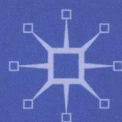
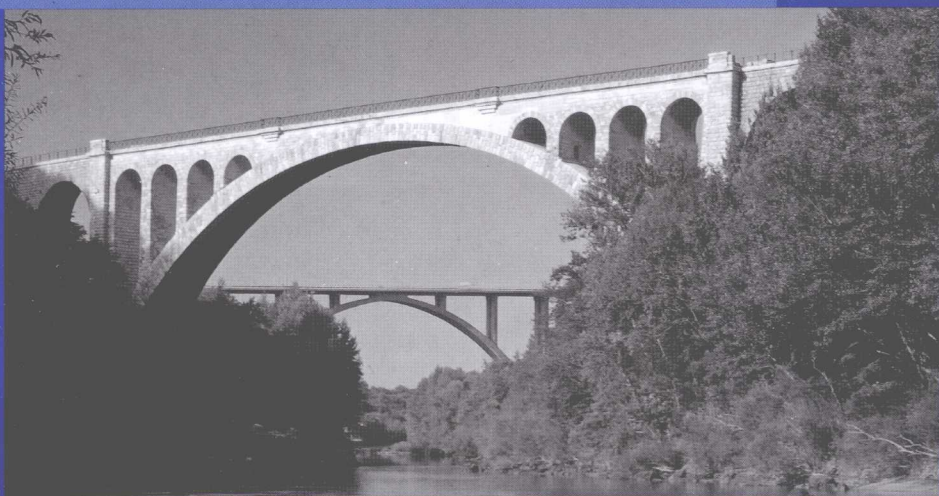


Rights, Promotion and Integration Issues for Minority Languages in Europe

Edited by
Susanna Pertot, Tom M. S. Priestly
and Colin H. Williams

Palgrave Studies in Minority Languages and Communities
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Rights, Protection and Integration of Minority Languages in Europe



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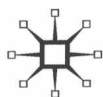
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Editors

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Introduction: European Union Enlargement and Citizen Empowerment

Colin H. Williams

This volume provides an overview picture of the state of several regional and minority languages following the latest enlargements of the EU in 2004 and 2007, when initially ten new states and subsequently two further states joined this remarkable organisation. Reflecting on the growth of the successive International Conferences on Minority Languages (ICML) since the first event held in Glasgow in 1980, I am led to a stark conclusion. The few participants at that inaugural meeting were primarily engaged in the teaching profession, in local government and community development. We were activists and commentators, insiders and outsiders, eager to come together to share our common experiences and to learn practical lessons. The issues facing us were overwhelming: how to keep our respective languages vibrant and relevant. The answers we sought had much to do with family language transmission, formal education and an increased presence in the media. We believed that if we could make significant breakthroughs in each of these areas then that would establish a strong platform from which to launch further campaigns in favour of our discriminated languages. Yet, as Joe Mac Donnagh of University College, Galway reminded us at the 2005 ICML Trieste Conference, 'for any complex problem, there are usually simple solutions, which are usually wrong'. My considered conclusion, on reflection, is not that we were wrong to promote language transfer, education and mass communication in the first few meetings, but that they were never going to be sufficient unless we also took account of a host of other elements which conduce to language vitality. By the beginning of the twenty-first century many of these other elements are receiving their due attention and are reflected in the fascinating material discussed in this volume, which derives in large part from papers presented at the ICML event, so expertly hosted by the Slovene Research Institute, SLORI, in July 2005. The theme of the Trieste conference, 'Minority Languages in post-2004 Europe', was chosen to reflect the general growth of EU membership and the more particular accession of Slovenia itself, which in turn influenced the relationship between Slovenes

and their neighbours, including fellow Slovene-speakers in Italy, Austria and Hungary.¹

Post-enlargement Europe

Four elements of the enlargement process deserve especial attention, I believe, for they are critical to our success. The first is political recognition and public resources. The second is citizen empowerment, legislation and rights. The third is a detailed consideration of language vitality in terms of what works in practical, real-world situations, so that the transfer of good practice can be made with some authority and confidence. The fourth is the garnering of evidence, of high quality data and the framing of issues in terms of a supportive discourse and a conceptual framework which gives worth to pluralism and diversity in a real, substantive and not merely rhetorical manner.

Today Europe is almost synonymous with the EU, almost but not quite. However, the EU is certainly the dominant institutional actor and has a significant influence on non-EU members, applicant states and those which border the EU. Since its creation in 1958 the European Union has grown from six to 27 members. Two additional states, Croatia and Turkey, are current candidates for membership, and others are actively seeking candidate status, e.g., Ukraine. This process of widening has been accompanied by a deepening of the Union's scope and a complicating of the myriad relationships which now govern our interaction at many levels. The impetus for the establishment of the original European Community was the need to ensure a stable and secure environment following the conflict and devastation of WWII. The aspiration to create a common internal market, which necessitated the formation of a customs union, was accompanied by the levying of a common commercial tariff, which led the EC into external economic affairs. This included how it dealt with third-party countries, creating a vast network of trade agreements between the EC and countries and regional organisations around the world. In 1987 the provisions of the Single European Act (SEA) were a significant step in the development of the Community's external economic role. Access to this market was, and continues to be, one of the most important factors in generating demand for membership. The SEA laid the foundations for institutionalising a system of foreign policy coordination, but it was not until 1993, with the end of the Cold War, that formal attempts were made to develop a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Thus the abiding concern of the EU has been politics, economics and security, and only recently has it given sustained formal attention to question of language, culture and diversity in respect of its minority populations.

