
ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE POLICY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Annotation. The presence of linguistic diversity in Europe in general, and in the European Union in particular, is an important social, cultural, economic and political fact of life, and one which has significant implications both for Europe itself and for many other parts of the world. One of the important issues raised by the European integration is that of languages and in particular how the European Union institutions can cope with language diversity. The article analyses the importance of language diversity in Europe and its impact on individual and national identity. The nature and perspectives of the phenomenon are explored, the integration process in Europe accelerating. Language policy pursued by the European Union is analysed and assessed by institutional, democratic, cultural and legal aspects. It is aimed to draw guidelines for extended European Union language policy.

Keywords: linguistic diversity, national identity, European language policy.

INTRODUCTION

Europe can be described as a variety of nation states, having formed in the last several decades with political sovereignty as the underlying feature. It is the strongest obstacle when implementing the project of the last decades – integration of European countries, which foresees that nation states are supposed to transfer a part of their sovereignty rights to supranational EU institutions. Integration success in economics, where European countries first tried to limit their rights for the sake of the common ones, encouraged to implement this process elsewhere, namely in politics, law, finances, etc. Both politicians and the society have long and thorough discussions about occurring problems or arguments as far as integration in the countries is concerned. On the other hand, the impact of integration on European languages attracts little attention, whereas it is obvious that languages affect the process significantly and always will.

Language diversity is not a particular problem of Europe or the period. It has existed throughout the history of humankind, reflecting abundance of nations and their individuality. The unification of European countries having started, it became obvious that diversity of languages is not only a value but also an obstacle. Although citizens of Europe speak many different languages, in order to pursue common (economical, political) projects they must find

a common language that is understood by everyone. Here the most important question arises – is any single language supposed to become the means of communication or, on the contrary, should people be encouraged to learn as many languages as possible and thus preserve the current diversity?

The problem of languages is complicated as it cannot be solved pragmatically. The reasons of problems lie within the process of formation of the current European states as they have formed as ethnic structures and for many of them a national language has been a very significant factor in the process of political country's unification.

Language has remained one of the most significant symbols of national identity for numerous states and people even up to these days. This fact cannot be denied seeking successful integration in Europe. It can be successful as far as people assume that being a European citizen does not prevent one from being individual. Thus, it is obviously true that the issue of languages cannot be solved pragmatically, i.e. by restricting oneself to one language only.

The complexity and the importance of the issue have been evaluated by creators of the integration process, who defined EU priorities in the area of culture. In Article 151 of European Community there is a provision that the European Community adds to flourishing of member-states, respects their national and regional variety, simultaneously envisaging common cultural heritage¹. Whereas Union respects national identity of member-states while in EU Treaty Article 6 it is claimed that the Union respects national identity of its member-states². Language is an inseparable part of national identity and, therefore, preservation of language diversity can be regarded as the priority aim of the Union in the area of culture. It is confirmed by Union decision to establish a special institution (General Directorate), which concerns all the issues related to languages.

Summarizing everything that has been said, one can claim that diversity of languages is a value not only from historic, political or cultural point of view but also a legal perspective. However, it is a serious obstacle for both Union institutions, which have to deal with financial and organizational problems related to translation, and the most important Union aim –

¹ Article 151 of European Community. Available at: ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/.../culture_en.pdf. [accessed 4 December 2014].

² Treaty on European Union: Article 6. Available at: www.europart.europa.eu/hearings/.../default_en.htm. [Accessed 5 December. 2014].

common market, where language diversity slightly limits movement of persons, goods and services.

The **aim** of the article is to analyse the importance of language diversity in the EU and its impact on nation and individual's identity.

The **objectives** of the article are as follows: 1) evaluate emotional, democratic, legal and cultural factors of EU language policy; 2) define the guidelines of Europe language policy.

The **method** of generalizing scientific work analysis was applied to obtain research results.

SOCIOCULTURAL ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE DIVERSITY

Many people perceive diversity of languages and cultures spread worldwide as a naturally existing phenomenon and only rare tends to consider the reasons of its emergence, the scope, the operation mechanism and, most significantly, value for people. It is extremely important currently when all areas of life, including the language, are being dominated by the contrary phenomenon – globalisation. Diversity of languages in this century of mobility is more frequently perceived as an obstacle for communication between people as well as closer cooperation of states. Therefore, a logical and unavoidable solution to the problem could be as follows: choose any language (English is undoubtedly in the leader position), which could become the global means of communication. All other languages would gradually become extinct as unnecessary ballast. Although such a solution seems rather favourable, in principle it is determined by a narrow and single-minded attitude towards a language as a means of communication, forgetting multifold nature of a language and its influence on the formation of individual and nation's identity.

