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*Topic area B: "Encouraging Intercultural  
Dialogue through the preservation of  
Dialects and Endangered Languages".*



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## ***Topic area B: “Encouraging Intercultural Dialogue through the preservation of Dialects and Endangered Languages”.***

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## 1. Welcoming letter by the Board Members

Dear delegates,

It is an honor to officially welcome you to ThessISMUN 2018, which is going to be held in Thessaloniki from 11th to 15th of April, and more specifically to the UNESCO Executive Board. It is our utmost pleasure and privilege to serve as your Board and we are looking forward to our interaction, communication and cooperation, prior and during the debates of our Committee. Our task can be characterized as challenging, since we are going to elaborate on two important contemporary issues that have to be efficiently and comprehensively addressed.

Our first agenda item focuses on the “prevention of violent extremism through education”. Violent extremism is one of the most prevalent and contemporary issues that the international community faces nowadays. Education can play a vital role in tackling violent extremism worldwide. Thus, security measures along with deterring solutions could be efficient towards eradicating extremism; an educated individual is less likely to join an extremist group or commit acts of terrorism. That is the reason for which practical solutions with an educational direction need to be implemented by UNESCO.

Regarding topic area B, the issue of endangered languages in the context of promoting intercultural dialogue is of utmost importance in today’s society. Language as an integral part of culture needs to be preserved in order for the cultural singularity of its speakers’ to be a part of a continuously globalized international community. The issue of endangered languages and dialects is as contemporary as ever, given the fact that it is becoming increasingly difficult for minorities and indigenous peoples to ensure the linguistic continuation of their communities, as new generations cease to speak their mother tongues and instead choose to learn more widespread languages, contribute to the cultural expense of their own. However, one should bear in mind that extinct languages are a loss for the international community, since they carry along a unique cultural heritage, a distinctive viewpoint of the world and knowledge that cannot be retrieved after their extinction.

As a result, the upcoming sessions are going to give all of us a unique opportunity; the opportunity to combat crucial issues, always contemplating that diplomacy, cooperation, respect for everyone, accurate information and honest dialogue are the keys to success. A decent start, shall be the review of your study guides as a stepping stone for expanding your research, as we urge you to thoroughly research on the Topics, study your country’s policy, start brainstorming on possible solutions and proposals, as well as passionately raise your voice. Do not hesitate to contact us for your possible queries!

Best regards,

The UNESCO Executive Board Presidency.

## 2. Mandate of UNESCO

Nowadays, our world is facing and has to deal with different economic and humanitarian crises, the United Nations and more specifically, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), continue to set goals and achieve them by working hard towards the protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms. UNESCO's mission is to enable people to create and use knowledge for just and inclusive societies, and of course in order to build long-lasting peace worldwide.<sup>1</sup> As stated in Article 1 of its Constitution, the organization's main purpose is *"to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law, and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms, which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion, by the Charter of the United Nations"*.<sup>2</sup>

UNESCO pursues its objectives through five major programs: education, natural sciences, social and human sciences, culture and communication/information. Projects sponsored by UNESCO include literacy, technical, and teacher-training programs, international science programs, the promotion of independent media and the freedom of press, regional and cultural history projects, the promotion of cultural diversity, translations of world literature, international cooperation agreements to secure the world's cultural and natural heritage and to preserve human rights, and attempts to bridge the worldwide digital divide. It is also a member of the United Nations Development Group.<sup>3</sup>

Bearing all the above into consideration, UNESCO's aim is "to contribute to the building of peace, the eradication of poverty, sustainable development and intercultural dialogue through education, the sciences, culture, communication and information". Other priorities of the organization include attaining quality Education for All and lifelong learning, addressing emerging social and ethical challenges,

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<sup>1</sup>Unesco.org. (2018). *About us | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*. [online] [Accessed 4 Jan. 2018]. Available from: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/about-us/>

<sup>2</sup>UNESCO. (2018). *Learning to Live Together*. [online] [Accessed 4 Jan. 2018]. Available from: <https://en.unesco.org/themes/learning-live-together>

<sup>3</sup>"[UNDG Members](#)". United Nations Development Group. Archived from [the original](#) on 11 May 2011. Retrieved 8 August 2011.

fostering cultural diversity, a culture of peace and building inclusive knowledge societies through information and communication.<sup>4</sup>

To sum up, UNESCO is one of the organizations, in which current global issues are discussed and may be solved by efficient solutions proposed by skilled and educated people, in respect of all Treaties and the existing legal framework, especially the documents concerning the respect of human rights.

