



# EUROPEAN POLICYBRIEF

eldia

european language  
diversity for all

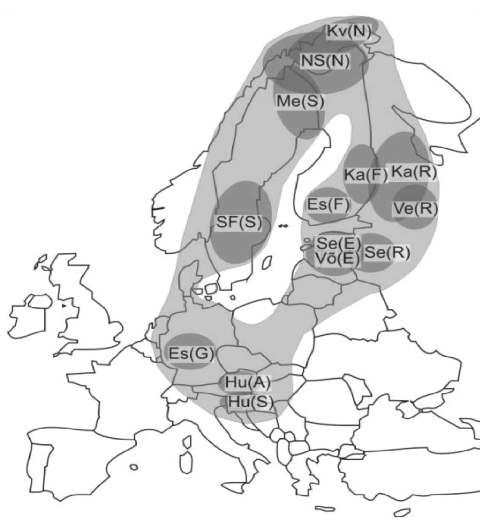
## EUROPEAN LANGUAGE DIVERSITY FOR ALL

Some results and implications of the EU-FP7 research project  
ELDIA

August 6, 2013

### INTRODUCTION

The interdisciplinary research project ELDIA was consciously developed to contribute to a better understanding of – as the project title implies – European Language Diversity for All. This means that the research focused on the cultural and linguistic resources possessed by European minority groups and on the fact that their “natural” multilingualism forms an integral part of the traditional European language diversity. Contrary to the majority of earlier studies which have usually been concerned with a handful of well-known Western European (mostly Indo-European) minority languages, ELDIA concentrated on Central, Eastern and Northern European minority languages and migrant communities with a Finno-Ugric heritage language.



Kv(N) = Kven in Norway  
NS(N) = North Sámi in Norway  
Me(S) = Meänkieli in Sweden  
Ka(F) = Karelian in Finland  
Ka(R) = Karelian in Russia  
Es(F) = Estonian in Finland  
Ve(R) = Vepsian in Russia  
SF(S) = Finnish in Sweden  
Se(E/R) = Seto in Estonia and Russia  
Vö(E) = Võro in Estonia  
Es(G) = Estonian in Germany  
Hu(A) = Hungarian in Austria  
Hu(S) = Hungarian in Slovenia

The main operational goal of ELDIA was to construct a systematic tool, the **European Language Vitality Barometer** (EuLaViBar), for identifying those areas of

