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Panel discussion: The symbolism of the notion of national language

1. Introduction (by Bessie Dendrinou)

The invitation sent to the panel participants contained an explanation that the starting point for this event was a paragraph of the Dublin Declaration (see Appendix) which initially was articulated as follows:

The “one nation, one language” ideology is still very strong in politics, the media and indeed public opinion in many countries. However, it is largely invisible, and its acceptance is taken for granted. Thus the use of other languages is nearly always socially marked. Such an ideology is at variance with the demands of the processes of globalisation in general and European integration in particular. EFNIL is resolved to promote a debate to overcome this situation.

This statement disturbed most EFNIL delegates. After several edited versions which were still annoying to some, I rephrased it as follows:

Most European states still view the ‘one nation-one language’ construct as the norm, whereas in many instances the social reality is different. This reality often does not surface due to lack of reliable, recent statistics on the actual regional and minority languages. Given today's conditions of social plurality in European states, and the need for social cohesion, EFNIL is committed to promoting plurilingual citizenry and to working together with other European organisations, in order to collect and disseminate reliable data and best practice in this field.

Still, however, there were a few delegates disturbed by the very idea that ‘one nation-one language’ may be viewed as a construct or an ideologically loaded notion. Therefore, based on the comments received, the next version was edited as follows:

In some European countries there are more than one official or national language, and in several countries certain minority languages are recognised but others not. However, the linguistic reality is not always visible due to lack of reliable, recent statistics which would give us a valid linguistic map of Europe. Yet, we recognize today's conditions of social plurality in European member states, and because of the need for social cohesion, EFNIL is committed to promoting plurilingual citizenry and to working together with other European organisations, in order to collect and disseminate reliable data and best practice in this field.

Finally, because even the immediately above was disturbing to some delegates, we arrived at the more or less unanimous version of paragraph 6, included in the Dublin Declaration as follows:

In most European countries today there is a rather complicated linguistic reality which is not always visible due to lack of reliable, recent statistics. As EFNIL recognises the conditions of social plurality in Europe and the need for social cohesion, it is committed to promoting plurilingual citizenry and to working together with other European organisations, in order to collect and disseminate reliable data and best practice in this field.

The ‘history’ of the Dublin Declaration, as concerns this paragraph in particular, is the context of the present discussion during which each panellist presented a five minute position paper. Indeed, the discussion that followed the position papers included in this

article was a heated one, since issues related to one's language create divergent and deeply felt beliefs, as one's language is often deeply tied to questions of identity, nationhood and power.

Below, there are the position papers by the four panelists and this article concludes with a fifth position statement by me, as chair of the panel.

2. The symbolism of “national language” (by Jean-François Baldi)

Une petite partie de la déclaration de Dublin – dans sa version initiale – a suscité des réserves de notre part. Il s'agissait de ces quelques mots qui s'en prenaient à l'assimilation d'une langue à une nation, et considéraient ce couple “une langue, une nation” comme, je cite, “une vieille idéologie”.

Nous avons bien conscience du mouvement historique qui a conduit à “déterritorialiser” les langues. De nombreux facteurs y contribuent, et la conférence de Thessalonique a mis en évidence l'importance des technologies dans cette “déterritorialisation”.

Les langues ne sont pas, ne sont plus, enfermées dans un territoire: elles ne sont pas l'apanage exclusif d'une nation. Nous avons nous-même coutume de dire que le français n'appartient pas à la France: il appartient à ceux qui le parlent.

Pour autant, c'est dans un rapport étroit avec la nation et son émanation politique, l'Etat, que s'est construite la politique du français. Et c'est dans un rapport étroit avec la langue française que l'Etat-nation s'est développé en France, notamment depuis que l'ordonnance de Villers-Cotterêts en 1539 visa à faire du français la langue officielle du droit et de l'administration, en lieu et place du latin et des autres langues du pays.

Nous sommes désormais une “République indivisible”, selon l'article 1er de notre Constitution. Constitution qui précise également, dans son article 2, que “la langue de la République est le français”.