### 3. Introduction to the Topic

Language preservation is the effort to prevent languages from becoming unknown. There are different factors that can put a language in danger of becoming extinct. One is the fact that a language is no longer being taught to the children of a community, or at least to a large number of its children. In most of these cases, the remaining fluent speakers of the language are generally the older members of the community, and when they pass on, the language dies with them. Child speakers are not enough to ensure the survival of a language. If the children who do speak the language are relocated to another region where it is not spoken, it becomes endangered.

Political and military turmoil can also endanger a language. When people are forced from their homes into new lands, they may have to learn the language of the new area to adapt, and they end up losing their own. Likewise, when a country or territory is successfully invaded, the population may be forced to learn the invader's language.

A language can also become associated with a lower social class. In this instance, parents will encourage their children to speak the language used more often in order to distance themselves from the perceived lower class. Within one or two generations of this occurrence, the language can easily be lost.

Focusing on a language's significance, it reflects the culture and tradition of its people. Through language people build, understand and express their emotions, intentions and values, confirm social relations, and transmit cultural and social expressions and practices. Thus, language is a determining factor of cultural identity for diverse groups and individuals. It is an inherent part of who we are. Most importantly, it embodies their way of thinking, way of feeling as well as sense of value. In other words, a language has the power to determine one's way of thinking. Therefore, the loss of a language has significant meaning. When one is deprived of his/her own language, one has to give up his/her own way of thinking. If people were forced to use the same language, this would lead to uniformity in thinking. Multilingualism is one of the most essential elements for the further evolution of our

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<sup>4</sup>[UNESCO • General Conference; 34th; Medium-term Strategy, 2008–2013; 2007"](#) (PDF). Retrieved 8 August 2011.

society. Civilization can advance only in societies that different cultures coexist. The variety of cultures gives birth to new wisdom and serves as a foundation for innovative human thinking. Advanced information technology has accelerated globalization, and the world has become smaller. The increased opportunities for access to information via internet are widely welcomed, as it is expected to benefit developing and developed countries. However, globalization is posing a threat to multilingualism. As more and more people rely on major languages which are used on the online services, minority languages are on the verge of disappearing. Indeed, there is a study which warns that more than 50% of the 7,000 languages spoken in the world may vanish within decades.<sup>5</sup>

In recent years, globalization has progressed in all fields of politics, economy, and society. For example, in the economic sector, business activities that cross borders and freely access markets around the world are significantly affecting the global economy. Mutual exchange of culture and values beyond borders has heightened interest in countries with different languages, societies, cultures, and religions. It has opened the door to gaining knowledge and experiences. At the same time, it is necessary to possess advanced language capabilities and to be trained in communications technology, such as IT, in order to benefit from globalization. At this point, only a part of the worldwide population has these abilities. The truth is that around the world there are 770 million people aged above 15, who are illiterate.<sup>6</sup> The disparity between those who can adapt to globalization and those who cannot will likely widen even more.

While languages have always been susceptible to the political, socio-economic and cultural pressures of more influential language communities (as in the case of the marginalization or eclipse of vernacular languages in the context of European colonialism), today's pressures are impacting with increasing force on all communities as a consequence of globalization and the far-reaching communication developments accompanying it. In opening up previously self-enclosed societies and subjecting some minority languages to increasing competition, globalization and urbanization are major factors in contemporary patterns of linguistic erosion — the bulk of today's languages being far from equal in the face of these developments and the most vulnerable among them being threatened with rapid extinction.