A widespread stereotype is to estimate a language only as a means of people's communication. Although this communicative function is very important, it is not the only one. It is crucial for one to understand that the impact of a language on a person encompasses much more than simply rendering information. Language is primarily a thinking instrument³. Throughout entire decades a long-lasting investigation of a relationship between thinking and a language is in fact very significant as it reflects a special significance of a language in every person's life: a language is one of the main factors which determine individual or collective

³ Kohonen, V., Jaatinen, R. (2014). *Experimental Learning in English Language Education*. New York. Routledge.

(i.e. nation's) formation. Each language, although less used, expresses the spirit of a certain ethnic group and, as a result, one can claim that beside other factors, which develop each nation's identity such as geographic, historic-political, psychological, religious, etc. peculiarities, the role of a language in this process is special – it is not only the means of communication but also the symbol of collective identity.

Appearance of national languages in Europe was a determining factor for formation of sovereign states, including Europe itself, as we perceive it today. The emergence of Europe as the multinational and multilingual continent is clearly marked not only by historic-political but also linguistic processes. Establishment of languages in clearly defined territorial boundaries is often presented as a strong argument, proving that the basis of languages was one of the underlying assumptions in the development of nation states in Europe. Despite the fact that abundance of languages prevented people from communicating, at the same time this phenomenon allowed establishing of settlements, nations and feeling of national identity⁴.

Thus, although languages had a special significance in the formation of nation states, it is not clear if this *nation-language* relationship will remain as close in the future Europe, where national identity is replaced by the European one.

Continuous unification of Western Europe states can undoubtedly be regarded as a successful project. It is proved by a significant number of states-candidates, wishing to join the EU. However, integration has its price: a part of sovereignty (it means, national identity, too) must be transferred by member-states to the organization which they are entering. Such a price is not always acceptable.

Although no one has doubts about the idea of integration itself, transferring of sovereign powers to the EU is not always favoured by citizens of member-states. It can be explained by the fact that the EU is the community of nations and states⁵, and, thus, identity of its citizens is of national nature, i.e. primarily related to the living place, region or state. European identity only supplements national one but it cannot replace it.

Knowing that national language has a special significance to formation of national identity, this factor can be used when strengthening citizens' identity feeling, related to Europe. It is becoming more and more important to preserve linguistic and cultural diversity

⁴ Kriaučiūnienė, R. (2013). Užsienio kalbų mokymosi galimybės ir daugiakalbystės kultūra. Vilnius. Vilniaus universitetas.

⁵ Forche, R. Christian (2012). On the Emergence of Euro-English as a Potential European Variety of English Attitudes and Interpretations. Jezikoslovlje. Freie University. Berlin. 13.2, pp. 447-478.

of European countries currently as seeking integration more and more issues and areas, where the right of making decisions is transferred to EU institutions and when member-states have to refuse more and more symbolical meaning possessing state elements (for instance, national currency is replaced by the common one), emerge. Therefore, one may understand that frequently the EU is treated by simple citizens as a distant and hostile Brussels' bureaucratic mechanism''⁶. It is crucial to respect, preserve and foster cultural peculiarity of each country or region so that the so-called European identity could be created or, in other words, to retain people's wish to be involved in this organization. It would allow creating cultural European identity, which on its behalf would become an assumption to form political European's identity (education and training). Therefore, respect to national languages could be a significant factor when creating citizens' Europe.

LANGUAGE POLICY IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Numerous Europeans believe that multilingual situation in European states is a rare, even exceptional case. Such thinking was determined by ideology of European nation state, having established in the 19th century and still making a strong impact. According to this ideology, homogenous nations created their states in Europe. Thus, each state is supposed to have a single national language⁷. Nevertheless, apart from one exception – Iceland, which due to its special geographic position is an ideal example of a close national state, in all European states diversity of languages and cultures has existed *de jure* or at least *de facto*⁸. The most significant reason of this is not a migration process but a historically developed fact that political boundaries of states almost never coincide with language boundaries⁹. Thus, the idea of culturally and linguistically homogenous state in Europe is practically utopia.