Ces dispositions constitutionnelles ont des conséquences très directes sur la politique de la langue de notre pays.

D'une part, à travers la loi du 4 août 1994, nous sommes dotés d'un cadre légal auquel nos concitoyens sont très attachés et qui vise à leur garantir un “droit au français” dans un grand nombre de circonstances de la vie sociale, économique et culturelle.

D'autre part, c'est à l'Etat, en collaboration avec un réseau de partenaires, qu'échoit la responsabilité de conduire cette politique et d'en rendre compte devant le Parlement. Ainsi, le gouvernement est officiellement tenu chaque année de produire un rapport sur l'emploi du français à l'attention des parlementaires.

Cependant, si la langue de la République est le français, le français n'est pas la seule langue parlée sur le territoire de la République.

En effet, rien ne s'oppose à l'usage et à la promotion d'autres langues que le français dès lors que ne sont pas conférés des droits spécifiques à des groupes de locuteurs, à l'intérieur de territoires dans lesquels ces langues sont pratiquées. C'est cette limite que la Constitution fixe à l'emploi des langues régionales dans notre pays.

Des évolutions récentes se font jour. Ainsi, depuis la révision constitutionnelle de juillet 2008, l'article 75 de la Constitution prévoit que "les langues régionales appartiennent au patrimoine de la France". Là encore, c'est bien dans une référence à un patrimoine national que s'inscrivent les langues régionales. Le breton, l'alsacien, l'occitan, le basque... ne sont pas l'affaire des seuls locuteurs de ces langues et des territoires sur lesquels elles sont parlées, même si ceux-ci ont une responsabilité particulière dans leur développement et leur promotion, mais de la nation toute entière.

Voilà pourquoi, en France, malgré l'internationalisation des échanges, l'intégration européenne, et leur corollaire, le développement des identités locales, la nation constitue un cadre de référence encore actuel à la conception et à la mise en oeuvre de la politique de la langue.

3. The symbolism of "national language" (by Pietro G. Beltrami)

Prenderò lo spunto dalla situazione italiana. Nel 1861, quando l'Italia è stata unificata, coloro che parlavano italiano erano una modesta percentuale della popolazione, dal 2,5% al 10% secondo le diverse stime.¹ Nella vita quotidiana si parlavano i cosiddetti dialetti, che sono in realtà lingue derivate dal latino indipendentemente. L'italiano era una lingua quasi solo scritta, una costruzione letteraria, ma rappresentava, e da alcuni secoli, un simbolo dell'unità culturale del Paese e, in questo senso, era la sua lingua nazionale. Con l'unificazione politica la lingua nazionale diventò anche la lingua del nuovo stato, cioè la lingua ufficiale, anche se nessuna legge lo stabilì esplicitamente. Da allora esiste una stretta relazione fra italiano e nazione italiana, e una spia di ciò può essere vista oggi nel fatto che i movimenti autonomistici cercano di ottenere l'uso o l'insegnamento del dialetto nella scuola accanto all'italiano, o al suo posto. In effetti, poiché i dialetti non derivano dall'italiano, la distinzione fra dialetti e lingue di minoranza può diventare opinabile.

La prima e unica dichiarazione dell'italiano come 'lingua ufficiale della Repubblica' si trova infatti precisamente nella legge del 1999 sulle lingue di minoranza,² mentre prima di questa legge l'italiano è stato niente di più (ma anche niente di meno) che una 'lingua ufficiale di fatto'. La scelta di parole è significativa: l'italiano è detto 'lingua ufficiale', non 'lingua nazionale'. 'Lingua ufficiale' è un concetto amministrativo e politico, men-

¹ Il numero preciso di coloro che parlavano italiano nel 1861 è controverso. La stima più bassa, di De Mauro, è il 2,5% della popolazione; la più alta, di Castellani, è il 10% (non c'è accordo sul punto se coloro che parlavano i dialetti toscani si debbano considerare parlanti dell'italiano o no). Ancora nel 1950 la percentuale della popolazione che parlava normalmente italiano non era superiore al 18%; un 18% era in grado di parlare italiano oltre il proprio dialetto locale, e il restante 64% parlava solo un dialetto o una lingua di minoranza. Secondo i dati disponibili più recenti, oggi il 44% della popolazione parla solo italiano, il 51% italiano e il proprio dialetto o la propria lingua di minoranza, e il 5% non parla italiano per niente (De Mauro, T. (2004): *Cari italiani, come state parlando?* In: *Lid'O – Lingua italiana d'oggi I*, 55-70).