Linguists believe that a large percentage of the world's languages are likely to disappear in the course of the 21st century. While the precise number of languages

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<sup>5</sup> Unesdoc.unesco.org. (2018). [Accessed 19 Jan. 2018] [online] Available at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001831/183170E.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Unesdoc.unesco.org. (2018). [Accessed 19 Jan. 2018][online] Available at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001831/183170E.pdf>

spoken in the world today is disputed, inventories such as the Ethnologue (which is the most authoritative resource on world languages, trusted by academics and Fortune 500 companies) and Linguasphere put the total at somewhere between 6,000 and 8,000. Half of the existing languages are spoken by fewer than 10,000 people, and one such language is said to be disappearing every two weeks.<sup>7</sup>

#### 4. Definition of key words regarding the Topic Area

**a) Language:** While there have been many definitions of language, one that indeed sums up its most distinctive elements is the following: “Language is a system of conventional spoken, manual, or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, express themselves. The functions of a language include communication, the expression of identity, play, imaginative expression, and emotional release”.<sup>8</sup>

**b) Endangered Language:** “A language is endangered when its speakers cease to use it in fewer and fewer domains, and use less its registers and speaking styles, or stop passing it on to the next generation. No single factor determines whether a language is endangered, but UNESCO experts have identified nine factors that should be considered together. These are: 1) intergenerational language transmission, 2) absolute number of speakers, 3) proportion of speakers within the total population, 4) shifts in domains of language use, 5) response to new domains and media, 6) availability of materials for language education and literacy, 7) governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies including official status and use, 8) community members’ attitudes towards their own language, and 9) amount and quality of documentation”.<sup>9</sup>In labeling a language as endangered, it is imperative that one takes into account the variations of this meaning. UNESCO has adopted the following categorization of the different degrees of endangerment: “vulnerable”, “definitely endangered”, “severely endangered”, “critically endangered”, and “extinct”.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Britannica Encyclopedia. *Language Definition, Characteristics and Change* [online] 2017. Available from: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/language>[Accessed 24 December 2017]

<sup>9</sup>UNESCO. *Frequently Asked Questions on Endangered Languages* [online] 2017 [Accessed 28 November 2017]. Available from: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/endangered-languages/faq-on-endangered-languages/>

<sup>10</sup>UNESCO. *Atlas of Languages in Danger* [online] 2017 [Accessed 30 November 2017] Available from: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/endangered-languages/atlas-of-languages-in-danger/>

**c) Dialect:** A form of a language, which people speak in a particular part of a country, and differentiates from the others because of containing some different words and grammar.<sup>11</sup>

**d) Culture:** While there is no consensus concerning the definition of culture and it has created controversy, one, commonly used way of describing it is the following: “Culture is that complex whole, which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by a human as a member of society” (Edward Tylor, 1871). The term sub-culture is used to refer to minority cultures within a larger dominant culture.<sup>12</sup>

**e) Intercultural Dialogue:** “Equitable exchange and dialogue among civilizations, cultures and peoples, based on mutual understanding and respect and the equal dignity of all cultures is the essential prerequisite for constructing social cohesion, reconciliation among peoples and peace among nations.”<sup>13</sup>

**f) Globalization:** While the international academic community has concluded in a variety of definitions and has usually debated on what globalization actually is, Anthony Giddens briefly described it as follows: “Globalization can be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations, which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa”.<sup>14</sup> When examining globalization, one must keep in mind that it is a multi-dimensional process characterized by:

- The acceptance of a set of economic rules for the entire world designed to maximize profits and productivity by universalizing markets and production, and to obtain the support of the state with a view to making the national economy more productive and competitive;
- technological innovation and organizational change centered on flexibilization and adaptability;
- the expansion of a specific form of social organization based on information as the main source of productivity and power;
- the reduction of the welfare state, privatization of social services, flexibilization of labor relations and weaker trade unions;

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<sup>11</sup> Cambridge Dictionary. *Dialect Meaning* [online]. 2017. [Accessed 30 November 2017] Available from: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/dialect>

<sup>12</sup> UNESCO. *Cultural Diversity*. [online]. 2017. [Accessed 25 December 2017]. Available from: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/international-migration/glossary/cultural-diversity/>

<sup>13</sup> UNESCO. *Intercultural Dialogue*. [online]. 2017. [Accessed 23 December 2017]. Available from: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/dialogue/intercultural-dialogue/>

<sup>14</sup> UNESCO. *Globalization*. [online]. 2017. [Accessed 15 December 2017]. Available from: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/international-migration/glossary/globalisation/>



