



Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN)
Union Fédéraliste des Communautés Ethniques Européennes (UFCE)
Föderalistische Union Europäischer Volksgruppen e. V. (FUEV)
Федералистский Союз Европейских Национальных Меньшинств

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Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great pleasure for me to be in such distinguished company and an honour to be invited to address the Parliamentary Assembly's Committee on Culture, Science and Education in Strasbourg as it celebrates the European Day of Languages 2005.

On behalf of the Federal Union of European Nationalities, I express strong support and gratitude for the lead taken by the Council of Europe and the European Union to celebrate linguistic diversity, plurilingualism and lifelong language learning across Europe and beyond.

As I am a mother-tongue speaker of English, with historic ties to a highly marginalised minority language now, thankfully, under the protection of a Council of Europe language initiative, I am well placed to know, understand and reap the benefit from such activity. However, a paradox presents itself in that just as moves are being made that will enable minority language users to resist the further encroachment of English into their cultural spheres of influence, we are at the same time witnessing the progress of English towards becoming the world-wide "Lingua Franca", a phenomenon that can give rise to states engaging in state language protectionism which, in turn, adversely affects the fortunes of European minority languages. The ability of people to travel easily and cheaply, means that modern Europe, and its longstanding mix of indigenous cultures is becoming increasingly more complex and difficult to manage as a number of new minorities from outside the continent obtain critical mass. The indigenous minority languages of Europe now face a three-fold threat – the English "lingua franca", a greater promotion of majority languages by European states and an increasing tendency by states to divert attention and resources to the new minority languages. The international institutions, therefore, need to be ever vigilant to ensure more effective and even-handed compliance to existing measures and need to adapt to meet changing circumstances

I address you as a representative of an NGO, an umbrella organisation for European national minorities that feeds directly into the Council of Europe.

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So it is unfortunate that, in a time of great hope for indigenous minority languages brought about by Council of Europe charters and conventions, I should come before you to note how some governments, which often encourage their citizens to learn other state languages, are sometimes less inclined to promote indigenous minority languages within their territories and, in so doing, evade some of their obligations towards the Council of Europe in this respect.

I speak with direct personal experience in this matter as I am a member of the Cornish minority from the United Kingdom, a minority that in spite of the best efforts of the Council of Europe, has yet to achieve recognition under the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. Although it is three years since the state authorities extended the provisions of the Charter for Regional or Minority Languages to the Cornish language, 70,000 Cornish school children receive little or no education in this subject, nor indeed, in their history and cultural affinities, from state authorities. In a state that has a good track record in dealing with its new minority racial and ethnic communities, the Cornish case appears to be an example of the paradox that institutions like the Council of Europe must, at some point, turn their attention towards.

I have to say that this is not a solitary example. In other parts of Europe, there are minority people who are unable to access, through the state, their language and culture. Amongst many, but of particular concern to FUEN, is the Aromanian community in Romania.

Again, like the UK, the state of Romania has a very good record in respecting and recognising minorities. However, despite Resolution 1333/1997 (rapporteur, Mr de Puig), and the fact that Aromanians are officially recognised in other Balkan states, Romania continues to insist that Aromanians within its territory speak a dialect of Romanian and are, therefore, Romanian. Of course, we all recognise the right of a state to define which languages it wishes to officially support and recognise under the Charter but, in this example, it seems as though the state, by redefining a language as a mere dialect of the majority, has excused itself from diverting precious public resources.

Similar paradoxical situations relating to linguistic minorities exist in our host nation, France, and in Greece.

I hope that the current hypocrisy displayed by some old members, who insist that new members, wishing to accede to membership of the Council of Europe, must ratify the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, with its special provision for languages, whilst at the same time they refuse to do so themselves, will soon be a thing of the past.

So, ladies and gentlemen, I am sure that you understand that there is still a considerable distance to go on the route to retain the cultural diversity of Europe. We must all be vigilant, we must ensure more effective and even-handed compliance to existing measures and we must adapt to meet the changing circumstances in an inter-continental, global economy. With a closer regard by all states to the interests of linguistic minorities, future European Days of Language will have even a greater impact on our ability to help to shape our common future!

Thank you for your kind attention!

THEMES:

Pan european institutions

Problem arising for indigenous minorities as state reaction to rise of English as Linqua Franca combines with new 'visible' minorities receiving disproportionate attention

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