



## Recommendations

December 2011

### Ten years since the European Year of Languages – adjustments for the smaller and smallest languages of Europe required

Ten years ago – in 2001 – for the first time the European Union and the Council of Europe jointly announced the European Year of Languages, which was followed by an Action Plan and several initiatives to promote linguistic diversity, language learning and multilingualism.

Already since it was founded the European Parliament has had a strong focus on the issue of linguistic diversity and the importance of the regional and minority languages that is connected to it.

#### The facts

According to official numbers of the EU, 40 million citizens of the enlarged European Union use a regional or minority language. This corresponds to almost 10% of all the citizens of the Union. The European Union refers to a total of 60 known regional and minority language communities.

#### The background

In 2003 the European Parliament decided to work on an initiative report on the language policy of the European Union. The Parliament and the Committee of the Regions again and again asked attention for the lack of a consistent language policy of the Union and for not taking the smaller and smallest languages into account.

#### The initiative report

In the case of the adopted initiative report there is a legal peculiarity. In the legislative procedure of the EU the European Commission has the sole right of initiative in almost all policy areas. But: the Council of the European Union can ask the Commission to come with a proposal. Since the Lisbon Treaty citizens have a similar right in the context of the European Citizens' Initiative.

Article 225 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (Lisbon) / Article 42 of the EP-Rules of Procedure

#### The Ebner-report

On 14 July 2003 the Parliament adopted the "Report with recommendations to the Commission on European regional and lesser used languages – the languages of minorities in the EU – in the context of enlargement and cultural diversity (2003/2057(INI)). The Ebner-report (named after its rapporteur Michl Ebner) was adopted by the Parliament; with 423 votes in favour, 27 against and 21 abstentions.

The European Parliament agreed to an unambiguous call to the Commission: pay attention to linguistic diversity in Europe – and take especially care of the regional and minority languages in Europe!

#### The demands

- Creation of an EU-Agency for Linguistic Diversity and Language Learning in which the European regional and minority languages are duly taken into account
- Creation of an EU-funding programme of its own to promote linguistic diversity and language learning in Europe – including regional and minority languages

**The implementation**

Today – 10 years after the European Year of Languages 2001 – the result of the actions for the regional and minority languages is mediocre. Out of the demands from the European Parliament not one has been directly implemented. The European Commission decided to choose another approach – mainstreaming – which makes it harder especially for the smaller and smallest languages to be taken into account in an adequate way.

Therefore FUEN would like to make some proposals on how – especially in regard to the new programme generation 2014-2020 – the starting position for the smaller and smallest languages may be improved.

**Proposal for three priorities for promoting regional and minority languages****Background of RML-promotion**

In 1983 Budget Line B3-1006 for the protection and support of regional and minority languages was established on the initiative of the European Parliament, which provided both support to specific projects as well as institutional funding to a European network structure.

After a decision by the European Court of Justice the budget line for the regional and minority languages was suspended in 1998. In 1999 and 2000 further funding for project measures was guaranteed from Budget Line B2-1000. The institutional funding was provided from Budget Line A-3015. In total, funding ranged from 2 to 4 million Euros per year.

In 2000 the direct funding for regional and minority languages ceased completely because there was no legal base. Since then the approach of “mainstreaming” has been followed. Proposals for regional and minority languages are eligible in all EU programmes, but there are no special funds earmarked for regional and minority languages.

In view of the newly negotiated programme generation 2014-2020 and the fact that the overall results of funding for regional and minority languages in the current programme generation are not satisfactory and also with reference to the *“Report with recommendations to the Commission on European regional and lesser used languages – the languages of minorities in the EU – in the context of enlargement and cultural diversity (2003/2057(INI))”*, FUEN proposes three concrete measures, which will be explained on the following pages.

For more and similar proposals, we would like to refer to the report of the Civil Society Platform on Multilingualism established by the European Commission. This report gives a summary of the recommendations and explanations typical for the past decade.

- Micro-project-funding and seed money reserved for small regional and minority languages and their projects
- Creation of a European “Language Diversity Centre” for regional and minority languages
- Development of a strategy by the EU Commission on safeguarding the regional and minority languages in Europe – Action Plan and EU legal framework

## Micro-project-funding and seed money reserved for small regional and minority languages

The smaller and smallest regional and minority languages in Europe have difficulties using the EU funding programmes for their cause. Regional and minority languages that are critically endangered, and according to the EU-EUROMOSAIC-study this includes the language communities of less than 300 000 speakers, usually do not have the organisational structure, corresponding resources and the European visibility and networks required to participate in the complex EU-programmes.

The approach of mainstreaming allows regional and minority languages to participate in all the EU programmes. This offers various chances, which hitherto have not been used sufficiently. The principle of “mainstreaming” is a motivating measure for the larger regional and minority languages, and for the umbrella organisations active on the European level.

FUEN repeatedly pointed out that it welcomes the opportunities to obtain funding for new networks for language diversity and uses these opportunities itself, but at the same time it calls attention for the fact that these networks are no adequate replacement for the measures demanded in the Ebner-report that was referred to before.