- de facto transfer to trans-national organizations of the control of national economic policy instruments, such as monetary policy, interest rates and fiscal policy;
- the dissemination of common cultural values, but also the re-emergence of nationalism, cultural conflict and social movements. <sup>15</sup>

## 5. Historical background

It is widely accepted that languages are an extremely rich part of cultural heritage. Languages express identity and provide a link for speakers of a language with their past, present and future. Within languages, there is a great deal of knowledge about the world and the human experience. When languages become extinct, this knowledge is lost. As mentioned above, between six and eight thousand languages are spoken in the world today. 97% of the world's people speak about 4% of the world's languages and, conversely, about 96% of the world's languages are spoken by 3% of the world's people (Bernard 1996). Only 3% of the world's languages are indigenous to Europe. According to the Atlas of the World's Languages (UNESCO), there are 128 languages within the European Union that are considered to be endangered. All languages that are treated as a separate language, and not a dialect, have their own ISO- Code.<sup>16</sup> Languages can be placed in different categories depending on their size as well as the political and economic situation of a region. When talking about languages that have a weaker position than the major languages in Europe, they can be referred to as a) Constitutional, Regional and Smaller State languages (CRSS), b) Regional and Minority Languages (RML). Lesser Used languages, c) Autochthonous, Cross border and d) Non-territorial languages. Many of these categories overlap, while some of them are classified as endangered languages.

Regional and minority languages can be described as those, which are traditionally used by part of the population of a state, but are not official language dialects, migrant languages or artificially created languages. At this point, it needs to be clarified that minority languages can also be divided into four other categories, which are relevant to the discussion on weaker and endangered languages. Then autochthonous languages are languages that originated in a specified place and were not brought to that place from elsewhere. They are usually spoken within a part or parts of a state, but are not the majority language of that state or even the region one, for instance Welsh in Wales. Structural and Cohesion Policies Autochthonous languages, which are also cross border languages, are languages which are not the main state language, for example Basque in Spain but are also spoken across the border in another member

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.



state, where they are not the main state language there either e.g. Basque in France, and North Sami in Sweden and Finland. Cross border languages are languages spoken by a minority language group in one state, while the language exists also in another state. The Cross border language is often the majority language in the neighboring state.

The fourth category is the non-territorial languages such as Roma and Yiddish. Romani is incontestably the most widespread non-territorial language in the world.<sup>17</sup> It is sometimes treated as seven languages; Carpathian Romani, Kalo Finnish Romani, Baltic Romani, Balkan Romani, Sinte Romani, Welsh Romani and Vlach ('Vlax') Romani. Nevertheless, the Romani dialects preserve a remarkable degree of unity, which has led to the current treatment of Romani as a single language. Both Roma and Yiddish are included as endangered languages in the Atlas, and receive little support from European or member state sources (Suominen, 2009).

Africa comprises 54 countries, slightly over one billion people (2012 projections) and an estimated over 2,000 different spoken languages, making it the most linguistically diverse continent in the world. Other experts put the number at around 2,500 languages.

Linguists have noted that some languages are critically endangered and are disappearing, mainly through increasing assimilation by bigger language groups.

Language death, however, does not mean that the ethnic speakers of the language have disappeared. It simply means that its speakers have shifted to speaking another (usually more dominant) language.

In Africa, the rate of disappearing languages has accelerated because of official language policies that have been adopted by countries. Social factors play a pivotal role, since it may be considered prestigious to speak a global language, for example, English in East and southern Africa, and French in Francophone Africa. According to UNESCO estimates, there are 231 extinct languages in the world. Of these, 37 are from sub-Saharan Africa. For example, the Zeem language in Nigeria, Berakouin Chad, Kwadi in Angola and Kwadza in Tanzania are said to be among many that have become extinct in the last decade.<sup>18</sup> Last but not least, Nigeria and Cameroon have the highest number of critically endangered languages, according to Ethnologue, a comprehensive reference work cataloguing all of the world's known living languages.

