

**MULTILINGUALISM AND THE IDEAL OF UNITY IN DIVERSITY  
IN THE EUROPEAN UNION.  
KEY CONCEPTS AND CONTEXT**

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**Abstract**

*In a world challenged by cultural diversity, this article aims to look at the great diversity of languages and cultures that coexist within the European Union. Building on the story of the Tower of Babel that explains, from a religious point of view, the cultural and linguistic diversity existing in the European Union, the authors tried to contextualize EU's motto of "unity in diversity", interpreted as an ideal involving a lot of effort and sometimes even many conflicts, but one that we should all fight for and strive to maintain.*

**Keywords:** linguistic diversity, ethnicity, nation, minority, majority, communication, unity in diversity

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## Introduction

Linguistic and cultural diversity, multilingualism and multiculturalism are among the main values of Europe. Nowadays, multilingualism (which “refers to both a person’s ability to use several languages and the co-existence of different language communities in one geographical area”<sup>1</sup>) is a bridge among cultures, but one must be aware that it has not always been this way. Languages, together with other cultural instruments, were also used as “battlefields”. Some languages dominated, others were discriminated or even excluded. It is still the case in certain countries, where linguistic, cultural or religious differences cause riots, rebellions that lead to the death of many people.

### 1. What is linguistic diversity?

Linguistic diversity refers to the variety of languages in a certain area, state, region etc. According to Glanville Price,<sup>2</sup> there are almost 300 languages on the territory of Europe. However, compared to the large number of languages that exist all around the world, one may say that Europe is not very rich in what linguistic diversity is concerned.

In 1929, the *Académie Française* identified 2,800 different languages in the world, while in 1931 a German linguist identified around 3,000 different languages. Current data show there are around 6,700 languages in the whole world.<sup>3</sup>

Europe might seem poor as to its language diversity, and this may look strange to some persons, but one should recall the extraordinary language diversity existing in Africa or in Asia, for instance. According to Jean-Claude Beacco and Michael Byram, the languages spoken in Europe

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<sup>1</sup> Commission of the European Communities, “Communication from the European Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee, the COR: A New Framework Strategy for Multilingualism”, Brussels, 22/11/2005, [<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52005DC0596&from=EN>], 13 November 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Glanville Price, *Encyclopedia of the languages of Europe*, London: Blackwell, 1999, p. 499.

<sup>3</sup> Mark Aronoff; Janie Rees-Miller, *The Handbook of Linguistics*, Second Edition, 2017 Hoboken and Chichester: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., p. 21.

represent only 3% of the total number of languages existing in the world, whereas the languages spoken in Africa and Asia represent 30% each. They also mention the fact that out of the large number of languages spoken all over the world, ten of them tend to dominate, while five of them are spoken in Europe (English, German, Russian, Portuguese and Spanish).<sup>4</sup>

The world has always been diversified from the linguistic point of view, but the study of its linguistic diversity is a rather new domain. Beacco and Byram propose two ways of defining linguistic diversity. The first one takes into consideration the mere number of languages: "the more languages, the more LD [linguistic diversity]", referring only to autochthonous languages. The second one refers to the non-endemic languages, such as German, which is spoken as mother tongue not only in Germany, but in Austria, Switzerland and Belgium as well.

In Europe, linguistic diversity can be traced way back to the Roman Empire. As Franco Fanciullo argues in his book, "the linguistic and cultural situation existing in today's Europe has its roots in the Roman Empire and in the movements that took place during the Middle Ages".<sup>5</sup> During the Roman Empire, "The language of Virgil and Cicero (...) was so universally adopted in Africa, Spain, Gaul Britain, and Pannonia, that the faint traces of the Punic or Celtic idioms were preserved only in the mountains, or among the peasants. Education and study insensibly inspired the natives of those countries with the sentiments of Romans".<sup>6</sup> Still, even though they were living in a multilingual and multicultural society, due to their conquests, Romans never developed any interest for this situation. Silvia Luraghi mentions that, in the best case, they wrote grammar books in which they

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<sup>4</sup> Jean-Claude Beacco, Michael Byram *apud* Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, *Why Should Linguistic Diversity Be Maintained and Supported in Europe? Some Arguments. Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe from Linguistic Diversity to Plurilingual Education – Reference Study*, Language Policy Division, Directorate of School, Out-of-School and Higher Education DGIV, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 2002, p. 7, [[http://www.linguistic-rights.org/tove-skutnabb-kangas/Why\\_should\\_linguistic\\_diversity\\_be\\_maintained\\_and\\_supported\\_in\\_europe\\_\\_Tove\\_Skutnabb\\_Kangas\\_Council\\_of\\_Europe\\_Strasbourg\\_2002.pdf](http://www.linguistic-rights.org/tove-skutnabb-kangas/Why_should_linguistic_diversity_be_maintained_and_supported_in_europe__Tove_Skutnabb_Kangas_Council_of_Europe_Strasbourg_2002.pdf)], 12 November 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Franco Fanciullo, *Introduzione alla linguistica storica*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007, p. 229 (the authors' translation from Italian).