In particular, because there is and will be no possibility for the smaller and smallest regional and minority languages to participate in these broad EU-funding programmes. Therefore a special provision should be introduced that explicitly opens up the programme for the smaller and smallest regional and minority languages.

### **Proposal:**

- Make available funding for micro-projects and seed-money for innovative projects of the order of 5000 – 50 000 per measure.
- Small or no own contribution in implementing these projects
- Easy to manage bureaucratic procedures for applying and reporting

### **Funding priorities:**

- Funding for more and qualitatively better teaching / education for regional and minority languages
- Funding for media, digital production and broadcasting in the regional and minority languages
- Funding for more use of regional and minority languages in private and public space, in school and the working place and the creation of a language friendly environment
- Funding for and development and dissemination of basic materials on language revitalisation
- Funding for cross-border and regional cooperation between regional and minority languages
- Development of new information and communication technologies for the regional and minority languages
- Funding for creating networks and the transfer of knowledge and expertise between regional and minority languages
- Promotion of the European idea and Europe-wide awareness raising for the significance of the regional and minority language and their specific causes

## Creation of a European “Language Diversity Centre”

Within the budget framework of EU there is no targeted funding for regional and minority languages and hence for the smaller and smallest languages that are critically endangered. Moreover there are no funding opportunities to enable European exchange between these smaller and smallest languages that is required and to raise attention for the specific situation of this group.

Based on the demands in the *“Report with recommendations to the Commission on European regional and lesser used languages – the languages of minorities in the EU – in the context of enlargement and cultural diversity (2003/2057(INI))”*, FUEN proposes to establish a “Language Diversity Centre” for the regional and minority languages, which will have a special focus on the smaller and smallest languages in Europe.

The initiative report of the European Parliament recommends the creation of a full-fledged language agency – to implement such an agency does not seem politically feasible at this moment. In the feasibility-study for a language agency that was ordered by the European Commission the creation of so-called Language Diversity Centres is proposed as an alternative. FUEN would like to revive this idea and encourage the establishment of a Language Diversity Centre for regional and minority languages – funded by the European Commission.

The “Language Diversity Centre” will be able to build on the organisational structures of the Europe-wide networks active in the field of regional and minority languages.

It is important to make clear that with the promotion of “Language Diversity Centres” we do not aim at providing institutional funding for existing Europe-wide networks. Instead it is about the creation of structures needed for supporting the regional and minority languages.

### **Remit / mandate**

- Raising awareness of the importance of the regional and minority languages and the necessity to promote this diversity on all relevant levels.
- Creation of a knowledge, information and competence centre accessible for all actors in the field of regional and minority languages.
- Funding and support for a Europe-wide network of regional and minority languages with a special focus on the smaller and smallest languages.

### **Target groups**

The centre should concentrate on the regional and minority languages and give priority to the smaller and smallest languages in Europe.

Involvement of all institutions: European Commission, European Parliament, Council of the European Union and other relevant European organs as well as international organisations in general and the European public sphere in particular. Furthermore all experts, professionals and civil-society representatives active in the field of regional and minority languages.

## Development of a strategy by the EU Commission on safeguarding the regional and minority languages in Europe – Action Plan and EU legal framework

According to the EUROMOSAIC-study that was ordered by the European Commission the critical limit for the survival of a language is 300 000 speakers.

Based on the existing numbers about regional and minority languages, at this moment only 20% of them reach this size. That means that based on the existing empirical data approximately 80% of the 300 European minorities do not reach this threshold and are therefore critically endangered. In numbers these are circa 240 European regional and minority languages<sup>1</sup>.

At the latest with the Lisbon Treaty and the Charter of Fundamental Rights the European Union explicitly undertook to respect its cultural and linguistic diversity – that means concretely that the Union has a moral and legal obligation to look for solutions / strategies and measures to confront the extinction of languages and cultures in Europe.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, especially Article 22 states:  
*“The Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity”*<sup>2</sup>;  
and Article 3 of the Lisbon Treaty:  
*“It shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and shall ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced”*.<sup>3</sup>

FUEEN is of the opinion that the European Commission should present proposals on how this cultural and linguistic diversity of the smaller and smallest languages can be safeguarded and developed into the future.

FUEEN proposes three measures to proceed further.

- Inventory: what has happened since the European Year of Languages 2001 and the Initiative Report 2003 in the field of regional and minority languages?
- On the basis of the inventory the Commission should develop a proposal on how a strategy to safeguard the regional and minority languages in Europe that takes in particular smaller and smallest languages into account may look like and coordinate this proposal with representatives from civil society.
- Concretely this strategy should lead to an action plan or a legal framework for permanent and comprehensive support for regional and minority languages in Europe.

In case this request for action meets with disapproval on the part of the European Commission, it would be a suitable reason to consider engaging in a European Citizens' Initiative.

<sup>1</sup> Pan, Christoph; Handbuch der Volksgruppen. 2002

<sup>2</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2007:303:0001:0016:DE:PDF>

<sup>3</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:115:0013:0045:DE:PDF>