R6 United in Diversity: Safeguarding Europe's Linguistic Heritage

Proposer: Joves Ecosocialistes (Catalonia),Óige Ghlas, Young Greens (Ireland); Les Jeunes Ecologistes (France)

Agenda item: 7. Resolutions

Motion text

One of the defining features of Europe is its cultural diversity. Europe has historically consisted of multiple and different cultures, languages, and beliefs. In fact, more than 200 different languages are spoken in Europe. This is undoubtedly a factor in making our continent such a culturally and socially rich place. The identity of each and every person, as well as that of every society, is shaped by various factors—one of which is language. Our mother tongue is not just what we use to communicate; it also shapes the way we think and perceive the world. It builds the cultural heritage of every human community. Nonetheless, some of these languages are barely spoken.

Nowadays, this diversity is hard to preserve for several reasons. Among them, we highlight the perception of minority languages as a threat to a state’s cohesion and as a barrier to efficient communication. Regional languages tend to be undervalued, ignored, unprotected, and even occasionally deliberately attacked, as countries often try to deny any sign of regional identities. As a result, they are barely taught, barely spoken, and rarely used outside the private sphere, which could easily lead to their extinction.

It could be argued that many ancient minority languages—such as Catalan, Breton, and Welsh—face the threat of extinction due to their linguistic subordination in relation to more prestigious state-endorsed languages, such as Spanish, French, and English, respectively. In fact, the cultural homogenization caused by globalization has also had a detrimental influence on minority languages, as English has emerged as a dominant language worldwide. The minority languages, due to the fact that they are not granted official status in most states—or only have limited official recognition—, are at risk. There are sectors of European society that, instead of valuing this linguistic wealth, regard these languages as useless, even claiming that they could be replaced without issue by those with greater international presence. In our capitalist societies, the use of languages is indeed seen primarily from an economic and utilitarian angle. The apparent “uselessness” of regional languages for the market and the capital reinforces the trend towards their disappearance.

Being able to use one’s mother tongue in all aspects of life is a basic human right. Nevertheless, the individual perspective is not the only one that matters; multilingualism enriches societies and brings social and economic benefits. However, the situation of minoritized languages in Europe can be defined as critical.

One example of minoritized languages is Catalan. Despite being spoken by 10 million people in Spain, France, Italy, and Andorra, as of today it is not considered an official language of the EU, even though its number of speakers is comparable to that of other EU official languages. Whilst in Catalonia, according to the regional government’s survey concerning linguistic usages (2023), 80.4% of the population can speak Catalan, only 32.6% use this language habitually.

Meanwhile, the Irish language is officially recognised at an EU level and in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. However it is not widely spoken due to a history of colonialism, and English is the working language across the island, with less than 2% of the Republic of Ireland population using the language daily, and less than 1% of Northern Ireland’s population using it at home. In Northern Ireland, the language remains controversial among British Unionists, meaning usage of Irish is effectively limited to majority Catholic areas. In the Republic, despite a century-old official dual-language policy, efforts to revive the language have had limited success, and Irish is the primary community language only in limited ‘Gaeltacht’ areas.

These statistics show the importance of endorsing linguistic policies that promote the use of minoritized languages, preventing the situation from worsening and reversing the trend. The different examples also display how diverse the situations can be for minority languages: they can be recognized official -by the countries where they are spoken and by the EU- but still endangered (e.g. Irish), only be recognized in the country where it is spoken (e.g. Catalan), or not even be an official language in their region (e.g. Breton).

In addition to this, as established in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages adopted in 1992 and signed by 33 countries, European institutions have the duty to promote all European languages. However, several member states of the EU did not ratify, or even signed this Charter. Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, and Latvia did not sign it; while France, Italy, Malta and Portugal signed it, but didn’t ratify it. This is alarming for the state of protection of regional and minority languages in the EU, and constitutes an incoherence with the report on the final outcome of the Conference on the Future of Europe (May 2022), which stated in Proposal 48: "Minority and regional languages require additional protection, taking note of the Council of Europe Convention on Minority Languages and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities."

We are committed to a diverse Europe, where each of our languages is kept alive and receives the recognition it deserves. In order to provide the protection they need, we propose:

- That Minoritized languages such as Catalan, Romani and other languages be recognized as official EU languages.

- That the right of all people in the EU to study in their local minoritized language in public education systems be fully recognized.

- That language immersion in communities with minoritized languages becomes the model of education promoted by the EU.

- That inclusive language policies be adopted to ensure migrants' right to learn minoritized languages, including a mandate for public administrations to provide free courses that ensure the achievement of a sufficient level of these languages.

- That funding for the production of audiovisual content in European minoritized languages be significantly increased.

- That public resources be allocated to promote live arts (e.g., plays, concerts, etc.) in minoritized languages, such as Catalan, Irish, Tyrolean, Welsh, or Breton.

- That every member state of the Council of Europe that haven't done so yet fully ratifies the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

- That the European Commission strongly encourages its member states who haven’t done so yet, to fully ratify the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

Reason

Minoritized languages in Europe face different realities. Nevertheless, almost all of them are not protected enought and face various threats. We can't let that happen as they are an essential part of Europe's culture and identity. For that reason, we believe FYEG must be a key advocate for the protection on linguistical diversity on a European and national level

Supporters

YGS (Young Greens South Tyrol), Saúl Lara (Juventud Verde), Michele Rattotti (Giovani Europeisti Verdi)