<sup>6</sup> Edward Gibbons, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (Vol. 1-6), eBookMall, Inc., 2001, p. 65.

compared their own language (Latin) to the Greek language,<sup>7</sup> while Gibbons states that “the two languages exercised at the same time their separate jurisdiction throughout the empire: the former, as the natural idiom of science; the latter, as the legal dialect of public transactions”.<sup>8</sup>

The separation of the Roman Empire, which took place during the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D., into the Western Roman Empire and the Eastern Roman Empire (commonly known today as the Byzantine Empire), also meant the separation from the linguistic point of view. Therefore, the Western Roman Empire maintained Latin as the official language, while the Eastern Roman Empire adopted Greek. But, as Fanciullo mentions, this separation was also cultural and religious, as the alphabets used were the Latin one in the West and the Greek one (and Cyrillic) in the East; the population was Catholic in the West and Orthodox in the East.<sup>9</sup>

This was in fact just the beginning for what was about to follow. During the following centuries, and especially during the Middle Ages, the great monarchies of that time, such as England, France or Spain, militated for a single language that would become the national “liaison” of the people. In this aspect, Fanciullo named the punishments applied by the English and Spanish monarchies against those who spoke other language than the “national” one (Celtic language in the case of England and the Basque in Spain)<sup>10</sup>. This linguistic unification of peoples and the politics of the states advocating for unity led, in fact, to the wars for independence, which were carried out, in the beginning, against the great empires of that time that were multilingual and multicultural.

The Roman Empire, as well as other great empires of the history (such as the Ottoman Empire or the Austro-Hungarian one), was never monolingual. It is the situation today as well. Even though some say that European countries are monolingual, this is in fact unnatural, as it is usually just a matter of political choice. In the context of this globalisation era, the free mobility of the persons led to their movement from one country to another, which created situations of bilingualism and multilingualism.

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<sup>7</sup> Silvia Luraghi, *Introduzione alla linguistica storica*, Roma: Carocce Editore, 2006, p. 25.

<sup>8</sup> Edward Gibbons, *op.cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>9</sup> Franco Fanciullo, *op.cit.*, p. 199.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem.*, pp. 201-202.

## 2. Minority languages in the European Union

According to the *European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages*, regional and minority languages represent the languages “traditionally used within a given territory of a State by nationals of that State who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the State's population”.<sup>11</sup> These languages are different from a State's official languages and do not include dialects or the immigrants' languages.

The differences existing among cultures, languages and religions should be seen, in a democratic society, as necessary in the education of the democratic citizens. Diversity is necessary, both in a classroom as well as in a society.<sup>12</sup>

“Difference and multiplicity are valued differently in Europe (“a founding value” to be preserved) and in America (*ex pluribus unum*, “one out of many”) might be one of the critical issues in the 21st century, as the opposing positions concerning the 2003 Iraq war have begun to show. The U.S. motto *ex pluribus unum* focuses on unity, i.e., on the result of the process of unification: the United States are “united”, a past participle, indicating that the process is “perfect”, concluded; children born in America belong to the *unum*, have one language and one culture. The European Union is not *unum* but *unionem*, which means “the process of becoming united”: a process which will cost each child born in the EU the effort of learning three languages at least, of interacting with least six, seven cultural areas.”<sup>13</sup>

The languages spoken by the European citizens define us as individuals, as the document *Speaking for Europe. Languages in the European Union* states. The numerous languages spoken by the five hundred million citizens in the European Union are spread on the continent as a mosaic. The

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<sup>11</sup> Council of Europe, “European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages”, Strasbourg, 5<sup>th</sup> November 1992 [<https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/media/21486313/ecrml.pdf>], 13 November 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Heidi Biseth, “Multilingualism and Education for Democracy”, in *International Review of Education*, 55, 2009, p. 20.