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<sup>17</sup> Unesdoc.unesco.org. (2018). [Accessed 19 Jan. 2018] [online] Available at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001831/183170E.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Africa Review. (2017). *Africa's disappearing languages*. [Accessed 25 Dec. 2017]. [online] Available from: <http://www.africareview.com/special-reports/Africas-endangered-languages/979182-2008252-3d6e3wz/index.html>

In 1992, the International Congress of Linguists (CIPL)<sup>19</sup>, meeting in Canada, discussed the issue of endangered languages, and as a result formed the Endangered Languages Committee. It held an international meeting also in 1992, in Paris, in order to underline the significance of the topic and call for initiate action. The meeting was considered important enough to come under the authority of UNESCO. With the instigation of Stephen Wurm, a Hungarian linguist, the committee decided to create a research center, the International Clearing House for Endangered Languages (ICHEL) and to publish the UNESCO Red Book of Endangered Languages based on the data it collected. Shigeru Tsuchida was to start the research center. It began in 1994 at the University of Tokyo with TasakaTsunoda as its director.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, the initial reports on endangered languages had already been collected and submitted to UNESCO by regional experts in 1993. These were turned over to ICHEL, which created a website for the red book.<sup>21</sup> It continues to be updated regularly.<sup>22</sup>

Not only can ideas go extinct, but entire conceptualizations of reality are wiped off the map when languages go extinct. South Asia is an area with the greatest linguistic diversity in the Old World, with the possible exception of Papua New Guinea. Many languages in the area have gone extinct in documented history. For example, Pyu is an extinct Tibeto-Burman language of the Irrawaddy basin. The language had an epigraphic tradition, which endured well into the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Numerous languages have gone the way of Pyu. Rangkas was recorded in the Western Himalayas as recently as the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but is now extinct.<sup>23</sup>

The Red Book of Endangered Languages was published by UNESCO (1993) and it included a comprehensive list of the world's endangered languages. The main aim of the project was to systematically gather information on endangered languages, to strengthen research and the collection of materials. However, one crucial element that was missing from the Red Book was that it did not work with the endangered-language communities towards language maintenance, development and, revitalization.

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<sup>19</sup> Ciplnet.com. (2017). *CIPL - International Congress of Linguists*. [online] Available at: <http://www.ciplnet.com/international-congress-of-linguists/> [Accessed 27 Dec. 2017].

<sup>20</sup> Brenzinger, Matthias (2007). *Language diversity endangered*. Berlin, New York: [Mouton de Gruyter](#). pp. 206–207. [ISBN 3110170493](#), [ISBN 978-3-11-017049-8](#).

<sup>21</sup> ["Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger"](#). new edition of the Atlas of endangered languages. UNESCO. 2012. Retrieved 30 April 2012.

<sup>22</sup> ["UNESCO Interactive Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger"](#) (in English, French, and Spanish). UNESCO. 2011. Retrieved 26 June 2011.

<sup>23</sup> Himalayanlanguages.org. (2017). *Cite a Website - Cite This For Me*. [Accessed 25 Dec. 2017]. [online] Available from: <http://www.himalayanlanguages.org/files/driem/pdfs/2007EndangeredLggsSouthAsia.pdf>

In 2001, UNESCO adopted the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity that recognized a relationship between biodiversity, cultural diversity, and linguistic diversity. In 2002 - 2003, UNESCO asked an international group of linguists to develop a framework for determining the vitality of a language, in order to assist in policy development, identification of needs and appropriate safeguarding measures. The ad hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages published the paper “Language Vitality and Endangerment”.<sup>24</sup> In 2003, the first version of the World Atlas of Languages in Danger<sup>25</sup> was published. The third updated edition was published in 2009. The languages included in the Atlas all suffer some level of endangerment. UNESCO notes five levels of endangerment that may be distinguished with regard to intergenerational transmission, which is recognized as the cornerstone of a language’s vitality (UNESCO, 2003).

However, the survival of individual languages is primarily determined by factors which have nothing to do with their intrinsic worth as a system for the articulation of human thought, but by economic, ecological and demographic factors affecting the individual language communities. The success of one language in outcompeting another has little or, in some cases, nothing to do with its grammatical propensities or lexical richness and refinement. Instead, the extinction of a language is a function of the histories of peoples, regions and language communities. In addition to the socio-economic and demographic changes, which cause language communities to assimilate to larger, often more exploitative groups, there are also trends and fashions within the linguistic establishment that impede the documentation of endangered languages.

