Endangered European languages and linguistic diversity in the European Union

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The Committee on Culture and Education unanimously adopted the report by François ALFONSI (Greens /EFA, FR) on endangered European languages and linguistic diversity in the European Union.

Members recall that in some countries and regions minority or regional languages exist which are endangered or dying out but which in other, neighbouring, countries are official, majority, languages.

They call on the European Union and the Member States to be **more attentive to the extreme threat that many European languages, classified as endangered languages, are experiencing**, and to commit wholeheartedly to the protection and promotion of the unique diversity of the Union's linguistic and cultural heritage by deploying ambitious proactive revitalisation policies for the languages concerned and by dedicating a reasonable budget to this aim. They encourage Member States to **produce action plans to promote endangered languages** based on shared good practices which are already available within a number of language communities in Europe. The governments of the Member States are called upon to condemn practices which, by means of linguistic discrimination or enforced or concealed assimilation, have in the past been – or are now – directed against the identity and language use of endangered linguistic communities or their cultural institutions.

Ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages: Members call on all Member States who have not yet done so to ratify and implement this Charter as it acts as a benchmark for the protection of endangered languages.

The Union authorities are called upon to include effective respect for linguistic diversity, and **protection for the most vulnerable European languages** in particular, as a condition that must be met by all states wishing to be admitted as an EU Member State.

Members invite the Commission and the governments and regional authorities of the Member States to establish programmes to promote tolerance of endangered linguistic or ethnic communities, respect for their linguistic and cultural values and respect for those communities in society.

The Commission is also called upon to:

- propose concrete policy measures for the protection of endangered languages;
- adapt EU policies and schedule programmes so as to support the preservation of the endangered languages and linguistic diversity, using EU financial support tools for the period between 2014 and 2020;
- finance the protection of endangered languages so as to ensure that those seeking to use it will, within a set time-frame, be in a position to offer real help to those languages.

Acquisition of a language at an early age: Members consider that the EU should support and encourage Member States to have a language policy that enables children to acquire the endangered language, as a mother tongue, from the very earliest age. They support the reinforcement of teaching endangered languages with appropriate methodologies for students of all ages. They note the **Commission's multilingualism programmes**, recalling that endangered language communities fighting for the survival of endangered languages often consist of small groups of people.

They recall that EU funding for the promotion of linguistic diversity should not be redirected from its intended course nor be used to support actions that **utilise endangered languages as vehicles for pursuing wider political agendas**.

Transmission of languages: Members call on the Member States to pay increased attention to and support higher education studies and research with a special focus on endangered languages. They take the view that new technologies can provide a tool for fostering the knowledge, dissemination, teaching and preservation of endangered European languages.

They emphasise the importance of the **transmission of the endangered languages from generation to generation within families**. Media and new media can play an important role in the protection of endangered languages, particularly for future generations.

Cooperation with third parties: Members call on the Commission to provide constant support, via its various programmes, for transnational networks and European-level initiatives and activities that are designed to promote endangered languages. They emphasise that active participation is needed in order to ensure that UNESCO's Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger is rendered more complete and remains a permanent fixture. Moreover, the Commission is called upon to continue the research which began with the Euromosaic study, and to identify examples of proactivity at national level that have resulted in a significant reduction in the threat of a European language becoming extinct.

The report calls on the Commission to support research on the acquisition and revitalisation of endangered languages and on the cognitive and societal benefits of bilingual and multilingual European citizens.

Members state that the Union should support linguistic diversity in its relations with **third countries**, in particular those wishing to join the EU.

Promoting multilingualism: Members take the view that programmes related to the promotion of multilingualism are essential for EU neighbourhood/candidate and potential candidate countries' policy strategies. With this in mind, the Commission should pay attention to the fact that, **with their policies, some Member States and regions are endangering the survival of languages inside their borders**, even if those languages are not in danger in the European context.

Lastly, Members call on the Commission to issue a call to update the useful websites that provide information on EU programmes under which funding is available for projects that promote endangered languages with a view to including the new programmes for the period between 2014 and 2020, and to provide more information on this subject, especially for the attention of the language communities concerned.