<sup>13</sup> Paolo E. Balboni, “Transition to Babel: The Language Policy of the European Union”, in *Transition Studies Review*, 11 (3), 2004, p. 164.

European Union recognizes the right to identity and promotes the freedom of speech and writing in each individual's language. Furthermore, through its institutions, the European Union continues its actions to the attainment of its purpose, i.e. having a better integration among its member states.<sup>14</sup>

### 2.1. *Ethnicity and nation*

Ethnicity is generally identified with a community characterized by language homogeneity, the same customs, traditions and history, all in a delineated territory, even though this aspect is not common to all ethnicity – for instance this is not valid for Romani people.<sup>15</sup>

As Toso mentions in his book, *Frammenti d'Europa. Guida alle minoranze etnico-linguistiche e ai fermenti autonomi*, it is not easy to make a clear distinction between ethnicity and nation. He defines *nation* as the collective belonging of a community characterized by common cultural, racial, religious traits and he associates it to a political and social institutionalized organization. Furthermore, he states that *nation* was born as a functional union made to satisfy certain determined exigencies in order to satisfy the common aspirations. Conversely, Toso describes *ethnicity* as being an unorganized community, while *nation* is or tends to be a society, the result of an agreement among its members. *Ethnicity* is a nation in power, while *nation* is the expression of an ethnic group which is able to give life to a state and its structures.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, he states that *nation* is the result of a historical process that, through a series of actions (treaties, conquests, agreements etc.), led to the fusion of different communities into a society that tends to give a certain homogeneity to language, traditions and common objectives.

From a linguistic point of view, as Sue Wright argues, the landscape in Europe “was both more local and more ‘international’ than today.” It is said that multilingualism was simply a necessity of life in the Middle

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<sup>14</sup> European Commission, “Speaking for Europe. Languages in the European Union” (brochure), Directorate-General for Commission Publications, European Communities, Published in Germany, 2008, p. 3 [canvas.gu.se › files › download], 16 November 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Fiorenzo Toso, *Frammenti d'Europa. Guida alle minoranze etnico-linguistiche e ai fermenti autonomisti*, Milano: Baldini e Casoldi, 1996, p. 16.

<sup>16</sup> Fiorenzo Toso, *op.cit.*, pp. 17-19.

Ages.<sup>17</sup> At the top of the hierarchy of social classes in Medieval Europe, multilingualism was a normal thing, due to the alliances and marriages that were made among the dynasties of that time. The result of these alliances and inter-marriages were the multilingual families.

Rulers at that time required loyalty from their populations, but they were not interested in their people's language and linguistic behaviour. It wasn't until the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, when the feudal systems collapsed in Europe, that the national space started to be delineated and the affiliation to a certain nation became important for the people. "The authority of the monarch is increasingly presented to the population as spectacle and a discourse develops where loyalty to the monarch and the dynasty begins to be expressed as patriotism. The country personified in the king appears increasingly as a focus for identity."<sup>18</sup>

Between the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the feudal systems of that time began to collapse. Furthermore, the kings' divine right to rule was also challenged. All these led to the shaping of the national idea. From a linguistic point of view, this area was dominated by religious writings. Official religious texts were produced in Latin, but there was a need to translate them so that every Christian was able to understand them. Therefore, texts had to be translated into the so-called "vernaculars" and the use of printing could not have come at a better time.<sup>19</sup>

However, even though the power of the Church and the influence of religion were increasing, many dissensions appeared as a result of religious beliefs, and they culminated in wars, riots and rebellions.

From the linguistic point of view, the period coincided with the introduction of the bureaucratic system. This was a central tool of the administration and an agent of linguistic unification. There were linguistic differences between people who lived in rural areas and those who lived in urban areas, the latter that belonged usually to the upper class being more proficient in the languages of the court.

But absolutism was too drastic not to cause riots and rebellions. As Wright mentions, "once the divine right of the sovereign had been disputed, it

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<sup>17</sup> Sue Wright, *Language Policy and Language Planning. From Nationalism to Globalisation*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p. 20.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*.

was necessary to find an authority to put in its place”.<sup>20</sup> She mentions Montesquieu and Voltaire in France who introduced the idea that the people should also have a saying in the decision-making process, while Rousseau introduced the *volonté générale* of the people so that they are able to say what is good for them.

