

**What are we referring to when we speak about linguistic diversity in Europe?
The importance of its definition in order to determine the role of public authorities in its
defence and promotion**

Begoña Antxustegi & Amaia Agirre

Dirección de Coordinación de la Viceconsejería de Política Lingüística del Gobierno del País
Vasco, Basque Country

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- 1. What is linguistic diversity, what do European institutions understand by diversity, which languages does it include and which ones does it exclude**

Good morning. *Egun on.*

I will start with a brief overview of the texts that constitute the Community heritage, that is to say, strictly speaking, the sources of European Community Law, and of the information that the European Union and other institutions of the European sphere offer in their Internet homepages. Thus, I will show you the astonishing number of language categories which can be found in these documents.

This will allow us to see not only the diversity of languages that are included there, but their vast categorisation and the subsequent different juridical treatment.

Therefore, by analysing the way in which European institutions understand linguistic diversity, we will have a better view of the legal consequences implied by this definition.

Well, the linguistic regime of the European institutions is an issue which has been present in Community Law already from 1958. Rule 1 of the Council (of April 15, 1958) on the establishment of the linguistic regime of the European Community, articles 290 and 314 of the Treaty on the European Community and Article 21 of the Treaty of Amsterdam deal with the **official languages of the current European Union**.

Obviously, these regulations regard the **official languages of the Member States** which, in the Europe of the fifteen Member States means one language for each state, except in the cases of Ireland, Belgium and Luxembourg.

The states of Ireland and Luxembourg have not requested the inclusion of Irish and Luxembourgian, respectively, in the list of the official languages of the EU. Therefore, we may conclude that the official languages of the Member States and those of the European Union do not coincide.

In addition, there are the **working languages** of the Union's institutions which, despite the fact that Art. 1 of Regulation nr. 1 sets that the official languages are also working languages, they are the languages that each institution of the Community may establish in its procedural regulations so that they can be used in specific cases.

This means that, in practice and in accordance with Art. 6 of Regulation nr. 1, official languages are not always working languages in some European institutions.

There are also the **national languages of the countries of the European Association of Free Trade and of the European Economic Space** made up of Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein. Although these languages do not have an official status given the fact that these three countries are neither EU members nor candidate countries, they deserve a preferential treatment and are included in the linguistic actions of the EU (I am referring to Icelandic and Norwegian).

Then, if you decide to access the information offered by the European Union in the Internet, you will find expressions such as **main languages, most-widespread European languages, less-widespread languages**, as well as **less-widely used and less-taught languages or LWULT languages**. Despite their name, they are neither minority languages nor regional languages, but official languages of the Member States which are not to be found among the most widespread ones.

Indeed, given the fact that LWULT languages are official and scarcely widespread languages, they are recognised by the European Union. From my status of minority language speaker, this is -if you allow me to express my opinion- an enviable situation.

We will not start qualifying expressions such as main languages, but I wish to point them out as a sample of the evaluative tone of some of these designations. After all, if I ask the speaker of any language which language is for him/her the main language, does anybody doubt that he/she will answer his/hers?

But, let us go back to our overview. We may even find working documents of the European Commission. I am specifically referring to one dated in Brussels on November 13, 2002, that literally states that *"the offer of language learning resources should include most-widespread and less-widespread European languages, 'national' languages and regional ones, minority languages and those of the immigrant communities, as well as the languages of our main commercial partners all over the world."*

In order to conclude this first point, we must add that the Euromosaic Survey, undertaken by the Commission in 1992 and completed in 1995 with the surveys on the linguistic regional and minority groups of Austria, Finland and Sweden, deals -as you may know- with what it calls **linguistic minority groups** of the European Union. Among other things, in these texts we may find the following expressions: **national languages, official, regional, lesser-used, intraterritorial and extraterritorial state minority languages, etc.**

I could go on and tell you about what the UNESCO calls **endangered languages** or I could refer to **our neighbours' languages** as a priority in language learning, according to the proposal of the Commissioner of Education and Culture, Mrs. Viviane Reading.

However, I feel confident about the fact that this quick overview of terminological expressions has been useful to show the complexity and the diversity of situations hidden under the cover of what we have come to call, with some innocence and due perhaps to the lack of a necessary reflection, “linguistic diversity”.

Now, to conclude this first section, let us see what, from our point of view, constitutes a good example of the true contents of linguistic diversity for the European Union:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/lang/languages/lang/europeanlanguages_es.html

2 Diagnosis of the situation and the sociolinguistic evolution of languages in Europe. What do we have, what do we need

Now, let us look at the data available. I anticipate that you will find these data contradictory and, sometimes, even surprising. You should not be surprised if you notice that the mention of sources or approximate references is missing, due to the lack of more accurate or recent surveys

Firstly, the most visible and objective data:

To date and until next May, the European Union is made up of fifteen states and has eleven official languages. With the accession of the ten candidate countries, which introduce nine more official languages, in the EU we will end up having twenty official and working languages.