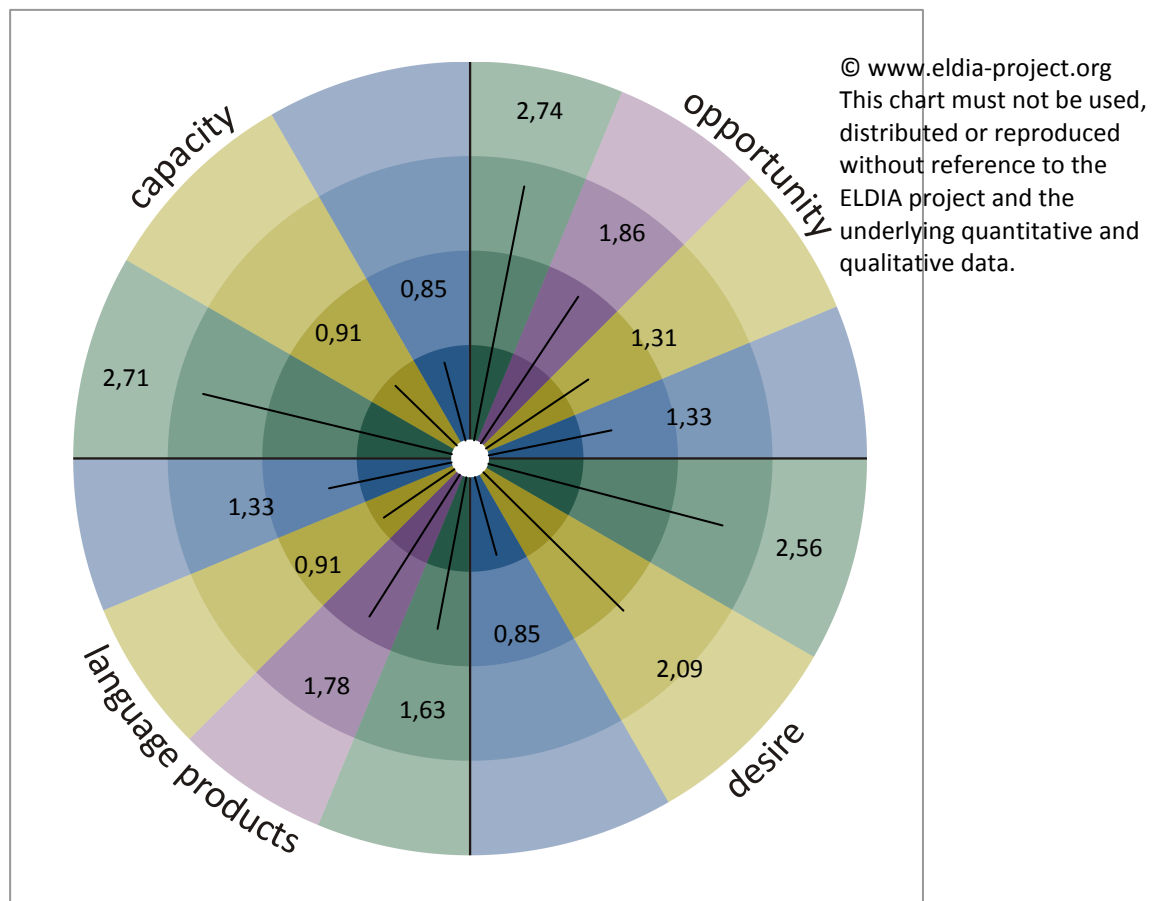
language management which need special attention and resources in order to effectively support the maintenance and development of the language at issue.

In the light of the project results, at least five general problem areas in contemporary European and national language policies can be identified:

- **The lack of a common direction** in European and national language policies. Although language diversity is an acknowledged part of European cultural heritage and multilingualism has repeatedly been proclaimed a central goal of European language and education policies, the strategies for supporting the maintenance of language diversity are created on local, national or regional levels. As a result, the supportive measures have largely remained inefficient and isolated from other aspects of multilingualism, in particular, the general goals of European language-education policies.
- **The lack of goal-oriented minority(-language) education policies.** European and national education policies either practically ignore the multilingualism of minorities or fail to deal with it in a productive way. Firstly, while acquired multilingualism (the learning of vehicular languages) is defined as a central goal of education policies on both European and national level, as an important investment, the multilingualism of minorities is still seen and treated in decision-making as an item of extra expenditure. Secondly, the current minority (language) policies do not correspond to reality any longer. Modern European minorities are usually multilingual, mastering their heritage languages to varying extents, and often mobile or dispersed. Thus, the traditional means of supporting language maintenance – often based on geographical areas and supposedly monolingual speaker communities – do not meet the needs of contemporary minority members.
- **The lack of systematic policies supporting the maintenance and the development of minority languages as a true European cultural and economic asset.** As stated above, European language management is lacking a common direction. Moreover, European policy-makers have hardly paid any attention to the fact that multilingualism is not only part of our cultural and historical heritage, but also an area in which our continent stands out: nowhere in the world is the proportion of relatively viable, well-developed and extensively used “minor” languages and thus the prospect of successful and profitable maintenance of language diversity as great as in Europe.
- **The invisibility of the rich multilingualism** of minority groups in Europe. Not only is the multilingualism of minorities not treated on a par with acquired multilingualism – it frequently fails to receive any attention from policy-makers or media. In particular, the fact that recent migrant groups, small-numbered and dispersed minorities (for instance, members of regional minorities now living outside their traditional areas) also represent living multilingualism in their societies has gone almost completely unnoticed.
- **The inefficiency of language legislation** and its implementation. Multilingualism as such is not protected by law; what is affirmed is, in the best case, the right of a certain group to use a certain language in a certain area. Language legislation fails to offer adequate protection to the maintenance of minority languages; there either are no effective redress mechanisms in cases of violation of language rights, or they are not properly implemented. Non-discrimination provisions do not adequately support the active maintenance and revitalisation of smaller languages.

## EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

The results of the case studies were analysed and processed into *EuLaViBar* results. These show the state of language maintenance on a scale from 0 (the language is severely and critically endangered) to 4 (the language is maintained at the moment and does not appear to be threatened). The following example, taken from the ELDIA case study on Hungarian in Austria, illustrates the state of language maintenance in four focus areas (the quadrants of the *EuLaViBar* diagram: *capacity*, *opportunity* and *desire* to use the language, as well as the supply and demand of *language products*), and in four dimensions: language use and interaction (the green sectors), education (purple), legislation (yellow) and media (blue). The length of the lines in each sector indicates the grade of language maintenance or endangerment: the longer the line and the lighter the shade, the better the language is maintained.



It must be noted that the *EuLaViBar* diagrams can only illustrate the current state of each language as it is reflected in the results of the surveys. **They should not be interpreted and used without detailed knowledge of the actual situation behind the figures.** Above all, the ELDIA consortium stresses that the future of any language depends on a number of decisions made by both policy-makers and language users; thus, **the barometer cannot predict the fate of an individual language**, nor can it be used to determine whether a language “has chances to survive” and “deserves to be supported”. In the hands of well-informed users, *EuLaViBar* will help policy-makers and stakeholders in identifying those areas which are in particular need of support and those conditions which particularly threaten the

maintenance of a given language, so that resources can be allocated in the best possible way and special support be directed to areas indicated by low vitality scores.

The most relevant finding of the case studies is that, according to the results yielded by the *EuLaViBar* analyses, **all the minority languages examined by ELDIA are by almost all indicators endangered** at least to some extent. That the picture shown by *EuLaViBar* scores also corresponds to experts' knowledge of the situation of these languages further confirms that the *EuLaViBar* tool can be used to assess the vitality of a language.

It is particularly noteworthy that the three minority languages with the poorest maintenance score in this study, viz. Kven in Norway, Meänkieli in Sweden, and Karelian in Finland, are all spoken in Nordic countries which usually hold high rankings in many indices of human development and democracy. Obviously, **higher aggregate levels of human development or strong egalitarian traditions are not a sufficient guarantee for the vitality of minority languages**, especially if these minorities have experiences of long-standing discrimination, forced assimilation and marginalisation.

Moreover, merely **permissive institutional frameworks** (such as language laws *allowing for* the use of the minority language) or the **lack of overt discrimination do not suffice to really promote the active use and transmission of the language**. (This was evident even for languages enjoying a very high level of legal protection, such as Hungarian in Slovenia and North Sámi in Norway.) The field research also showed that the minorities under study were often uninformed or indifferent about existing language legislation and its importance for their linguistic rights.

**The minorities under study are multilingual and attach high value to their languages:** they acknowledge the importance of mastering the state language (as well as international vehicular languages, most notably English) and also typically explicitly wish their heritage language to be maintained, used and developed.

Despite legal and institutional support which in a form or another exists for all the minorities under study, the **supply of language products, media and language education is insufficient and inadequate**. The role of the minority languages in the education system is often unclear, the contents and methods of teaching may be inadequate, and even in countries where the national education system promotes efficient early language-teaching methods such as pre-school language immersion or CLIL (content-language integrated learning), minority languages are often not involved.

In the national discourses and policies, **minorities are still often “othered”**, seen as an exception, apart and distinct from the majority societies. The case studies as well as the analyses of legislation and media have revealed a “strategic invisibility”: minority-language speakers want to appear as integrated good citizens and thus reinforce the tendency of media and policy-makers to avoid dealing with issues of inequality or the fact that the institutional support for minority languages is still often inadequate and inefficient.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The basic tenet of all recommendations given on the basis of ELDIA research is that the maintenance of linguistic diversity and equality of languages and ethnic groups requires **resources and proactive efforts**. Mere permissive policies and non-discrimination are not sufficient. It should also be emphasised that **supporting sustainable multilingualism is the only possible solution if citizens' needs and**

**rights are to be respected:** generally, the minorities under study want *both* to retain their heritage language *and* to learn the state language and other languages.