² Legge 482, 15 dicembre 1999, art. 1: "la lingua ufficiale della Repubblica è l'italiano". Le lingue di minoranza di cui si occupa la legge sono il sardo, il ladino e il friulano (che appartengono al sistema italo-romanzo, ma hanno un'identità linguistica e storica distinta dall'italiano e dai dialetti italiani); il tedesco; il francese, il franco-provenzale e l'occitano; il catalano; il greco; l'albanese; lo sloveno e il croato.

tre ‘lingua nazionale’ è un concetto culturale. Come lingua nazionale, si può dire che l'italiano è la lingua parlando la quale come parlanti nativi ci si sente italiani, anche se non si deve dimenticare che nella realtà questa lingua non è la stessa per tutti.

Oggi, tuttavia (e questa può essere un'affermazione, o una domanda), non è più realistico pensare che solo coloro che parlano la stessa lingua possano sentirsi parte della stessa nazione. In effetti, quali che siano state le motivazioni del legislatore italiano, la scelta della parola ‘ufficiale’, non ‘nazionale’, implica che una legge che protegge le lingue di minoranza non nega che l'Italia sia una nazione, e non tante nazioni quante sono le lingue protette. Una nazione, o meglio una società, della quale oggi fanno parte non solo comunità storiche di lingua diversa dall'italiano, ma anche nuove comunità originate dall'immigrazione, alle quali si deve chiedere di saper usare la lingua ufficiale, ma si deve anche riconoscere il diritto di mantenere l'uso delle loro lingue di origine (come dice anche la Dichiarazione di Dublino della EFNIL). La lingua nazionale, dunque (e anche questa può essere una domanda), dovrebbe essere considerata, piuttosto che un simbolo di unità politica, un patrimonio culturale.

Questo porta a dire che il problema di cui discutiamo non è linguistico, ma politico; non è il concetto di ‘lingua nazionale’, ma quello di ‘nazionalità’. È palese che la globalizzazione, nel mondo, e in Europa il processo di integrazione dell'Unione Europea, hanno acuito ovunque il senso dell'identità e il timore dell'assimilazione, e ciò riguarda sia gli stati nazionali, come gli stati europei nel loro rapporto con l'Unione, sia tutti i popoli grandi o piccoli che possono identificare se stessi per storia, tradizioni, costumi, lingua, all'interno di uno stato o in regioni a cavallo di più stati e così via. Il nome di lingua nazionale, o ufficiale, o altro che uno stato dà alla propria lingua è di fatto in relazione con tutti gli altri aspetti dei rapporti di potere e con l'ideologia. Sono i conflitti che nascono di qui che rendono l'uso dell'espressione ‘lingua nazionale’ una materia delicata, ed è per questa ragione che, a mio parere, una politica linguistica rivolta ad appianarli deve superare il concetto di nazione per quello di cittadinanza.

4. National and/or official language (by Walery Pisarek)

Since the first glimpse at one of the paragraphs of the *original* version of the Dublin Declaration, I was convinced that it is, to me, formally and ideologically unacceptable. Almost each word and expression it contained awakened negative emotions in me; almost each judgment and proposition it contained has provoked my determined opposition. To quote this paragraph:

The “one nation, one language” ideology is still very strong in politics, the media and indeed public opinion in many countries. However, it is largely invisible, and its acceptance is taken for granted. Thus the use of other languages is nearly always socially marked. Such an ideology is at variance with the demands of the processes of globalization in general, and European integration in particular. EFNIL is resolved to promote a debate to overcome this situation.