All these ideas were the basis of the Revolutions that took place at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Europe and America. Sue Wright also mentions the linguistic difficulties that the French revolution had to face. At that time, according to a census carried out in 1790, there were only three million persons speaking French as their first language, while the rest spoke a vernacular language and had little or no competence at all in French. “The revolutionary message was spread in the various languages and dialects of France.”<sup>21</sup> However, with the triumph of the Jacobins in France, linguistic diversity was no longer tolerated and it became a patriotic duty to speak French.

According to Hroch, Spain, Portugal, France, Britain, Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands were the first countries that had settled their borders and set up themselves as nation-states.<sup>22</sup> Wright discusses Miroslav Hroch’s idea of nation, as he states, in one of his books, that nation is “a large social group characterised by a combination of several kinds of relations (economic, territorial, political, religious, cultural, linguistic and so on) which arise, on the one hand from the solution found to the fundamental antagonism between man and nature on a specific compact land-area and, on the other hand, from the reflection of these relations in the consciousness of the people.”<sup>23</sup>

The 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were dominated by the doctrine of nationalism that promoted the idea according to which every individual was unique and “one was born into a nation as one was born into a family”<sup>24</sup>, therefore the doctrine advocated for the so-called “one state – one nation – one language”. It was usually the linguists and the writers of a country that played an important role in the elaboration and establishment of linguistic traditions for a national group.

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 31.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> Wright, *op.cit.*, p. 35.

## 2.2. Majority and minority

In Europe, ethnicity represents a group of people with certain common characteristics determined by cultural homogeneity, these characteristics being those that identify and individualize the group from the rest of the population in the country of belonging. It therefore represents a *minority*.<sup>25</sup> Minorities are inferior in number to the rest of the population. "What makes an ethnic group a minority is a numerically and politically non-dominant position in a state of which they are citizens."<sup>26</sup>

According to Stefan Wolff, there are four types of minorities: national minorities; transnational minorities; indigenous minorities; immigrant minorities. *National minorities* are described as those ethnic groups that live on a state's territory but are "ethnic kins of the titular nation of another, often neighbouring state (kin-state)"<sup>27</sup> (Germans in Central and Easter Europe, Hungarians in Romania and Slovakia, Greeks and Turks in Cyprus etc.). *Transnational minorities* are the "ethnic groups whose homeland stretches across several different states, but do not form the titular nation in any of them" (the Frisians in the north of the Netherlands and in Germany, the Basques and the Catalans in Spain). According to Stefan Wolff, the *indigenous minorities* refer to the "ethnic groups living in their ancestral homelands in only one state of which they are not the titular nation"; this is the case for Corsicans and Bretons in France, Scottish and Welsh in Britain etc. Finally, the fourth type of minority is represented by the *immigrant minority* formed of the immigrants who moved from their homeland to a foreign country, but they are not the citizens of their new host country. Here, examples can be numerous: north-African immigrants in France, Pakistani and Indian immigrants in the UK, Turkish immigrants in Germany, Romanian immigrants in Italy, etc.<sup>28</sup>

The situation in Europe today is rather complicated from this point of view. The European Union has twenty-seven member states and twenty-four official languages. Apart from these, the EU also recognizes the regional and minority languages existing in its member-states and tries to promote them.

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<sup>25</sup> Toso, *op.cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>26</sup> Stefan Wolff, "Ethnic Minorities in Europe: The Basic Facts", 2010 [<http://www.stefanwolff.com/files/min-eu.pdf>], 17 November 2020.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*.

After the two World Wars, which were considered to be the wars of high nationalism, the picture in Europe started to change. With the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the European Convention on Human Rights (1950) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), with the birth of the European Union and a more intensified the process of globalization, minority rights and linguistic rights rapidly spread.

### 2.3. *Language policies in France*

Joshua A. Fishman said that “there are three types of language policies for threatened languages: permissive language defence (tolerating the use of particular languages or ensuring freedom of speech); active language defence (therapeutic measures for disadvantaged languages); preventive (proactive) language defence (legally enforceable measures to ensure the use of a particular language in education and public services).”<sup>29</sup> Moreover, it seems that in the European Union “one in six citizens speak at home a language other than the dominant language of the state.”<sup>30</sup>

France may be considered one of the most diversified European countries from cultural and linguistic points of view. Although French is used by most of the population (approximately 82%) and is the official language of the state, there are other languages used (regional or immigrant languages). Some of the most important immigrant communities in France come from the north-African colonies, as well as from Italy, Spain, Portugal, Turkey, Armenia and Vietnam.<sup>31</sup> The number of immigrants has been continuously rising in the last decade. Studies show that there are no monolingual speakers of regional languages anymore, but, unfortunately these languages are being used only by adult population, they are no longer transmitted to younger generations, as they do not see any practical reason in them.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Robert Phillipson, *English-only Europe? Challenging Language Policy*, London and New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 16.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>31</sup> P. Rowlett, “France: Language Situation”, in Keith Brown, *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, vol. I-XIV, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Oxford: Elsevier Pergamon, 2004, p. 621.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*.

