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## ECCA report

January 2020



## The ECCA project: contents and aims

**Abstract:** In this report, I will briefly address the issue of linguistic diversity and then explore some of the characteristics of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, the most important legal instrument for the protection and promotion of linguistic diversity in Europe. Finally, I will explain the contents and objectives of the European Charter Classroom Activities (ECCA) project, which brings the principles of the Charter into the classroom.

**Keywords:** European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, language diversity, regional languages, minority languages, education, language policy, ECCA project, youth, school activities.

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## LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY

Linguistic diversity is one of humanity's common cultural heritages. Human languages do not only constitute a unique communication system in the animal kingdom, but they are also vehicles of transmission, organization and creation of knowledge, they are signs of individual and collective identity, and they are reflections of evolution, societies and the cultures of humanity and our peoples. Unfortunately, today it is estimated that many languages will be replaced and will disappear: of the 6,700 languages that there are around the world, 40% are threatened, according to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (2016)<sup>1</sup>.

Therefore, UNESCO declared 2019 to be the International Year of Indigenous Languages (or "autochthonous", in the French version), in order to promote and protect linguistic diversity, improve the life of indigenous language speakers and contribute to the world's sustainable development. UNESCO has taken this opportunity to highlight the value of linguistic diversity and the importance of languages for their speakers, for humanity and

<sup>1</sup> According to the information on the International Year of Indigenous Languages website: <https://en.iyil2019.org/>





for our planet. Thus, in the introduction to UNESCO's plan of action (2018:2), it states, among other things:

*Language is a core component of human rights and fundamental freedoms and is essential to realizing sustainable development, good governance, peace and*

*reconciliation. A person's freedom to use his or her chosen language is a prerequisite to freedom of thought, freedom of opinion and expression, access to education and information, employment and other values enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.*

## THE EUROPEAN CHARTER FOR REGIONAL OR MINORITY LANGUAGES (ECRML)

Europe is, of course, no exception to this rule. Although Europe is the continent with the least linguistic diversity as compared to other continents and regions<sup>2</sup>, according to Ethnologue there are more than 200 indigenous languages (without counting immigrant languages), some of which are official in the states where they are spoken, others have partial recognition and others do not have any type of legal recognition. According to Halwachs (2017:22), the democratization of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the evolution from an ethnic conception of the nation-state to a more civic conception resulted in “the transformation of the official linguistic diversity of Europe from the simple addition of national languages to the consideration of all indigenous languages [...]. [...] linguistic diversity becomes part of the European self-perception”. Given this situation, it is not surprising that the Council of Europe should protect and promote the linguistic diversity of Europe and the linguistic rights of European citizens. After all, the Council of Europe is a supranational and intergovernmental institution (created by state governments) and at present the largest organization of

<sup>2</sup> For more information, see Coulmas (2017:7).





GIVING REGIONAL  
AND MINORITY  
LANGUAGES A SAY!



human rights in Europe: just one year after its creation, it adopted the European Convention on Human Rights in 1950; since then “the Council has concentrated on the advancement of human rights, parliamentary democracy, the rule of law and the promotion of common values [...]”. As part of the efforts to advance the mechanisms of defining and protecting human and especially minority rights, the Council's agenda included questions concerning language” (Bugarski 2017:43). At present, the Council of Europe has 47 member states, encompassing approximately 800 million inhabitants, and is the oldest pan-European institution.

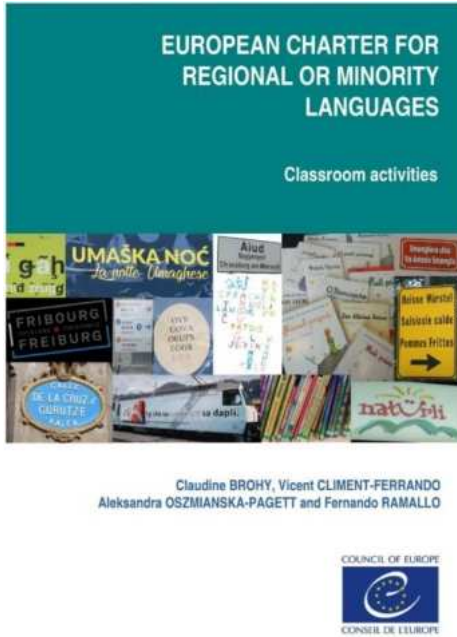
Regarding the protection and promotion of linguistic diversity, the Council of Europe's most important document is the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (Council of Europe 1992), an international convention, which is legally binding for the states that sign and ratify it, “designed on the one hand to protect and promote regional and minority languages as a threatened aspect of Europe's cultural heritage and, on the other hand, to enable speakers of a regional or minority language to use it in private and public life” (Halwachs, 2017:23). This treaty is unique, since it is the main (and only binding) international legal instrument for the protection of Europe's linguistic diversity. The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages was adopted in 1992 and came into force in 1998 when the first five member states of the Council of Europe ratified it. So far, 33 states have signed it, of which 25 have ratified it<sup>3</sup>; it protects 79 languages used by 203 national minorities or linguistic groups (Council of Europe 2018).