## 6. Legal Framework

In recent years, through several international normative texts and declarations, there have been taken actions and raised awareness of the importance of language issues at an international level. A number of important developments have allowed the issue some visibility in regional, national and international discussions.

### 6.1. The *Declaration of Vienna and Programme of Action*<sup>26</sup>

The **Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action**, also known as **VDPA**, is a human rights declaration adopted by consensus at the World Conference on Human Rights on 25 June 1993 in Vienna, Austria. The proposal of the United Nations High

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<sup>24</sup> Unesco.org. (2017). *Language vitality | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*. [online] [Accessed 25 Dec. 2017]. Available from: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/endangered-languages/language-vitality/>

<sup>25</sup> Unesco.org. (2017). *UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in danger*. [online] [Accessed 25 Dec. 2017]. Available at: <http://www.unesco.org/languages-atlas/>

<sup>26</sup> Ohchr.org. (2017). *OHCHR | Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action*. [online] [Accessed 13 Dec. 2017]. Available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/Vienna.aspx>

Commissioner for Human Rights was included in this Declaration and subsequently established by General Assembly Resolution 48/121.<sup>27</sup> In this Declaration, people belonging to minorities were guaranteed with the right to use their own language.

## 6.2. The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity<sup>28</sup>

The *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*, acknowledges the relation amongst biodiversity, cultural diversity and linguistic diversity; its action plan recommends that Member States, in cooperation with speaker communities, undertake steps to:

- a. sustain linguistic diversity and give support to expression, creation and dissemination in the greatest possible number of languages;
- b. encourage linguistic diversity at all levels of education, and foster the learning of several languages for young people;
- c. incorporate traditional pedagogies into the education process with a view to preserving and making full use of culturally appropriate methods of communication and transmission of knowledge;
- d. encourage universal access to information in the public domain through the global network, including the promotion of linguistic diversity in cyberspace.

## 6.3. The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage<sup>29</sup>

The 2003 *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* aims to safeguarding language as “a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage” i.e. it recognizes the crucial role of languages for the expression and the intergenerational transmission of elements of our living heritage. Some of the domains of this heritage, such as oral expressions and traditions, are totally dependent on language. Safeguarding measures for language related topics may be expected to be adopted under this Convention.

## 6.4. The Recommendation on the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Vienna World Conference (OHCHR's official site)

<sup>28</sup> Portal.unesco.org. (2017). *UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity: UNESCO*. [online] [Accessed 13 Dec. 2017]. Available from: [http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=13179&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13179&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

<sup>29</sup> Unesco.org. (2017). *Convention for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*. [online] [Accessed 21 Dec. 2017]. Available at: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/santiago/culture/intangible-heritage/convention-intangible-cultural-heritage/>

<sup>30</sup> Portal.unesco.org. (2017). *Recommendation concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace*. [online] [Accessed 21 Dec. 2017].

By adopting the *Recommendation on the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace*, UNESCO's General Conference in 2003 recognized the importance of promoting multilingualism and equitable access to information and knowledge, especially in the public domain, and reiterated its conviction that UNESCO should have a leading role in encouraging access to information for all, multilingualism and cultural diversity on the global information networks. In various documents and programmes, UNESCO has stressed the importance of multilingualism and the need to introduce and promote it through education.

### **6.5. The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages<sup>31</sup>**

The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML) is a European treaty adopted in 1992 under the auspices of the Council of Europe to protect and promote historical regional and minority languages on a European and national level. The Charter provides a large number of different actions that states can take, so as to protect and promote regional and minority languages. There are two levels of protection all signatories are required to apply; the lower level of protection to qualifying languages.

### **6.6. Framework Convention for the protection of national minorities<sup>32</sup>**

The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) is a multilateral treaty of the Council of Europe aiming towards protecting the rights of minorities. The Council of Europe first discussed upon specific protection for national minorities in 1949, but it was in 1990, when the Council of Europe made a firm commitment to protect these minority groups. Recommendation 1134 (1990) contained a list of principles that the Assembly of the Council of Europe considered necessary for this purpose. The Parliamentary Assembly called for the adoption of a protocol to the ECHR. The Framework was signed on February 1995 by 22 Member States of the Council of Europe and entered into force in 1998. By mid-2005, 43 Member States had signed and 39 ratified it.

