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# REPORT

on endangered European languages and linguistic diversity in the European Union  
(2013/2007(INI))

Committee on Culture and Education

Rapporteur: François Alfonsi

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## MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

### on endangered European languages and linguistic diversity in the European Union (2013/2007(INI))

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to Articles 2 and 3(3) of the Treaty on European Union,
- having regard to Articles 21(1) and 22 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights,
- having regard to the Commission’s Euromosaic study, which establishes that European languages are dying out because the measures in force cannot protect them,
- having regard to the UNESCO Convention of 17 October 2003 for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which covers oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of intangible cultural heritage,
- having regard to the UNESCO Convention of 20 October 2005 on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions,
- having regard to UNESCO’s Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger,
- having regard to the resolution of the Council of Europe’s Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of 18 March 2010 entitled ‘Minority languages – an asset for regional development’ (301/2010)<sup>1</sup>,
- having regard to Report 12423/2010, Resolution 1769/2010 and Recommendation 1944/2010 of the Council of Europe,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 18 September 2008 entitled ‘Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment’ (COM(2008)0566),
- having regard to the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning<sup>2</sup>,
- having regard to the Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on protecting and developing historical linguistic minorities under the Lisbon Treaty<sup>3</sup>,
- having regard to the Council Resolution of 21 November 2008 on a European strategy for multilingualism<sup>4</sup>,
- having regard to the Council of Europe’s European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, opened for signature on 5 November 1992,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1671947&Site=DC>

<sup>2</sup> OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> OJ C 259, 2.9.2011, p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> OJ C 320, 16.12.2008, p. 1.

- having regard to the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights (1996),
  - having regard to the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1995),
  - having regard to its resolution of 14 January 2004 on preserving and promoting cultural diversity: the role of the European regions and international organisations such as UNESCO and the Council of Europe<sup>1</sup>, and to its resolution of 4 September 2003 on European regional and lesser-used languages – the languages of minorities in the EU – in the context of enlargement and cultural diversity<sup>2</sup>,
  - having regard to its resolution of 14 January 2003 on the role of regional and local authorities in European integration<sup>3</sup>, which refers to linguistic diversity in Europe,
  - having regard to its resolution of 24 March 2009 on multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment<sup>4</sup>,
  - having regard to its resolution of 25 September 2008 on community media in Europe<sup>5</sup>,
  - having regard to Rule 48 of its Rules of Procedure,
  - having regard to the report of the Committee on Culture and Education (A7-0239/2013),
- A. whereas the objective of safeguarding and promoting each and every facet of the European Union’s cultural and linguistic heritage has been bolstered under the Lisbon Treaty;
- B. whereas linguistic and cultural diversity is one of the fundamental principles of the European Union, as enshrined in Article 22 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which reads: ‘The Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity’;
- C. whereas linguistic diversity is acknowledged as a citizen’s right in Articles 21 and 22 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which means that trying to establish the exclusivity of a language is a restriction and a violation of the fundamental values of the Union;
- D. whereas endangered languages should be conceived as part of the European cultural heritage, and not as a vehicle for political, ethnic or territorial aspirations;
- E. whereas all of Europe’s languages are equal in value and worthiness, form an integral part of its cultures and civilisations and contribute to the enrichment of humanity;
- F. whereas cohesive multilingual societies that manage their linguistic diversity democratically and sustainably help to foster plurality and are more open and better placed to form part of the richness that linguistic diversity represents;

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C 92 E 16.4.2004, p. 322.

<sup>2</sup> OJ C 76 E, 25.3.2004, p. 374.

<sup>3</sup> OJ C 38 E, 12.2.2004, p. 167.

<sup>4</sup> OJ C 117 E, 6.5.2010, p. 59.

<sup>5</sup> OJ C 8 E, 14.1.2010, p. 75.

