republics is in a minority, even in their own titular republic. From conversations I have had with concerned parties, even in the North Caucasus, Europe's so-called "mountain of languages" some of the local languages are becoming moribund with intergenerational transmission at a dangerously low level. Nevertheless, there is real progress in other cases e.g. in Kalmykia where a language revitalisation policy is under way.

Russia signed the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in 2001 but has yet to ratify it. An instrument of ratification would again place a clear international obligation on the Federal Government to ensure at least minimum support for all of the Federation's 120+ regional languages.

Most of the peoples who left the Soviet Union and established independent sovereign states have embarked on robust policies to normalise their national languages, the three Baltic republics being classic examples. Georgia and Moldova are also endeavouring to promote their national languages, probably in a less organised or successful manner than Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

### Future Prospectives

What we can say is that real progress has been made in Europe over the past quarter century to protect language rights and promote linguistic diversity. We can also observe that ability in a second and even a third language has risen among many Europeans. A Eurobarometer survey<sup>13</sup>, published in February 2006, showed a reasonably high level of bilingual ability.

Which languages do you speak well enough in order to be able to have a conversation excluding your mother-tongue?

At least One Language	56%
At Least Two Languages	28%
At Least Three Languages	11%
None	44%

<sup>12</sup> v. *Saving Languages . an introduction to language revitalization*. Lenore A. Grenoble & Lindsay J. Whaley [Cambridge, 2006]

<sup>13</sup> Eurobarometer 243 *Europeans and Their Languages*

The language spread is, however, far from even. English and French are known by more people who acquired them as L2 rather than as L1.

Language	Mother-Tongue	Foreign Language	TOTAL
English	13%	38%	51%
German	18%	14%	32%
French	12%	14%	26%
Italian	13%	3%	16%
Spanish	9%	6%	15%
Polish	9%	1%	10%
Russian	1%	6%	7%

We need, of course, to remind ourselves that these figures apply primarily to EU member states.

Above all, we need to remind ourselves that we are living in a rapidly changing world. Patterns of social interaction would seem to be changing. In urban settings, people are now interacting more in networks rather than in purely geographical terms. Someone living in an apartment block may barely know their next-door neighbours but rather interact in networks based on common interests e.g. work, recreation. So Fishman's family and neighbourhood domain in his famous GIDS needs to be revisited. There are more and more one-parent families which will probably mean that school and television, for instance, may become even more critical in language transmission.

Language legislation is important but legislation of itself cannot revitalise a language. All it can do is create the conditions in which revitalisation can happen. What is critical is language planning, especially bottom-up planning.

Probably the most important factor of all is the globalisation of society and the dramatic increase in the world's population. It has more than doubled since 1960!

One of the most stimulating papers I have heard in recent years has been one given by your goodself, Mr. Chairman, at the Linguapax conference of 2002. You entitled it "Language policy in the age of globalisation: intercommunication and diversity from the perspective of "complexity" In it you pleaded for a global approach to linguistic diversity . a proposal that makes eminent sense. Some scholars, such as Crystal<sup>14</sup>, believe that we are in serious danger of losing half of the world's living languages in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. With the globalisation of the world's economy and the advent of ICT, there is no way may we can look at Europe on its own. Language death is a threat to all humankind.

### Proposals

May I be so bold as to make a few suggestions . none of which are very original or revolutionary but all of which are do-able.

1. I believe we should work to make optimum use of existing legal instruments, especially the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Not only should we work to have more states sign and ratify the Charter but we should encourage existing ratifying states to upgrade their instruments of ratification by extending to additional regional or minority languages the benefit of Part III of the Charter or by subscribing, in

<sup>14</sup> Language Death. David Crystal [Cambridge, 2000]

respect of a language or all its regional or minority languages spoken on its territory to paragraphs of the Charter not previously accepted. . This is possible as can be seen from par. 50 of the Explanatory report on the Charter. Furthermore, we should press to have more resources made available to the Council of Europe to police the Charter and to assist member states in overcoming difficulties in implementing sound language policies.

2. At its 10<sup>th</sup> biennial conference in Galway in 2006, the International Academy of Language Law unanimously adopted a resolution calling on UNESCO to prepare an International Convention of Linguistic Diversity. Unfortunately this idea has not been acted upon. This proposal should be reactivated. Could we not find a small number of states, with reasonably good records on linguistic diversity to table such a resolution at UNESCO? This, I feel, would be fully in keeping with Prof. Bastardosq proposal of six years ago.
3. I would like to refloat a proposal I made originally at a Council of Europe conference at Noordwijkerhout (Netherlands) in 2001 . the establishment of a European Centre for Linguistic Diversity. Such a centre could be semi-autonomous, or come under the aegis of the Council of Europe, like the European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz, and would serve as a clearing house for language planning, for data gathering, and for the sharing of expertise. It would draw, not only on academia but also on policy makers and practitioners in the field of language, be they from official agencies, international organisations (e.g. OSCE, UNESCO) or from NGOs. I see networking it with other universities, research centres etc. its services would be available to governments, embarking on language planning or endeavouring to accommodate linguistic diversity.

It seemed as if a similar proposal was about to be acted upon when the European Parliament adopted a resolution in 2003, tabled by Michl Ebner, a deputy from the Südtirol. This resolution contained a proposal for the establishment of a European Agency for Linguistic Diversity. Unfortunately, this proposal did not find favour with the European commission and eventually ran into the sand.

Would some regional government consider running with such a proposal?

4. The twinning of towns is well-established in Europe and has contributed to the building of relationship between peoples of different nationalities. May I suggest a variant of this idea . the twinning of lesser used language communities on a West-East basis . in short the twinning of small language communities in Western Europe with a counterpart community in, say, the Russian Federation. For instance, the Galicians might be twinned with Bashkirs, the Catalans with the Tatars, the Irish with the Kalmyks etc. This should cost very little but the sharing of expertise and the building of a sense of solidarity could be extremely valuable. Would the newly established Network for Linguistic Diversity consider such a proposal?
5. Finally, I feel the time is now upon us to develop a legal document, or at least a set of recommendations, concerning the linguistic rights of immigrant communities. In making this proposal I am very conscious of the complexity of the issue, not only because of the varying situations of immigrant groups and their geographical distribution but also because of their differing aspirations as regards integration. I also do not believe that immigrant language should be treated the same as autochthonous ones.

But surely, it is only right to afford children of an immigrant background an opportunity to read and write their ancestral languages and to become familiar with their attendant cultures?

A parting word! Proponents of linguistic diversity are often a semi-pessimistic bunch. I am not! We have made real and concrete progress over the past three decades and we should not hesitate to recognise it. Above all, linguistic diversity is now politically correct, even *chic*. This is the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. The UN has also proclaimed 2008 to be International Year of Languages, in an effort to promote unity in diversity and global understanding.

I suggest that now is the time for bold and imaginative thinking and, all, action.