In the Europe of the fifteen Member States, each member state has one official language, except for Ireland, Belgium and Luxembourg, which in all amounts to thirteen different languages.

The languages which are the target of the EU linguistic actions are today's eleven official languages, as well as Irish, Luxembourgian, Norwegian and Icelandic and the languages of the candidate countries, which amount to nine more. In all, twenty-four languages.

The General Direction of Education and Culture of the European Commission provides us with two very important data:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/lang/languages/lang/europeanlanguages_es.html

1. *We can find **more than sixty** communities of speakers of autochthonous regional or minority languages.*

2. ***About** forty million citizens of the European Union regularly use -generally speaking, in addition to the official language or languages of the state at issue- a regional or minority language which has been transmitted from generation to generation.*

The Commission does not mention its sources but points out that a thorough study has been commissioned on the European Union communities of speakers of regional and minority languages, the results of which have been published in the Euromosaic Survey.

Now, let us compare this information with the one the Euromosaic itself provides.

In its introductory page, this survey, which started in 1992 and was completed in 1995, as far as the surveys on the languages of Austria, Sweden and Finland are concerned, warns us of the poor credibility of the data it provides by means of the following words:

<http://www.uoc.edu/euromosaic/web/homeect/index1.html>

*“Given the fact that, in some cases, the data available are **scarcely credible, even non-existent, or need to be updated**, we invite the specialists and experts to send us their comments and amendments in order to improve and update the surveys.”*

<http://www.uoc.edu/euromosaic/web/homean/index1.html>

*“Insofar as in some cases the available data are **outdated, unreliable, unlocatable or simply non-existent**, thus rendering the relevant report incomplete or more provisional than others, we invite all specialists and informed persons to suggest amendments to them with a view to improving and updating them.”*

The person who, despite this warning, dares to visit the Euromosaic homepage will be able to extract the following data:

According to the 1992 data, in the Europe of the fifteen Member States there are thirty-two linguistic minority groups. The Euromosaic does not include Yiddish and the languages of the Romani and Sinti communities in its survey.

If we do not include Yiddish and the languages of the Romani and Sinti communities, in all it amounts to forty-three autochthonous linguistic communities in the EU today, a figure which is very far from the one used by the Commission when it speaks about more than sixty.

The Euromosaic will not present its surveys on the countries which are about to join the European Union until September this year. For this reason, at least at European level, the situation of minority and regional languages in these countries is still unknown.

The *Contact Bulletin* of EBLUL provides us with the following datum: *“According to some sources, there are approximately 5,000 national groups living in the contemporary world, and about 3,000 linguistic groups. All European countries are multilingual and all 55 OSCE participating States are multilingual -none is monolingual! This is the reality of the 21st century”.*

Once more, there is a lack of preciseness and rigour (“linguistic group” is not defined, sources are not mentioned, it gives an approximate information, etc.).

We also count on the information provided by the Eurobarometer of February 2001, according to which 53% of the Europeans stated that, in addition to their mother tongue, they speak at least one other European language.

Nevertheless, we cannot avoid questioning ourselves about the profile of the people polled and the elaboration of the questionnaire which they answered.

Thus, the first question that comes to mind is: Does this 53% of Europeans that declare to know at least one other European language besides their mother tongue include people like us that have as their first language another language different from the official state one and, as their second language, the official state one?

I do not think so. The information that is being asked to the people polled is based on a division between mother tongue and foreign language, which, we believe, impairs the results obtained.

http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/lang/languages/lang/baroexe_de.pdf

As regards the data provided by the Council of Europe in its section devoted to linguistic diversity, it is considered that in Europe there are about 225 autochthonous languages.

<http://www.ecml.at/edl/default.asp?t=celebration>

Finally, in its *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger of Disappearing*, the UNESCO estimates that in Europe there are about 50 languages that belong to this category.

Furthermore, in Europe there are the immigrants' languages; some are very widespread languages which are strong from the cultural point of view and given the number of their speakers. Among them, there is Arabic, Russian and Mandarin Chinese. However, we also lack data on their situation and their sociolinguistic evolution within the EU.

The same happens with the different languages of signs.

Consequently, the situation of languages within the European Union presents today the following features:

- The data available on the sociolinguistic situation in Europe are scarce, scattered, not very reliable and not properly updated. This makes planning impossible because we do not know about the basic situation.
- Hitherto, the EU institutions have not paid any attention to the need for a European language policy. This is shown by the lack of human and material resources devoted to this aim and, even, by the relative lack of knowledge regarding the real situation of European minority languages.
- The term "linguistic diversity" has been coined, but its semantic field is still to be defined. When required, it embraces either the official languages of the European Union exclusively or all the languages spoken in Europe, from the languages of signs to the foreign ones, the autochthonous ones, etc., or any intermediate stage between them.
- Such a flexibility of meaning in regard to diversity allows us to treat equally languages with very different needs. This does not favour a planning adjusted to each sociolinguistic reality.
- The most direct consequence of this lack of accuracy is the promotion of a "linguistic diversity" which leaves regional and minority languages, among others, out of the European programmes.
- We must add that there is not enough legal basis for the institutionalised promotion of the regional and minority languages of the European Union.
- We lack a coordination and cooperation mechanism between the European public infrastructures for language policy and the regional ones.
- Within the European Commission there is a lack of a specific General Directorate responsible for languages.
- The budgetary allocation for regional and minority languages is non-existent, which shows that there is no European policy of positive action to promote the use of our languages.