- G. whereas all languages, including those which are endangered, reflect historical, social and cultural knowledge and skills, and a mentality and a style of creativity, that form part of the richness and diversity of the European Union and the basis of the European identity; thus the linguistic diversity and the presence of endangered languages within a country should be seen as an asset instead of burden, and so should be supported and promoted;
- H. whereas UNESCO, in its Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger, points out that a language is endangered if it fails to fulfil or scores poorly in relation to one or more of the following scientifically-identified criteria: intergenerational language transmission; absolute number of speakers; proportion of speakers within the total population; usage in various public and private contexts; response to new media; availability of materials for language learning and teaching; governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies, including official status and use; community members' attitudes towards their own language; type and quality of documentation;
- I. whereas the 2005 UNESCO Convention on cultural diversity allows parties to take appropriate measures to protect cultural activities, goods, and services, including measures concerning the languages used for such activities, goods, and services, in order to foster diversity in terms of cultural expressions, both within the territory of parties to the Convention and under international agreements;
- J. whereas the Council of Europe's European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which has been ratified by 16 Union Member States, provides both a frame of reference for the protection of languages in danger of dying out and a means of protecting minorities, two points mentioned in the Copenhagen criteria, which countries must satisfy if they are to join the EU;
- K. whereas according to UNESCO there are languages in all European countries, in European territories overseas, and within the EU's traveller communities, that are only transmitted orally from generation to generation and should be regarded as being endangered; whereas some endangered European languages spoken by cross-border communities enjoy very different levels of protection depending on the Member State or region in which speakers of the language concerned live;
- L. whereas therefore in some countries and regions minority or regional languages exist which are endangered or dying out but which in other, neighbouring, countries are official, majority, languages;
- M. whereas, just like biodiversity in nature, the diversity of European languages and cultures is part of the living heritage that is vital for the sustainable development of our societies, and whereas they should therefore be safeguarded and protected against any risks of extinction;
- N. whereas respect for linguistic diversity makes a positive contribution to social cohesion by boosting mutual understanding, self-esteem and open-mindedness, and whereas linguistic diversity fosters access to culture and contributes to creativity and to the acquisition of intercultural skills, as well as promoting cooperation between peoples and countries;
- O. whereas Article 167 of the Lisbon Treaty clearly states that "the Union shall contribute to

the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity", and therefore encourages action intended not only to preserve and safeguard the richness of the Union's linguistic heritage as part of its diversity, but also to take a step forward in enhancing and promoting this heritage in addition to Member States' policies;

- P. whereas the notion of linguistic diversity in the European Union embraces not only official languages, but also co-official languages, regional languages, and languages that are not officially recognised within the Member States;
- Q. whereas the category of endangered languages also covers languages which are endangered only on a particular territory, where the number of speakers in the community is in significant decline, and cases where the statistics from consecutive censuses show a dramatic drop in the number of speakers of a specific language;
- R. whereas the official languages of the Member States may also be endangered languages in certain areas of the Union;
- S. whereas given the urgent nature of the situation they are facing, special attention ought to be paid to those languages that are in danger of dying out, by recognising multiculturalism and multilingualism, by implementing policy measures that combat existing prejudices against endangered languages, and by adopting an anti-assimilation approach at national and European level;
- T. whereas teaching in people's mother tongue is the most effective way of learning;
- U. whereas if children are taught their mother tongue from the start, and in parallel therewith learn an official language, they have a natural skill that they can use to learn more languages later on, and whereas linguistic pluralism is an advantage for young Europeans;
- V. whereas the threat to endangered languages in Europe can be reduced through the guarantee of the principle that in the conduct of public business and the administration of justice, the language concerned is treated proportionately on the basis of equality and in the interest of diversity;
- W. whereas protection and transmission of a language depend very often on informal and non-formal education and whereas it is important to recognise the role played in that context by voluntary organisations, the arts, and artists;
- X. whereas the issue of endangered languages does not receive enough specific attention within the Commission's multilingualism policy; whereas over the last two multiannual financial framework periods (2000-2007 and 2007-2013), European funding for these languages has been cut drastically, which has added to their problems, and whereas this situation must not be allowed to continue into the next multiannual financial framework (2014-2020);
- 1. Calls on the European Union and the Member States to be more attentive to the extreme threat that many European languages, classified as endangered languages, are experiencing, and to commit wholeheartedly to the protection and promotion of the unique

diversity of the Union's linguistic and cultural heritage by deploying ambitious proactive revitalisation policies for the languages concerned and by dedicating a reasonable budget to this aim; recommends that these policies should also aim at developing a broader consciousness among EU citizens of the linguistic and cultural richness these communities represent; encourages Member States to produce action plans for the promotion of endangered languages based on shared good practices which are already available within a number of language communities in Europe;