Thus, in order to make “an important contribution to the construction of a Europe based on the principles of democracy and of cultural diversity” (Council of Europe 1992:Preamble), the Charter promotes specific measures for the development of these languages; of these measures, the states must choose and commit to at least 35. It has to be said, however, that the state's adherence to the Charter and to the measures is open and that the Charter does not have “coercive force”, but that it is “a structure [that] is created with a basis of international political trust” (Molina 2017) and that it has a committee of experts that

<sup>3</sup> The states that have ratified it are Armenia, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine and United Kingdom.

The states that have signed but not ratified it are Azerbaijan, France, Iceland, Italy, Malta, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation.





regularly produces reports on the implementation of the Charter, which it sends to the ratifying states. Furthermore, a distinction must be made between two different levels of protection afforded by the Charter: the measures in Part II (the lowest but universal level of protection) apply to any language that is spoken in the ratifying state and that meets the definition of “regional or minority language”, while Part III (the highest but selective level of protection) applies only to those languages that the state explicitly chooses. For the purpose of the Charter, a “regional or minority language” is a language that is “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” (Council of Europe 1992: art. 1); moreover, it has to be “different from the official language(s) of that State” (ibid.), not including dialects or immigrant languages or sign languages. They do, however, include non-territorial languages and “lesser used” official languages, the latter only if the state declares them specifically. Finally, the following are the areas of application of the Charter, of which the first is the most important: 1) Education, 2) Judicial authorities, 3) Administrative authorities and public services, 4) Media, 5) Cultural activities and facilities, 6) Economic and social life, and 7) Transfrontier exchanges.

For more than 20 years now, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages has been in effect in some countries and there is no doubt that it has been a crucial tool for the protection of European linguistic diversity<sup>4</sup>. As Bugarski concluded:

*By challenging the traditional ideology of the monolingual nation state it has notably contributed to raising the general public's awareness of the importance of preserving the rich linguistic heritage of Europe. In other words, its application has increased the visibility of previously neglected minority languages everywhere, frequently providing recovery strategies for those most endangered. In this way it has highlighted the generally ignored fact that in nearly every European state there are minority languages deserving support. [...]*

<sup>4</sup> *It is clear, however, that it has also had its limitations. As Halwachs said (2017: 37-38): “They [the Charter and other Council of Europe instruments] reflect only the least common denominator that was reached among European nation-states during a time window when diversity and integration were high on the political agenda”.*



Education must always be at the service of linguistic and cultural diversity and of harmonious relations between different language communities throughout the world.

*Universal Declaration of  
Linguistic Rights*

*And quite generally, the Charter has stimulated minority communities to actively participate in matters of common concern. This has led to an increased awareness of their rights among minority members and to a more positive attitude towards their languages, while on the other hand encouraging state authorities to address their responsibilities in this area more systematically – inter alia, by establishing a variety of cultural and pedagogical institutions, commissions and programmes for minority languages.*

*In conclusion, the achievements of the Charter after eighteen years of operation can be considered satisfactory, as it has successfully triggered a long-term, in fact unbounded process of creative social intervention in a previously rather neglected area. It remains a living testimony to the mutually enriching efforts of European states at advancing the quality of life on the continent and affirming some of the principal cultural values of our era, while at the same time offering a possible answer to the challenges of cultural and linguistic globalization which Europe is increasingly facing. (2017:56-57).*



