



*munduko hizkuntzen amarauna*

## **Official Languages and Language Diversity in the European Union**

I would like to make a few points which, from our perspective, have linguistic and political significance for the multilingual Europe of to-day and the linguistic policy of EU member states.

Europe's linguistic tapestry will attain its harmony only if the numerous languages of the Russian Federation which number more than 170, are interwoven into it.

As is known, Russian is not only one of the most widespread Slavonic languages but also a most commonly used language worldwide.

The use of the Russian language outside the country and its wide application in different spheres of international communication have qualified it as a member of the "club of international languages". Russia is a great multicultural country which occupies a large part of Europe and Asia. Historically, throughout the centuries the Russian language, without enjoying an official status, has played an important state-forming role. It was not until the end of the 20th century that this status was recognised.

It was institutionalized as the RF official state language throughout the country by the 1991 Russian Federation Law and the 1993 Russian Constitution.

The Russian language is used as a state language in the constituent republics of the Russian Federation alongside their own national languages thus forming the communicative basis of Russia's unity and integrity.

Besides, the Russian language has an important role as a national language outside Russia, in such CIS countries as Kazakhstan, Kirgizia, Armenia, Belorussia <sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> In accordance with official agreements the Russian language enjoys the status of an official and working language in all of the CIS countries.

Therefore, Russian in ways similar to English is a lingua franca but it also ranks as a national language in some other countries.

2. Given the ongoing globalization process, the role languages play is becoming an increasingly important – and sensitive – issue.

On the one hand, globalization was “invented” by politicians and the desire to “adopt” 1-working languages in Europe (English, French and now increasingly German) to facilitate economic and political dialogue comes from the EU tradition in the first place, and is also explained by economic reasons and the need to train highly skilled translators and interpreters.

On the other hand, Europe has proclaimed as its overall goal the protection of its linguistic and cultural diversity, and as its immediate task, a competence in two foreign languages throughout Europe.

However, this goal is a matter of the future, while the strong current trend to speak one or two (less often three) languages in Europe may result in fewer people reading national literatures as well as in a lower level of language and cultural competence. As things are, political and economic discourse is confined by its very subjects – and hence lacks euphony, eloquence and subtlety of feeling found in literary and cultural traditions.

By limiting itself to eleven official languages or twenty in the near future, Europe is risking to lose such a vast culture and scholarly domain as Russia with its thousand years of culture, and centuries of literary tradition, and modern science. Russian researchers have no difficulty in reading scientific literature in English, German and French which is hardly the case with their European colleagues with regard to Russian.

Miguel Siguan’s article raises a whole range of issues which can not be tackled here for lack of time.

I would like to make just a few points for possible discussion:

With its more than 170 nationalities Russia has a unique experience of language policy and construction.

In implementing its language policy in the United Europe, EU and its future member states could be well-advised to bear in mind both the positive and negative aspects of Russian experience.

The Russian Federation appears to be the only country among the CIS and Baltic states where the adoption of the Law on the Languages of the peoples of RF (1991, amended in 1998) has not brought about any serious national-and-language conflicts.

Another problem: What foreign language competence level should be expected of Europeans who apart from their native tongue speak two foreign languages? For what purposes should they master two foreign languages? In fact, the aims set by politicians and motivation of common citizens may not – and often do not – coincide.

With regard to the Bologna convention and free movement of students, the question remains: What other languages (apart from the eleven above) should be studied in the European Union?

---

I would like to thank Belen Uranga and Hizkuntzen AMARAUNA World Languages Networks UNESCO Etxea for the opportunity to take part in the discussion.

I.Khaleeva