Let's start from the very beginning, i.e. from the phrase *one nation, one language ideology*. Maybe it is a question of my age, but I am not able to hear, to read, or to use this phrase without thinking of the slogan *ein Volk, ein Reich...* and so on. Even the slogan *one state, one nation, one language*, shortened to version *one nation, one language*

looks a bit manipulative: more or less widespread antipathy to its conjectural full version is transferred to the shortened one. Hence – in my opinion – this phrase is rhetorically marked and, as such, it may be used today exclusively for the overtly persuasive purposes and for this reason it is not suitable for use in a non-militant declaration.

What is a *nation* in English? According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary it is (1) *a country considered as a group of people with the same language, culture and history, who live in a particular area under one government* or (2) *all the people in a country*. And according to the Oxford Dictionaries Online *nation* is *a large body of people united by common descent, history, culture or language, inhabiting a particular state or territory*.

As a Pole, I find it hard to accept unreservedly these definitions of the word *nation* (and especially the first one of them), because according to them, the Poles in the nineteenth century, divided into three parts to the three neighbouring countries, ceased to be a nation. On the other hand, I do realize that the word *nation* is used internationally according to the Oxford Dictionary definitions, i.e. in the names of the UN and UNESCO.

What is a *nation* (*naród*) in Polish? According to the dictionary of the Polish language (*Słownik języka polskiego*, t. 2, PWN, Warszawa 1995), *nation* (*naród*) is *a stable community of people formed historically, founded on the basis of community of the historical fate, culture, language, territory and economic life as reflected in the national consciousness of its members*. An important element of the definition of the nation as a group of people is, in my opinion, the national consciousness of its members. It means that for instance the Polish nation is a community of people who view themselves as Poles. The same applies to other nations and their members. This self-awareness is sometimes reinforced by a common territory, common State, common religion and/or common language.

I don't need to remind anyone here that there are nations without common state, territory, religion or language, and nations whose national awareness is strengthened first of all by one or two of the factors just mentioned. According to my deepest conviction the national self-awareness of the Poles is based mainly on their language. My conviction is supported by various old (historical) and new (contemporary) arguments. Already in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, the population of the then Polish Kingdom was described as *gens linguae polonicae* – people of Polish language – thanks to their common language. The Poles, partitioned for more than 100 years into three parts by three neighboring states, remained Poles.

In 1985, in a national opinion poll the adult population of Poland answered the question “What above all makes us Poles?” Respondents were asked to assess the validity of each of seven factors. (Numbers in parentheses indicate the percentage of respondents who considered this factor as very important.)

1. Common history (87)
2. Common territory (80)
3. Common culture (81)
4. Common fate today and tomorrow (63)

5. Common religion (63)
6. Common state (55)
7. Common language (92)

Common language appeared to be the most important factor, more important than common territory and common state.

The Polish language is the national language of all the Poles. Of course it is – as are most judgments relating to the social sphere – a statistical truth. Of course there are people who consider themselves to be Poles and do not speak Polish.

What does *national* mean in English and in Polish (*narodowy*)? Etymologically or rather structurally, it is ‘that of nation, belonging to nation’ etc. And thus the difference between the English *national* and Polish *narodowy* boils down to the difference between the English *nation* and Polish *naród*. Hence *national language* is a language of some nation; e.g. the Polish language is national language of the Polish nation. Just like the Czech language is the national language of the Czechs and the German language the national language of the Germans. Some Czechs, Slovaks, Germans and Lithuanians live in Poland. Some of them have Polish citizenship, but despite this, they consider themselves Czechs, Slovaks, Germans and Lithuanians, and they state that their national language (national mother language) is Czech, Slovak, German or Lithuanian. At the same time dealing with public administration institutions, they use (yes, they have to use) Polish as the official language in Poland. In this way the Polish language, being the national language of the Poles, serves, as the official language in Poland, the needs of the Poles, of Polish citizens of other nationality and of other people living in Poland. As the official language it should be to all of them primarily a means of communication but – thanks to its phatic function – also a means of communion.