2. Calls on the governments of the Member States to condemn practices which, by means of linguistic discrimination or enforced or concealed assimilation, have in the past been – or are now – directed against the identity and language use of endangered linguistic communities or their cultural institutions;
3. Calls on all Member States who have not yet done so to ratify and implement the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages; points out that the Charter acts as a benchmark for the protection of endangered languages and as one of the minority protection mechanisms specified in the Copenhagen criteria which states must satisfy in order to gain EU accession;
4. Calls on the Member States and the Commission to honour the commitments that they have entered into by acceding to the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, be it on their own territory or in connection with international agreements;
5. Calls on the Union authorities to include effective respect for linguistic diversity, and protection for the most vulnerable European languages in particular, as a condition that must be met by all states wishing to be admitted as an EU Member State;
6. Calls on the Commission and the governments and regional authorities of the Member States to establish programmes to promote tolerance of endangered linguistic or ethnic communities, respect for their linguistic and cultural values and respect for those communities in society;
7. Draws the attention of the governments and regional authorities of the Member States to the fact that the survival of an endangered language is tantamount to the survival and development of the community which uses it and that, accordingly, for the purpose of formulating policies to protect it, account should be taken not only of cultural and educational aspects but also of the economic and social dimensions;
8. Calls on the Commission to propose concrete policy measures for the protection of endangered languages; calls also on the Commission and the Council, within their terms of reference under the Treaty, to adapt EU policies and schedule programmes so as to support the preservation of the endangered languages and linguistic diversity, using EU financial support tools for the period between 2014 and 2020, including: programmes on documentation of these languages, as well as on education and training, social inclusion, youth and sport, research and development, the culture and media programme, the structural funds (cohesion fund, ERDF, ESF, European territorial cooperation, EARDF), and all instruments and exchange platforms designed to promote new technologies, social media, and multimedia platforms, encompassing support for the generation of both

content and applications; takes the view that these tools should focus on programmes and actions that demonstrate a positive wider agenda, either culturally or economically, beyond their community and their region; calls on the Commission to consider the administrative and legislative obstacles posed to projects relating to endangered languages on account of the small size of the language communities concerned;

9. Given that there is no room for delay, calls for the funding earmarked for protective action to be made as readily accessible and as clear as possible so as to ensure that those seeking to use it will, within a set time-frame, be in a position to offer real help to endangered languages;
10. Takes the view that the European Union should support and encourage Member States to have a language policy that enables children to acquire the endangered language, as a mother tongue, from the very earliest age; points out that such a policy of promoting two or more languages would, as scientifically demonstrated, benefit and help children learn additional languages later on, while encouraging intergenerational transmission of languages, and that it would offer speakers of endangered languages practical support in revitalising intergenerational language transmission in areas in which it is dwindling;
11. Supports the reinforcement of teaching endangered languages with appropriate methodologies for students of all ages, including distance learning for the development of true European citizenship based on multiculturalism and linguistic pluralism;
12. Notes the Commission's multilingualism programmes; takes the view that promoters of projects must be able to take advantage of the opportunities they offer, and, given that endangered language communities fighting for the survival of endangered languages often consist of small groups of people, urges the Commission not to deem programmes involving these communities ineligible for funding on the grounds of low levels of financial commitment, the limited number of recipients, or the small size of the area concerned, but to facilitate access to, and publicise these programmes, providing guidance on their eligibility for funding; urges Member States to act as intermediaries and supporters of these small endangered language groups and communities to be funded from European funds, whilst recalling that EU funding for the promotion of linguistic diversity should not be redirected from its intended course nor be used to support actions that utilise endangered languages as vehicles for pursuing wider political agendas;
13. Takes the view that a language revitalisation policy is a long-term effort that must be based on a diverse, coordinated planning of activities in various fields, in particular education (with pre-school and primary school education as a real asset, together with parents' training in the language itself), administration, media programmes (also with the possibility to set up and develop radio and television stations), the arts and in all areas of public life, implying a need for resources to be made available over the long term; takes the view that support should be provided for the drawing-up of such programmes, for exchanges of good practice among language communities, and for the introduction of assessment procedures;
14. Recalls the importance of continuing the effort to standardise predominantly oral languages;