France is always a good case study for many specialists in what its language policies are concerned.<sup>33</sup> Many laws adopted along the centuries have been extremely protective with the national language of the French state. Therefore, in order to protect the French language, the edicts of Villers-Cotterêt were adopted in 1539 and imposed French as the language of law courts. Then followed the decrees of 1794, during the French Revolution; they converted Church schools into state schools and established French as the only medium of instruction. According to Spolsky,<sup>34</sup> in 1881, the Prime Minister of France at that time repeated the fact that French was the only language to be used as medium of instruction in schools. Mention should be made that French was the most important language for about three centuries; we may very well call it the *lingua franca* before the two world wars. "French was the main foreign language learnt in Europe for three centuries. In the German-speaking world French joined Latin and Greek as part of the core curriculum in the Gymnasium in the eighteenth century. English was the other main foreign language in the curriculum, but significantly more usual in the vocational *Realschule* in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In Britain, French had traditionally been the main foreign language that was learnt."<sup>35</sup>

Another very important act adopted to protect the language of the state was *Bas-Lauriol Loi* of 1975, which imposed the use of French in all commercial, industrial activities, including advertising. In 1989, the French government created the *Délégation générale à la langue française* that was responsible for the promotion of French language teaching at all levels (national as well as international) and also for the respect of linguistic and cultural diversity. In 1992, French became the only official language of the state for the very reason of protecting France against the progress of the

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<sup>33</sup> See: Dennis Ager, *Language Policy in Britain and France. The processes of policy*, London and New York: Cassell, 1996; François Grin, *Language Policy Evaluation and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003; Sue Wright, *Language Policy and Language Planning. From Nationalism to Globalisation*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004; Bernard Spolsky, *Language Policy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004; Philippe van Parijs (ed.), *Cultural diversity versus economic solidarity: Proceedings of the 7<sup>th</sup> Francqui Colloquium*, Brussels, 28 February – 1 March 2003, Bruxelles: De Boeck & Larcier s.a., 2004.

<sup>34</sup> Bernard Spolsky, *op.cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>35</sup> Sue Wright, *op.cit.*, p. 121.

English language. Two years later, in 1994, the *Loi Toubon* stated that “By virtue of the Constitution, French is the language of the Republic, and the French language is a fundamental element of the character and heritage of France.”<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, the law also imposed French as the compulsory language in affairs, employment, education, radio and TV broadcasts. Therefore, the *Loi Toubon* extended the supremacy of French over all official documents, over the mass media and over education.

Internationally, however, these measures taken by France to protect its language were perceived as harmful to multilingualism and multiculturalism. Under these pressures, as well as in the context created by the European Union, France was somehow obliged to adopt the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, in 1999. Furthermore, in 2001, the *Délégation générale à la langue française* changed its name into *Délégation générale à la langue française et aux langues de la France*.

Nowadays, multilingualism is a very debated topic. It has not always been like this as, for instance, the great ancient empires were both multilingual and multicultural, but multilingualism was not preserved, nor promoted, so that it can now be a rather new topic of discussion in Europe.

### 3. What is multilingualism?

Linguists and specialists in this field have tried to define the term of “multilingualism”. Therefore, Robert Phillipson defines it as follows: “Multilingualism, in the sense of an individual or institution operating effectively in more than one language, is an everyday reality, a source of richness and joy for us, facilitating access to a range of cultures.”<sup>37</sup>

Mention should be made that, on the one hand, the Council of Europe, for instance, makes a distinction between “multilingualism” and “plurilingualism”. The former refers to a geographical area where there is a certain linguistic diversity, several languages or dialects being spoken in the given region. The latter refers to the languages one can use in order to communicate and it is, therefore, the opposite of “monolingualism”.

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<sup>36</sup> Bernard Spolsky, *op.cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Phillipson, *op.cit.*, p. 3.