According to how many linguistic communities are found within the country and what the relationship of language minorities and the main group is established, three linguistic models of European countries could be distinguished¹⁰:

⁶ Ellinas, A., Suleeman, E. (2012). The European Commission Bureaucratic Autonomy. Cambridge University Press, p. 94.

⁷ Kriauciūnienė, R. (2013). Užsienio kalbų mokymosi galimybės ir daugiakalbystės kultūra. Vilnius. Vilniaus universitetas.

⁸ Europos kalbų mokymo politikos rengimo vadovas. Available at: <http://www.coe.int./lang>. [accessed 8 August, 2015].

⁹ Guus, E., Kutlay, Y. (2012). Europos kalbų lobynas. Daugiakalbystės politika ir praktikos tendencijos Europoje. Rotolito Lombarda SpA. Italija.

¹⁰ Special Eurobarometer 386. Europeans and languages. Available at: ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/.../ebs_386_en.pdf... [accessed 26 November, 2014].

- relatively homogenous states (for example, Portugal, Ireland);
- states, where language minorities make up 10 % of all country's inhabitants (for instance, Denmark, Germany, Finland, Greece, Italy, Holland, Austria, Sweden, Great Britain);
- multinational and multilingual states, where language minorities comprise more than 10 % of all that country's inhabitants (namely Belgium, France, Spain).

In almost all countries the situation of language groups is regulated by the principle that the highest status is provided to the language of the biggest community in that country. According to what rights are provided for language minorities, three types of European states (EU member states) can be distinguished¹¹:

- 1) officially monolingual states,
- 2) officially monolingual states where special regulation of linguistic minorities' rights is anticipated,
- 3) officially multilingual states

The principle of monolingualism

This group encompasses states, where the object of language policy is only a national language, by acknowledging it as the only official language of that country. In other words, one seeks to implement the principle of monolingualism "*one state – one language*". However, even in states of this type linguistic minorities can be acknowledged by providing them the limited (regional) status or even undertaking certain measures (only in the regional level) to preserve them¹². The group of such states can be subdivided into two groups according to the fact if a state is truly monolingual (e.g. Portugal) or monolingualism is established due to political reasons (e.g. France).

Regulation of language minorities' rights

Monolingualism, as it has been mentioned, is a rare phenomenon and, as a result, many European countries have to deal with the issue of linguistic minority. With regard to different historical and political circumstances, these minorities are provided certain rights in societal life. On the basis of the status provided for linguistic minorities, European countries of the

¹¹ Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. Vilnius, 2008.

¹² Hicks, D., European Language Diversity Summit. Available at: gb2016donostia.eu/?p=780&lang=en. [accessed 3 October, 2015].

group could be subdivided into three groups taking into consideration that such division is not a strict one¹³:

- Protection of linguistic minorities' rights – this group encompasses states having one official language, acknowledging existence of linguistic minorities and even applying various means to preserve and extend their languages. On the other hand, only limited status is provided for ethnic minorities' languages. Great Britain and Holland could be typical examples of the group.

- Principle of linguistic autonomy – this group contains states which have one official national language where ethnic minorities have political autonomy. Due to this reason languages of these regions have the official status (i.e. are regarded as official languages of the region). Moreover, each region pursues individual language policy. The most significant example of such a case is Spain and partly Italy.

- Principle of linguistic federalism – according to this principle, official status in the national level is provided to all linguistic communities of the country. These mostly include multilingual states of federal structure, for example, Belgium or Switzerland.

Multilingualism established institutionally

Countries belonging to this group have several official languages. However, languages there are distributed not according to regions but cover the whole territory of the country. Ireland, Finland and Luxembourg could be taken as examples of such a linguistic system in the EU. In these countries there is a legal provision that all languages used in a certain country are equal.

LANGUAGE POLICY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

The EU language policy greatly differs from that of all other international organizations. The United Nations (subsequently UN) and all their subsidiaries as well as other international organizations were established by the states, which are also the subjects of these organizations. European Coal and Steel Union, later Economic and Nuclear Power Communities were also set up on the basis of international treaties. However, these communities were the first international organizations *sui generis*, or, to be more precise, the

¹³ Minority Rights: International Standards and Guidance for Implementation. United Nations. New York and Geneva, 2010.

first supranational organizations in history, the subjects of which were not only states but also persons.