15. Calls on the Member States to pay increased attention to and support higher education studies and research with a special focus on endangered languages;
16. Takes the view that new technologies can provide a tool for fostering the knowledge, dissemination, teaching and preservation of endangered European languages;
17. Emphasises the importance of the transmission of the endangered languages from generation to generation within families, and the importance of the promotion of the learning of endangered languages within a specific education system if needed; encourages Member States and regional authorities to develop education policies and teaching materials for this reason;
18. Considers that, in order to revitalise languages, it is likewise important that languages which have become peripheral and whose use is largely confined to family circles should have the right to be used publicly in society;
19. Calls on the Commission to work in conjunction with international organisations which have set up programmes and initiatives to protect and promote endangered languages, including for example UNESCO and the Council of Europe;
20. Recommends that the Member States monitor the development of the most vulnerable languages, involving both state authorities and the authorities of territories which have their own languages, whether or not these are official languages;
21. Takes the view that media, especially new media, can play an important role in the protection of endangered languages, particularly for future generations; emphasises, furthermore, the fact that new technologies could also be used in favour of these aims;
22. Urges – given the fact that the death of the last speaker of a language usually marks that language’s extinction – local authorities in particular to adopt revitalisation measures with a view to changing this state of affairs;
23. Notes that digitalisation may be one way to prevent languages from dying out; urges, therefore, local authorities to gather together and place online books and recordings in those languages, as well as all other manifestations of linguistic heritage;
24. Suggests that endangered language communities should be empowered by both the international community and the Member States to recognise that the use and preservation of their own language represents an asset both for their own community and Europe;
25. Calls on the Commission to provide constant support, via its various programmes, for transnational networks and European-level initiatives and activities that are designed to promote endangered languages, and emphasises that active participation is needed in order to ensure that UNESCO’s Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger is rendered more complete and remains a permanent fixture, and to further develop a homogeneous set of indicators that will make it possible to monitor the state of each language and the results of policies being implemented to prevent its disappearance;

26. Calls on the Commission to continue the research which began with the Euromosaic study, and to identify examples of proactivity at national level that have resulted in a significant reduction in the threat of a European language becoming extinct; recommends that in order to support exchange of knowledge, expertise and best practices between the different language communities, European language networks conduct an assessment of the policies established in Member States to preserve, protect, and promote endangered languages, and that the Commission issue corresponding recommendations;
27. Calls on the Commission to support research on the acquisition and revitalisation of endangered languages and on the cognitive and societal benefits of bilingual and multilingual European citizens;
28. Calls on the Member States which have not yet done so to sign and ratify the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992) and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1995);
29. Calls on the Commission to envisage possible actions concerning the protection of endangered languages in the Union;
30. Calls on the Commission to support both pilot projects that help promote the use of endangered languages and action plans drawn up by the individual language communities themselves;
31. Takes the view that the Union should support linguistic diversity in its relations with third countries, in particular those wishing to join the EU;
32. Calls on the Commission to consider whether it might lay down specific European measures to preserve, protect, and promote endangered languages;
33. Takes the view that programmes related to the promotion of multilingualism are essential for EU neighbourhood/candidate and potential candidate countries' policy strategies;
34. Takes the view that Commission support for language revitalisation ought to focus particular attention on initiatives within the field of digital media, including social media, in an effort to ensure that younger generations engage with Europe's endangered languages;
35. Believes that the Commission should pay attention to the fact that, with their policies, some Member States and regions are endangering the survival of languages inside their borders, even if those languages are not in danger in the European context;
36. Draws attention to the useful websites that provide information on EU programmes under which funding is available for projects that promote endangered languages, and calls on the Commission to issue a call to update these websites to include the new programmes for the period between 2014 and 2020, and to provide more information on this subject, especially for the attention of the language communities concerned;
37. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.

## RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

<b>Date adopted</b>	18.6.2013
<b>Result of final vote</b>	+: 30 -: 0 0: 0
<b>Members present for the final vote</b>	Zoltán Bagó, Lothar Bisky, Piotr Borys, Jean-Marie Cavada, Silvia Costa, Santiago Fisas Aixela, Lorenzo Fontana, Mary Honeyball, Petra Kammerevert, Emma McClarkin, Emilio Menéndez del Valle, Marek Henryk Migalski, Katarína Neveďalová, Doris Pack, Chrysoula Paliadeli, Monika Panayotova, Gianni Pittella, Marie-Thérèse Sanchez-Schmid, Marietje Schaake, Marco Scurria, Hannu Takkula, László Tökés, Helga Trüpel, Sabine Verheyen, Milan Zver
<b>Substitute(s) present for the final vote</b>	François Alfonsi, Liam Aylward, Ivo Belet, Nadja Hirsch, Iosif Matula, Georgios Papanikolaou, Kay Swinburne, Inês Cristina Zuber
<b>Substitute(s) under Rule 187(2) present for the final vote</b>	Vasilica Viorica Dăncilă