More philosophically there is 'the idea of Europe' and of being 'European'. Conventionally interpreted in geographical and religious terms, today's conceptualisation of Europe lies more in its being 'a value community',

which binds its members ever closer. The very institutions of the European Union provide a patterned response to multilingualism and evince new practices which filter down to lower levels in the political and legal hierarchy (Mamadouh, 2001, 2002). The EU also provides opportunities for non-members through approximating the Union's declared values to draw closer to the Union and in due time to accede to membership.² This is an important process, and one which has huge significance both for language affairs and for immigration policy.

The enlargement process also changes the internal configuration of the EU. A case in point are the Slovene minority in Italy, who as Italian citizens of Slovene origin can now conduct their affairs with residents of Slovenia across the border from within a common European framework. Today many of the previous barriers to interaction and the designation of special status for the residents on the border region have been overtaken by regular and normal interaction between two neighbouring member states of the EU. Slovenia also became the first of the 2004 enlargement states to adopt the euro, in 2007.

Participation in an enlarged EU imposes institutional demands not only on the candidate states but also on the EU itself. This is particularly relevant for language and, as a consequence of enlargement, issues of language have risen up the EU agenda. This is in part to do with population movement and immigrant adjustment and in part with the concern to promote smaller indigenous languages, be they minority or not. So many of the 2004 enlargement states were themselves relatively small and sensitive to the question of language recognition and competition at the EU level. However, they were not always as sensitive to the thorny issue of protecting and promoting their own internal regional and minority languages.

Political recognition and public resources

This volume contains many encouraging and insightful messages from those involved in decision making and policy formulation. The chapters point to the challenges that a diverse, multilingual environment poses to policy makers and citizens at various levels, from neighbourhood, to city, to nation, to the state and to the wider European Union. On the one hand we are reminded that the better placed languages, such as Catalan and Welsh, are capable of being reinterpreted as instruments for social inclusion, citizenship and democratic participation, rather than as mere generators of conflict and markers of social exclusion. A change of discourse surrounding the promotion of languages is now very evident with a far greater emphasis on the positive nature of acquiring new skills, adapting to the demands of IT in an interactive environment, and stretching the domains within which new opportunities for using the formerly marginalised language may be used. A critical variable in this revitalisation process is the regional/local state, for it alone has the requisite capacity to supplement or rectify the failure of

state-wide efforts in terms of bilingual or multilingual education, language planning, language awareness training programmes, immigrant socialisation policies and practices and the like.

On the other hand there are also many other cases of language groups which face insurmountable odds, either because of their small size, such as Gaelic-speakers in Scotland, or political discrimination, such as the Romany population of Central Europe. They cannot hope to compete in real terms with powerful languages, because support for languages of wider communication, such as English, French or German, derives in part from their strategic role as contributors to a former colonial, imperial past and to current state hegemony. Such support is hardly ever considered as a direct subsidy or as an illogical intervention in the marketplace, but as normal policy and practice in order to execute daily socioeconomic functions. Additional support is offered by international commerce, science and technology, for such languages are purveyors of global knowledge, information and entertainment. However, when it comes to support for historical language minorities exceptionalism rules, and the logic of such support is nearly always couched in moral, cultural and group identity terms rather than in strict instrumental, functional terms. In such cases language, culture and economy are treated as autonomous spheres of influence and activity. They are not necessarily seen as mutually binding nor as constituting a sustainable alternative to the hegemonic language. And when any major case for significant policy reform is made it is nearly always advanced by language-related agencies rather than economic agencies. This makes it doubly difficult to mainstream language issues into political and economic schemas, regional development programmes and the like. For so often language planning agencies can be accused of satisfying the interests of a small minority of citizens and of engaging in special pleading. This is an understandable, if regrettable state of affairs. A major contribution can be made by this volume if it draws attention to this inequity and leads to the further development of a robust series of economic, commercial and strategic arguments for our position as advocates of the smaller languages of Europe. Clearly this would also require pressure on appropriate governmental agencies and commercial interests to produce regular, consistent, comprehensive time-series data on language use to act as a statistical base for charting the development of our policies, as we shall discuss below. This in turn requires further discussion of our various strategies and positions and of how we seek to regulate and conduct our often diverse agenda in a difficult, sometimes hostile, political climate.

Issues of governance and the regulation of language matters, together with the extension of equal rights to minority language speakers, are not unconditional. Having passed from supplicants to responsible actors, several of the cases reported on here are faced with the daunting challenge of navigating their languages into the mainstream of conventional politics and bureaucratic practice.