“Terms such as ‘minority language’ and ‘regional language’ are – as one can read in our Dublin Declaration – usually charged with ideological meanings, as are terms such as ‘national language’, ‘official language’ and many others used to indicate the condition or status of a language (e.g. indigenous, autochthonous, ethnic, lesser-used, co-official, dialect, non-territorial, dominant language).” Certainly we should use these terms very carefully, but the indigenous, lesser-used, non-territorial and dominant languages do exist and we need the terms to be able to refer to them. And, on the other hand, we should remember, that many languages have in some countries status of the official or state language and in other (usually neighboring) countries they are minority languages. Simply speaking, the same language may be dominating in one country and dominated in some others.

Most of us here, or maybe even all of us, represent “national institutions” in EFNIL and we are obliged according to our Federation statutes to support our national/official languages. Moreover, we represent 23 national languages of 27 countries on the general principle of one country one language. Some politically correct observers of the scene of EFNIL and of EU could say that this principle is quite apparent symptom of the “one nation – one language ideology”. I don't share such an accusation with them.

5. The symbolism of “national language” (by Maria Theodoropoulou)

My position statement begins with reference to historical facts, one of which is that to identify a nation with a specific language is the basic characteristic of the nation-state and its politics. Prior to the development of nation-states, the notion of “national language” did not exist. Also, it is widely recognized that, the promotion of a standard form of a single language, adopted as the national language, was required for the sake of homogenization. This type of homogenization was one of the main objectives of the nation-state in the socio-historical context of its formation: the pursuit of linguistic and cultural homogenization was a requisite for the creation of a homogenized labour force in the service of mass production. The consequence is also well known: the endorsement of a hegemonic – for historical reasons – linguistic variety as a standard language, which resulted in the elimination of the other varieties by means first of devaluating those varieties while re-evaluating at the same time the standard language with the added prestige of guaranteed social mobility.

Language was considered to be a constitutive part of a nation since the era of European romanticism by means of its identity with the nation's “Geist” (“spirit”) or “genius”. In the new socio-historical context, language was attributed with the role of defining the dividing line between “us” – that has a unifying function – and “the others” – which has a discriminating function. This happens irrespective of the fact that different nations can share the same language or that various multilingual nations consider multilingualism as a basic constituent of their identity. In other words, regardless of whether linguistic reality around the globe offers strong evidence that identifying a nation with a specific language is not an objective “truth” of some sort, this connection remains strong in our consciousness through an imaginary. The term *imaginary* is used here in order to emphasize the fact that the relation between language and nation is invested with a symbolic load, which not only lies outside the field of science but which is a social construct, deeply rooted in issues related to the formation of a national identity, as well as to the challenges that a nation faces vis a vis other nations.

By qualifying a language as *national* the identity of a language as a means of communication is transcended: thus language is converted into a subject-matter of symbolisms. Purity, continuity and origin become the main issues on which these symbolisms are anchored. I shall try to outline this line of thought using the Greek language as an example, but clearly it is not limited to this. With regard to purity, it is well known that the process of standardization is inevitably connected to a linguistic “cleansing” aiming to ensure a “unified” and homogeneous language. However, what is cleansed and by what it is replaced, entails a series of political and ideological decisions. Let me bring an example from the history of the Greek language: In the process of its standardization a high variety of Greek was opted for – in the 19th century – as the standard national language, validating thus in an institutional manner a diglossia which lasted until the second part of the 20th century. This process was marked by two acts: on the one hand, the massive elimination of the Turkish loan words, a result of the coexistence between Greeks and Turks during the 400 years of Turkish occupation in Greece. On the other hand it was marked by the massive adoption of loan words from the French and Italian languages or from older versions of Greek. From one point of view this was certainly legitimate since this

was what the society wished – and perhaps also needed – at that time. What is significant, however, is that borrowing from the West had to do both with the implicit and explicit claims of the new established Greek state concerning its European identity: it was an explicit claim in so far as it accommodated that historical conjuncture, that is, borrowing from a western language; it was an implicit claim as it appealed to the roots of its symbolic capital, the ancient Greek civilization, which was at that time “managed” by the West.