## ECRML EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES AND THE ECCA PROJECT

Despite the advances of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML), it became necessary to make it more publicly known, since, according to Ramallo (2017), “there is a remarkable lack of knowledge about the Charter”, which is why “progress is being made in the Council of Europe to disseminate the Charter”. In fact, as Climent-Ferrando confirmed in a recent interview, “experts already know it, but we must go further and raise awareness among people who do not know the Charter or the concept of linguistic diversity; awareness that this document is legally binding has to be raised, for example, in the



states that have ratified it, through education”. In order to celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Charter, it was decided to prepare an educational guide with activities for the secondary school classroom. The goal of this educational guide was to make the Charter more visible and to provide a tool for disseminating information and raising awareness about linguistic diversity in the school system. Therefore, the Secretariat of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages appointed a team of experts to prepare this publication: Fernando Ramallo, Claudine Brohy, Vicent Climent-Ferrando and Aleksandra Oszmianska-Pagett; hence, the publication is an initiative of the Council of Europe, in collaboration with the Universidade de Vigo, Université de Fribourg/Universität Freiburg, Wyższa Szkoła



Jezyków Obcych in Poznań and the Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity (NPLD).

According to Climent-Ferrando, one of the challenges in the preparation of the document was deciding on the end users of the activities, on one hand, and the adaptation of the language of the document to these recipients, on the other hand. Finally, it was decided to develop a document with activities for secondary school education (from 11-12 years on), with a plain and readable language, free of jargon, consisting of 3 parts. Part A is an introduction to linguistic diversity and a description of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages; Part B is a description of three states that have ratified the Charter as examples, namely Switzerland, Spain and Poland; and Part C is a collection of 10 educational activities, for different ages, on subjects related to regional or minority languages and the Charter:

- What is a minority language?
- Language prejudices
- Biography of a famous minority speaker
- Minority language day(s) or week
- Toponymy, linguistic landscape and signage in minority languages
- Edit-a-thon in a minority language
- New speakers of minority languages
- Variety of writing systems of minority languages
- Non-territorial languages
- Sign languages

This educational guide with activities “should not be left ‘on the shelf’”, as Vicent Climent-Ferrando told us; in fact, what the experts who have prepared the guide expect and hope for most is that it will be implemented in the classroom and “that it be useful”. This is the only way to achieve what is key for Climent-Ferrando: “awareness raising”; and it is not just about “preaching to the converted’, but also reaching monolingual people, even though in our regions it also has to be addressed because of language prejudices and diglossia”.



Only by raising awareness about language diversity and rights can we create a linguistically sustainable world. In accordance with this idea, in 2019 seven members of the NPLD<sup>5</sup> initiated the ECCA project (European Charter Classroom Activities). It is the first project to receive a grant from the NPLD, as a pilot programme for the implementation of the guide in secondary education, specifically in five different linguistic communities: the Catalan, Frisian, Friulian, Hungarian (in Romania) and Ladin language communities. As Sabrina Rasom (2019), the ECCA project-leader, said at the kick-off meeting in Brussels, the project intends “to bring together young people and teachers from different linguistic regions, to facilitate the exchange of good practices and to raise awareness among European citizens”; she also reiterated that we are stronger together, particularly in the case of minority language communities. More information on the ECCA project on its website: <https://thisismylanguage.eu/>

<sup>5</sup> For Catalan: *Xarxa Vives d'Universitats*. For Frisian: *Provinsje Fryslân and Afûk*. For Friulian: *Agenzie Regjonâl pe Lenghe Furlane (ARLeF) and the University of Udine's Centri pal Disvilup de Lenghe e de Culture dal Friûl*. For Ladin: *Comun General de Fascia*. For Hungarian: *Partium Christian University*.





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#### **About ECCA Reports:**

*The series of publications under the title ECCA Reports aims to disseminate the contents of the ECCA project in particular, but also to raise awareness on the fundamental importance of the Europe Charter for Regional and Minority Languages in general, to influence public opinion and to support the activity of the Council of Europe on this subject. ECCA targets European youngsters through a network of schools which have agreed to develop and apply specific classroom activities and an exchange of experiences among pupils from different regions.*

*Three universities are involved in the production of the ECCA reports: Partium Christian University, Vives Universities Network and Udine University- CIRF. These institutions are fundamental in order to accompany and study the development of the activities from an academic point of view, combining the practical and the scientific aspect, thereby contributing to the dissemination of the results at different levels.*

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More information on ECCA: [thisismylanguage.eu/](http://thisismylanguage.eu/)