As already shown by a wealth of research and confirmed by the ELDIA case studies, the key factors for the maintenance and vitality of a language are **intergenerational transmission**, active **language use** across a wide range of contexts and functions, and **institutional and societal support**. This implies that

- **language transmission** in families, if possible, and **early language learning** (for instance, pre-school language immersion) must be supported and parents informed of their responsibility as language educators – without new speaker generations, all other efforts for language revitalisation will be in vain;
- **explicit revitalisation programmes** for the most endangered minority languages are urgently needed, and **efficient teaching of minority languages at schools** (including also teacher training and teaching material) should be developed and reorganised. This means setting sustainable multilingualism as the goal and also implementing methods beyond traditional foreign-language teaching – language immersion, content-language integrated learning etc., especially for language communities where there is a generational gap in language transmission (i.e. whole speaker generations have been lost, often as a result of past repressive practices);
- the **multilingualism of migrants**, especially small-numbered and more recent migrant groups, needs to be affirmed explicitly and supported;
- language users need **encouragement**: support for families in transmitting the language to children (breaking habits of family-internal communication is very difficult), more opportunities to use the language also in the public sphere without the “fear of being impolite” towards outsiders who do not understand the language;
- language users must be **better informed of their rights**, the role of legislation and public institutions in supporting language diversity and the possibilities of every European citizen to influence policy-making;
- non-discrimination frameworks need to be complemented by **effective equality efforts** encompassing appropriate measures that need to be developed in close contact with the language communities concerned;
- **minority media needs more resources**, more supply and a wider coverage.

For **dispersed minorities**, especially small-numbered migrant groups or old minorities now living outside their traditional areas, new solutions for supporting language maintenance, in particular, by creating more opportunities to use the language, should be found. Small-numbered minorities in general also need **long-term support measures** which enable long-term planning – now, public funding for the language maintenance activities of these groups often comes in the form of short-lived projects which must be repeatedly re-planned and applied for.

**The media representations and public images of minorities need updating.** Both minority and majority media should highlight the role of minorities as an integral part of the local ethnocultural landscape and avoid reproducing the “extinction narrative”: depicting minority languages and cultures as something which belongs to the past and will inevitably die out. Instead of focusing on elements of “otherness”, traditional culture and folklore, and reproducing stereotypical images, **majority media should make explicit efforts to reflect real-life experiences and concerns of minorities.**

## RESEARCH PARAMETERS

The project was realised in the form of subsequent transversal and interdisciplinary work packages, involving researchers of linguistics, law, sociology and statistics and based on both desk research and field research. For each of the twelve centrally planned case studies with multilingual speaker communities across Europe, a questionnaire survey and a series of interviews were conducted, supported by desk research into the legal and institutional framework and analyses of minority and majority media. The results of the questionnaire survey were analysed statistically and interpreted with the help of qualitative results from desk research and the interview material.

The case studies and legal analyses, which in themselves created new knowledge about speaker communities hitherto underrepresented in international research, were or will be published as peer-reviewed open-access monographs (all available on the project website or directly at <http://phaidra.univie.ac.at/o:80726>). Their central results have been processed into an expert work report (an abridged version of this is available on the project website or directly at <http://phaidra.univie.ac.at/o:304815>) and the language maintenance barometer *EuLaViBar* (*European Language Vitality Barometer*), a tool for assessing the maintenance of endangered languages. The *EuLaViBar Toolkit* has been published on the project website; it can also be directly downloaded at <http://phaidra.univie.ac.at/o:301101>.

## PROJECT IDENTITY

**PROJECT NAME** European Language Diversity for All (ELDIA)

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March 2010—September 2013 (42 months)

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**BUDGET**

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**WEBSITE**

<http://www.eldia-project.org/>

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**FOR MORE  
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**FURTHER  
READING**

The publications of the project, including the case-specific reports of the 12  
case studies (forthcoming) and 8 legal and institutional framework  
analyses, can be downloaded from the project website or directly from  
<http://phaidra.univie.ac.at/o:80789> .