Coming now to the second point that brings forth the symbolic with regard to language: it is to be noted that the history of a language is the central space where the issue of continuity occurs. In the history of the Greek language, symbolisms became so forceful that they erased historical factuality, even for a number of linguists. In this complex context of claims that the newly established Greek nation pursued towards its European identity, and under the threat of theories that argued its “barbarization”, the continuity of the modern with the ancient Greek language was argued in favour of an “intrinsic” conservatism of Greek; a view which, of course, renounced linguistic change as a basic characteristic of language. Furthermore, the histories of the Greek language were written with an emphasis on the learned form of the language, which was conservative in its evolution, rather than the everyday language that the common people spoke. Of course, the existence of dialects, the field of linguistic change, was hushed. Finally, it should be noted that the historic orthography [spelling] is another field in which the continuity with older forms of language is asserted on a symbolic level. A debate, taking place in Greece at present, meets with two opposing views: the first one argues in favour of an archaic orthography that strictly follows the rules of etymology; the second one argues in favour of a rationally simplified spelling, more user-friendly and in accordance with the new social conditions that are continuously changing in Greece and other countries. The first one – an unscientific argument – is strongly supported and brings forth predictions of incurring dangers for the Greek language, and specifically its loss of “Greekness”.

I shall finish suggesting that, on one hand, these attitudes are founded in socio-historical reasons that lie deeply in the roots of ethnogenesis, as was mentioned before. On the other hand, these attitudes are intertwined with unconscious collective wishes and fantasies that elevate a language as the richest, the oldest, the most important one etc., which is of course spoken by a “privileged” nation. Such a stance, as far as I know, is not particular to Greece alone.

6. Final remarks on the notion “national language” (by Bessie Dendrinios)

From the discussion that followed the position papers, we understand that language is still tightly linked to social identity. It is one of the most important forms of human symbolic behaviour and is a key component of a group's social identity. Since people belong to different groups and have many potential identities, different codes serve as markers or tools to forge these identities. A separate, national language, for example, is often perceived as a necessary condition for a nation to exist.

Of course we also understand that definitions of languages can be very *subjective*. Seemingly identical linguistic codes can be identified as separate languages if distinct identi-

ties need to be established for two, otherwise similar, ethnic groups. An example of this is that until the 1991 war in the former Republic of Yugoslavia, Serbian and Croatian were treated as a single language (Serbo-Croat). The main difference between the two varieties was that they were written in two alphabets, Cyrillic and Roman respectively. After the war, however, linguists and non-linguists in the country went to considerable lengths to establish the varieties as separate languages by asserting how much the two codes differ structurally. If, say, British English and American English were to undergo similar political ‘theorizing’, one could imagine claims being made that they are radically different languages, whereas currently we think of them as varieties of a common code, distinguished by minor matters of vocabulary, pronunciation and orthography. Through this example, it becomes more apparent that what was at stake in the former Yugoslavia was not a linguistic reality but a set of political and social realities.

There are, of course, noteworthy exceptions to the generalization that national or ethnic identity is tied to a *national* or *ethnic* language. For example, the Irish have largely lost the autochthonous language – Irish Gaelic, but not a sense of nationhood.

Other peoples have lost the indigenous languages, but have not necessarily lost their ethnic identity or cultural vitality. In some of these cases, language can be a source of national or ethnic identity, but in a rather negative way – through a sense of loss. For example, when asked about their linguistic and cultural heritage, many Welsh monoglot English speakers invoke their Welshness in terms of a national language which has been denied to them. For other Welsh people, and particularly those whose learning of Welsh halted the decline in the overall numbers of Welsh speakers at the 1991 census, a Welsh identity is likely to be linked to the language in a less abstract way.