Therefore, we may say that an area, a region, a university is multilingual, while a person is plurilingual.<sup>38</sup>

On the other hand, one may easily notice that, according to many essays on this topic, several authors use the term “multilingualism” in order to define both situations. For instance, Herdina and Jessner define multilingualism as being “the command and/or use of two or more languages by the respective speaker.”<sup>39</sup>

Probably one of the most comprehensive definitions to define the term, which would satisfy both parts, is the one given to multilingualism by the European Commission in an official document of 2005 (*A New Framework Strategy for Multilingualism*): “Multilingualism refers to both a person’s ability to use several languages and the co-existence of different language communities in one geographical area.”<sup>40</sup>

Irrespective of the definitions given by different specialists in the field, one thing remains certain: multilingualism has to be considered and treated as a valuable asset that has to be preserved and promoted; multilingualism refers to both great international languages and to “small” languages, to official languages as well as to minority languages. Moreover, „multilingualism is to be seen as a desirable goal for all nations, and it should be maintained and spread in all societies via appropriate language policies, choices of languages offered in secondary and tertiary education, and other measures to be taken in political and social institutions as well as the media.”<sup>41</sup>

Languages are obviously “central to our increasingly international world, to globalisation and to the accelerating process of European unification.”<sup>42</sup> The ability to communicate in several languages is a truly extraordinary advantage for any person, organisation or company, as it

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<sup>38</sup> Council of Europe, “From Linguistic Diversity to Plurilingual Education: Guide for The Development of Language Education Policies in Europe”, 2007 [<https://rm.coe.int/16806a892c>], 14 November 2020.

<sup>39</sup> Philip Herdina, Ulrike Jessner, *A Dynamic Model of Multilingualism. Perspectives of Change in Psycholinguistics*, Clevedon-Buffalo-Toronto-Sydney: Multilingual Matters LTD., 2002, p. 52.

<sup>40</sup> Commission of the European Communities, *op.cit.*

<sup>41</sup> Juliane House, Jochen Rehbein (eds.), *Multilingual Communication*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2004, p. 10.

<sup>42</sup> Phillipson, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

stimulates one's creativity, destroys cultural stereotypes and encourages an original way of thinking.

Languages represent the core of the European project as they reflect our different cultures and, at the same time, they represent the key to the understanding of those cultures. The European Commission plays an obvious role in the support and assistance given to member states in their actions to promote multilingualism.

Citizens who are able to speak several languages can fully enjoy the free mobility within the states of the European Union and, consequently, they can integrate easily in another country to study or work.

Furthermore, language skills are required by many companies on the labour market, and they can increase the employability of the persons. They are also essential means of communication, as the mastering of foreign languages improves the intercultural understanding, within and outside Europe.

Languages are important in different areas of human life. Without them there will be no understanding, no development. As such, languages are considered very important for the economic environment of each country<sup>43</sup>. Today's world implies coexistence in a complex environment, in which people have to face specific challenges and varied problems. The solution is to increase their ability in giving specialized answers by trying to understand diversity in spite of uniformity, the ability of speaking several languages being seen as a great advantage for any individual, organization or company.

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<sup>43</sup> Their importance has been affirmed by many politicians, businessmen etc. along the years. See, for instance, the *Recommendations from the Business Forum for Multilingualism* established by the European Commission at <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/d5ee6ef0-986c-49e6-b8ac-71da8401efc6>, 18 November 2020; see Leonard Orban's speech (the former European Commissioner for Multilingualism) on the importance of languages for business at [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH\\_07\\_559](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_07_559), 18 November 2020; see also the study *ELAN: Effects on the European Economy of Shortages of Foreign Language Skills in Enterprise*, at [https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/languages/policy/strategic-framework/documents/elan\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/languages/policy/strategic-framework/documents/elan_en.pdf), 18 November 2020.

## Conclusions

The concept of globalization is not new, but the challenges we are facing nowadays seem to put us in a position of continuous actualization of values and identities. In the context of the recent events, multilingualism and language competencies may not occupy a leading position in the preoccupations of EU officials, but, since languages are strong markers of national and regional identities, sociolinguistic inequalities should not be disregarded.

The European Union is defined by the languages and cultures existing on its territory. Although the differences existing between different nations may lead to linguistic or religious conflicts, the European Union strives to preserve each nation's rights and to create an environment that cherishes this diversity, under the motto of "unity in diversity". Whether this apparent stability will last or not, we shall see in the years to come.

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