In case of international organizations communication occurs between states and, consequently, the rule is observed that such institutions pursue their activity in the main languages of the world (for example, English, French, etc.). Mostly language policy of such organizations is based on selective multilingualism principle, i.e. work in institutions is pursued in several selected languages (for instance, the UN at present has six official languages, namely English, French, Spanish, Chinese, Russian, and Arabic). Occasionally such organizations keep to the principle of monolingualism. In other words, work within institutions is carried out in one language only (for example, only the English language is employed in European Free Trade Association (EFTA)).

However, EU institutions ‘communicate’ not only with member-states but with their citizens as well (both natural and legal persons). Furthermore, EU law is superior to national law of member-states. Thus, EU citizens have a democratic right to gain all information in their native language. Therefore, motto of the EU language policy is “unity in diversity”¹⁴. Thus, respect towards national peculiarity of each member is expressed. At the same time it is that democratic basis on which integrated Europe is built.

Since the very beginning of the integration process a principle that at least one language of the member-state is acknowledged as the official language of the Community/Union has been observed. Currently fifteen states in the European Union communicate in eleven official languages (besides, exceptional status is provided to the twelfth one, namely Irish). Numerous legal acts of the EU institutions are translated into all official languages. This provision will remain valid in the future as well regardless of how many member-states will form the European Union and how many languages will be found. It is related to the already mentioned specific legal nature of the Union – supranational status, which is the crucial assumption for linguistic equality valid in the European Union. Another important issue is Union citizens’ right to elect and be elected themselves to the European Parliament. Restriction of this right with regard to foreign languages that one knows would also violate democracy principles. Therefore, disregarding all difficulties arising from language diversity, the number of official

¹⁴ Studer, P., Werlen, I. (2012). Linguistic Diversity in Europe: Current Trends and Discourses. Hubert and Co. Germany, p. 115.

languages cannot be reduced whereas in the future after entrance of new members it is supposed to increase inevitably.

On the other hand, working languages, used for communication within EU institutions, is a completely different issue. Currently, though unofficially, three working languages have firmly established, that is, English, French, and German (in some EU institutions there are five of such languages – the three already mentioned as well as Italian and Spanish). Such limitation is completely justified as far as the efficient work of such institutions is concerned. However, at the same time it is also the reason for certain important problems. First of all, priority situation of certain languages determines emergence of politicians and officials of two unequal categories: those who can work (discuss, debate, formulate decisions) in their native language and those who must know at least one foreign language, i.e. EU working language, so that it would not become an obstacle in their work. It goes without saying that those politicians and officials for whom one of the EU working languages is a native one are undoubtedly superior to the rest ones. The second problem is more of legal nature: it would be difficult to draw a line between work within institution only, during which the restricted number of languages used is justified, and the work outside the institution where one must observe the equality principle. Another complicated issue is to decide what language to select as the working one and what impact it does make on other languages.

Apart from all difficulties within institutional level, language diversity can become a serious obstacle in the common EU market as well. Knowing foreign languages, or, to be more precise, insufficient knowing can strongly restrict citizens' right to be employed in any member-state because when employing a person from another member-state, especially in the state sector, a condition to pass not only qualification but also language examination is imposed. In addition, language diversity can restrict free movement of goods within the market. It is related to marking of goods: in order to ensure that information about a good is understood for each citizen, it is frequently required to mark goods in all official languages of the EU. It determines supplementary costs, which aggravate free movement of a good within the market. This problem is extremely confounding in the way as it cannot be solved by traditional measures used in the common market, i.e. by applying principles of legal act harmonization or acknowledgment of national standards. How could language diversity be harmonized if not by introducing a common language? However, it is not clear what language should be selected, English or maybe Esperanto? Mutual acknowledgment of national

standards does not solve this problem either because acknowledgment of other languages does not facilitate the communication. Therefore, due to peculiarity of the language problem the common EU market will remain multilingual in the future and this fact must be accepted simply as the existing reality, monitoring if national linguistic provisions are not discriminating or applied disproportionately.

Such a situation from language diversity point of view in the European Union and its institutions is found. Nevertheless, another aspect, i.e. citizens' response to language diversity is also important. Frequently one may hear a proposal which says that every EU citizen apart from his/her native language is supposed to learn two foreign languages. It undoubtedly facilitates communication of citizens. Therefore, learning of languages must be promoted and this aim should become priority of all member-states education policy. However, it is only one of aspects of numerous language problems and it is not enough to deal with the problem. As a matter of fact, not every citizen is capable of learning foreign languages. Moreover, in case of such language diversity, knowing one of the three does not solve all communication problems (for example, a Greek, even knowing French and German would not be able to communicate with a Portuguese, who, apart from the native language, knows only English and Spanish).