There are several political and moral questions surrounding language and ethnic identity and many sociolinguists have been investigating them extensively. For example, the well-known American sociolinguist, Joshua Fishman, has spoken of the myth of ‘one nation, one state, one language’ as a damaging and dangerous (Eurocentric?) construct, which became well established in the 19th century. We have seen through the position papers and the discussion that followed this panel, and then we have seen how deeply disturbing it is still for most Europeans to speak of this construct negatively. In Europe it is part of the political and popular conception of nationhood. On the other hand, most of us have been witnesses to how such an ideology can easily be a tool of reactionary propaganda, in the rhetoric of such groups as ‘English Now’ in the USA. This movement calls for the linguistic cleansing of America by imposing English as the official language in the country. Such legislation may lead to a ban on bilingual education and might also spark off some version of ethnic cleansing, on the grounds of the supposed superiority of English over other languages spoken in America; that is, racism.

In contrast to the view of a nation as an ethnic and linguistic monolith, ethnic and linguistic diversity is proposed today by the European Commission that calls for a new kind of politics which does not favour monolingualist ideals or homogenization through assimilation. It promotes multilingualism not only as a universal and normal condition, but as a necessary and desirable one. In this context “ethnicity is a non-discriminatory, value-free notion, which we may oppose theoretically to racism —the prejudicial, essentially

hierarchical, value-laden notion that one group and its language is inferior to another.” This is due to the fact that European countries have ethnic and linguistic minorities within their boundaries. To construe them as a problem is to assert a divisive monocultural and purist ideal. Against this, the primary goal of sociolinguistics has been to assert principles of linguistic and cultural pluralism, to which EFNIL, in accordance with the policies of the European Union, the European Commission in particular, ascribes.

7. Contributors

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8. Appendix

THE DUBLIN DECLARATION

The relationship between official, regional and minority languages in Europe

1. The linguistic reality varies considerably from one country to another across Europe, as a result of differing historical, social, and political conditions. EFNIL members, as national or central institutions of the EU member states, are dedicated to supporting their official, standard language(s) through language research, status/corpus planning, documentation, and policy. In addition, they have a responsibility to monitor closely the development of language use and linguistic diversity in each of their countries.
2. Terms such as ‘minority language’ and ‘regional language’ are usually charged with ideological meanings, as are terms such as ‘national language’, ‘official language’ and many others used to indicate the condition or status of a language (e.g. indigenous, autochthonous, ethnic, lesser-used, co-official, dialect, non-territorial, dominant language). The use of such a range of terms is itself indicative of the fact that the relationship between languages and between language and society is very complex. EFNIL intends to contribute to awareness-raising regarding the use of such terms and to promote their careful use in official documents and language policies.
3. EFNIL views all languages as equal in cultural value, and this of course includes minority languages. EFNIL makes no distinction between autochthonous, immigrant and minority languages when it comes to their rights for access to knowledge and language education. To this end, EFNIL advocates the inclusion of as many languag-

es in school curricula as possible, and urges state authorities to take a proactive approach to the inclusion of minority migrant languages in school programmes and/or to offer opportunities for accessing education in these languages whenever possible.

4. Language groups living outside their 'kin-state(s)' or without a 'kin-state' should be reassured (for instance by bilateral agreements as regards groups with 'kin-state(s)' or by adequate legal acts regarding other groups) that the country of which they are citizens respects and indeed values linguistic rights. Such practices might contribute to improved international relations, exchange, and trade.
5. Citizens are typically expected to have a command of a particular language (usually termed the 'national' or 'official' language). Those wishing to acquire citizenship have to provide evidence of their competence in this language. In a few countries this requirement is applicable to one of several official languages. Nevertheless, this should not mean that other autochthonous languages, as constituent languages of the country and part of its cultural heritage, should not be valued. The rapid decline of speakers of some of these languages in recent times is a cause for great concern. EFNIL urges state authorities and the general public to recognise the cognitive, social, and indeed political and economic advantages for the national community of the bi- or multilingualism of all its members.
6. In most European countries today there is a rather complicated linguistic reality which is not always visible due to lack of reliable, recent statistics. As EFNIL recognises the conditions of social plurality in Europe and the need for social cohesion, it is committed to promoting plurilingual citizenry and to working together with other European organisations, in order to collect and disseminate reliable data and best practice in this field.