3. Performance and financing criteria for the promotion of European linguistic diversity

As regards regional or minority languages, we consider that the aims that must guide the intervention of the European Union in language policy are the maintenance, the intergenerational transmission, the promotion of the use and the preservation of the quality of languages, thus guaranteeing the offer of products and services in our languages and their access to new Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).

We consider it is necessary to carry out campaigns aimed at informing and raising awareness. From here, we urge people to foster the use of the lesser-used languages in the EU audiovisual policy, the use of telecommunications' modern digital technology in order to divulge the largest number of minority languages and the presence of lesser-used languages in every educational and cultural European programme in those areas where differentiated linguistic communities exist.

The linguistic actions and the programmes in which the linguistic criterion is present should include all European languages, both official and non-official, establishing conditions which can be adapted to the needs of the weakest languages.

The recognition of linguistic diversity must attain its largest and integrating dimension and must be understood as an asset in the development of the domestic market and economic and social integration, providing the languages of European regions with a specific and differentiated treatment adjusted to their needs and to the place they deserve in the construction of a unified and peaceful Europe.

We must insist on the fact that the European intervention must include campaigns informing citizens on the linguistic reality of all the countries that make up the enlarged European Union. Apart from arising the awareness of minority or regional language speakers and contributing to increase the prestige of their own culture in their own eyes, these campaigns should influence the sensitivity of the speakers of all languages, moving away from the apprehensions and prejudices that traditionally have been linked to the way in which anything which is a minority, which is different, is perceived.

The development and use of languages affect all the spheres of citizens' lives. Therefore, an integrating linguistic policy distinguishes itself by having a horizontal and *omnicomprehensive* nature. These values are essential for an efficient and integral policy.

The existence of the linguistic criterion in the actions promoted by the European institutions must be more specific, establishing regional and minority languages as one of its basic quality criteria.

To apply a horizontal policy with regard to language means that linguistic aspects will be taken into account within the whole series of Community programmes. Each one of the Community programmes should include a definition of its operative aims, a budget and the mechanisms foreseen to assess the fulfilment of its linguistic aims. European cooperation in the linguistic sphere may and ought to be integrated into the general economic and technical cooperation programmes.

The creation of networks, even virtual ones, which allows the establishment of periodical contacts among experts of different linguistic communities would produce a multiplicative effect of the benefits resulting from the personal experiences with a highly advantageous content, speaking from a human and economic point of view.

The output of the specific experiences and actions might be extended to linguistic communities different from those in which they originated. Given the fact that the process of recovery and revitalisation of languages follows a similar pattern, regardless of the particularities of each one of them -except for the fact that the degree of evolution and the specific situation of each language at a specific moment marks substantial differences-, it is important to describe the large number of similarities existing between linguistic groups as regards their economic conditions, environment, sociocultural status and ethnolinguistic dynamism; this is why it is reasonable to do so.

We expect that the Commission will support a project devoted to gathering accurate and reliable information on the situation and sociolinguistic evolution in Europe that is periodically and systematically updated, that embraces the activity of public administrations in this sphere and that helps to define the aims and indicators of an efficient institutional intervention.

The considerable effort that gathering information on the sociolinguistic reality in Europe would imply (its analysis, systematisation and management, together with the definition and ordering of priorities), would be an immediate advantage as a tool, so that each political institution of the European Union, the states and the regional and local authorities might establish aims and strategies based on the best practices.

In addition, when gathering information, the aspects influencing the development or the decline of languages should be taken into consideration.

The polls and surveys in this sphere must define the European situation as regards regional or minority languages, the linguistic competence of their speakers, their use in different spheres, the acquisition of similar competencies, the expectations of the target groups and the evaluation of the efficiency and the effects of the European Year of Languages as well as of other initiatives, programmes and strategic plans originating within the European Union in relation to regional or minority languages.

Thus, finally, we cannot forget that, whereas for other Europeans linguistic diversity is somehow an added value, even a luxury, for us it is a need.

There is no time to waste. The European Union must now seriously take into consideration the task of integrating all cultural and linguistic communities in an economically unified and social Europe. To achieve the respect and the prestige of Europe's different peoples means to respect in turn the different cultures that it is made up of, recognising them and giving them the position they deserve in all the initiatives that are generated by its institutions.

Thank you. *Eskerrik asko.*