Thus, all listed aspects could be generalized in the following way: cultural value of language diversity and political as well as economic necessity of communication in this diversity are cornerstone and by their nature controversial aspects of EU language policy. Seeking that integration of fifteen and in the meantime a greater number of member-states would not become the ordinary supranational communication forum but a real Union of the states and primarily their citizens, one is supposed to search for the most efficient ways to solve a problem that would not harm national citizens' feelings (it would happen if the current language diversity were abandoned by restricting citizens to one or several languages only). However, at the same time it should ensure efficient work in EU institutions and is not supposed to harm the functioning of the common market.

CONCLUSION

According to the European tradition, a language has special significance to the formation of individual and national identity. Therefore, reduction of the number of official

languages in the EU level would not comply with linguistic policy tendencies in member states and could be the reason for serious conflicts.

The European Parliament is the only citizen elected (directly) EU institution. Decrease in the number of official languages would mean that the citizens' right to be selected to this institution is limited regarding the knowledge of foreign languages. It would have a negative impact on citizens' attitude towards the EU and intensify current reproaches concerning lack of democracy.

The European Union is not a typical international supranational organization. Legal acts issued by its institutions make a direct impact on every EU Citizen. Reduction of the number of official languages would imply that not all citizens could read legal rights in their native language and this would contradict to principles of democracy and transparent activity.

Obligation of the EU to understand and foster national cultures of member-states provides conditions for formation of cultural European identity, which subsequently is the basis of political identity. Language is the most important component of culture and, as a result, it is crucial to maintain respect to national languages when creating citizens' Europe.

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KALBŲ POLITIKOS EUROPOS SĄJUNGOJE ASPEKTAI

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Santrauka

Kalbos - svarbus Europos Sąjungos prioritetas. Kalba yra neatsiejama mūsų tapatybės dalis ir tiesioginė kultūros išraiška.

Europos Sąjungos kalbų politikos tikslas – skatinti užsienio kalbų mokymą ir mokymąsi ES ir sukurti visų valstybių narių kalboms palankią aplinką. Užsienio kalbų žinios yra vienas iš svarbiausių įgūdžių, kuriuos įgyti turi visi ES piliečiai, siekdami turėti daugiau mokymosi ir įsidarbinimo galimybių besimokančioje Europos visuomenėje. Bendravimas užsienio kalbomis – vienas iš 8 svarbiausių gebėjimų, reikalingų norint gerinti švietimo ir mokymo kokybę bei veiksmingumą.

Šiame straipsnyje aptariami Europos kalbų instituciniai, demokratiniai, kultūriniai ir teisiniai aspektai. Išsamiai analizuojami kalbos ir identiteto, kalbos ir nacionalumo sąsajų klausimai, kurie laikomi esminiais, siekiant suprasti šiandieninę Europos kalbų įvairovę.

Trumpa Europos Sąjungos valstybių narių nacionalinės kalbų politikos vystymosi apžvalga aiškiai parodo, kad kalbų politikos tema visose Europos valstybėse pasižymi aukštu emociniu lygiu. Į šį faktorių reikia atsižvelgti priimant Europos lygmens sprendimus. Turėtų būti siekiama išvengti vienpusių reforminių pasiūlymų (pvz. šiandieninių Europos Sąjungos valstybinių kalbų skaičiaus sumažinimas). Kalbos turi svarbią reikšmę formuojantis ne tik individo, bet ir nacionalinės valstybės identitetui. Todėl, sumažinus valstybinių kalbų skaičių Europos Sąjungos šalyse, neatitiktų kalbos politikos tendencijos, būtų apribojama piliečių teisė būti renkamiems į Europos Parlamentą, ir paaštrėtų ar kultų nepasitenkinimas egzistuojančia demokratija, ne visi piliečiai galėtų skaityti jiems galiojančias teisės normas gimtąja kalba.

Saugojant valstybines šalių narių kultūras formuojasi kultūrinis Europos identitetas. Todėl straipsnyje ypatingas dėmesys skirtinas Europos Sąjungos šiandieninės kalbų politikos sistemos pagrindimui, akcentuojant savitą Europos Sąjungos charakterį.

Pagrindinės sąvokos: lingvistinė įvairovė, nacionalinis identitetas, Europos kalbų politika.

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