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Available at: [http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=17717&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=17717&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

<sup>31</sup>Languages, E. and Europe, C. (2017). *The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages is the European convention for the protection and promotion of languages used by traditional minorities*. [online] [Accessed 21 Dec. 2017].

European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-charter-regional-or-minority-languages>

<sup>32</sup>FCNM, N. and Europe, C. (2017). *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*. [online] National Minorities (FCNM) [Accessed 21 Dec. 2017]. Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/minorities/home?>

## 7. Discussion of the Topic Area

### 7.1. Globalization and Endangered Languages

While globalization has enabled a wide range of activities among different peoples, it has also resulted in a paradox: through contributing in the facilitation of communications, it has rather hampered intercultural dialogue. The interaction between nations that now takes place due to globalization has, instead of promoting a better understanding among them, enabled the demonstration of power relations on a cultural level.

The economic and political dominance of certain countries worldwide is, most of the times reflected on their cultural influence and therefore, one can notice that along with economic development on an international scale comes an increasing demonstration of soft power. The concept of “soft power”<sup>33</sup> basically refers to the attractiveness and impact of one’s culture as a means of achieving political goals and while it does not necessarily apply restrictedly to great powers, it is most likely that an economically and politically dominant country will be able to develop this kind of cultural diplomacy and expand its influence with the use of culture. As previously mentioned<sup>34</sup>, culture is intertwined with language and therefore, globalization has indeed enabled a broader interaction amongst countries and consequently an international field in which economic, political and cultural (“soft”) power can be introduced. While this alone, is not necessarily negative, it could lead to increasing xenomania and cultural assimilation – not exclusively as a result of cultural and linguistic attractiveness of a dominant country, but rather due to economic and social factors, such as but not limited to high employment rates, better living standards and prospects of more powerful countries. The desire to “gain access” to such prospects requires adaptability to the cultural and linguistic environment of such a country. Thus, citizens of less powerful countries (and therefore speakers of less powerful languages) feel compelled to culturally conform to the prerequisites of such an access. As a result, globalization has, in a way, impacted what Romaine describes as the “attitudes of speakers towards their languages”<sup>35</sup>. She argues that one of the main reasons why language policies (that aim at the preservation of nearly extinct languages and dialects) fail is that, by the time they are implemented, their speakers have already shifted their attitude towards their own language, convinced that in order

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33 Joseph S. Nye, Jr. Foreign Policy No. 80, Twentieth Anniversary (Autumn, 1990), pp. 153-171

34see “Definitions”

35Suzanne Romaine (2002) The Impact of Language Policy on Endangered Languages. *International Journal on Multicultural Societies (IJMS)*, Vol. 4, No. 2 pp. 194-212  
*International Journal on Multicultural Societies (IJMS)*, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 194-212

to ensure their personal success and wellbeing, they ought to focus on more dominant languages rather than their mother tongue.

However, while it is useful to place an emphasis on globalization and its consequences on minority languages, it is essential that one keep in mind a number of other various social factors (such as but not limited to population growth and age, classes etc.) that play a role in the issue at hand. As renowned linguist Joshua A. Fishman stated: “While I am pleased to see both of the latter (referring to “globalization” and “killer languages”, meaning, the dominant languages) receive their deserved come-uppance in the papers under discussion, there is also the opposite danger of overly discrediting them instead of refining them so that (as it has already occurred with post-Second World War inquiry into “race”) no acceptable role remains for them.”<sup>36</sup>

It should be noted that while there is a direct linkage between language preservation and public policy making, a political decision (of local as well as of international scale) could be either intentional or unintentional.

Therefore, globalization itself is not directly endangering languages, but the opportunity it provides for a cultural expansion could lead to the extinction of less powerful languages and dialects.<sup>37</sup> As Romaine notes: “The fact that most languages are unwritten, not recognized officially, restricted to local community and home functions, and spoken by very small groups of people reflects the balance of power in the global linguistic market place.”<sup>38</sup>

Thus, it should be concluded that linguistic balance is, most of the times, a structural reflection of the political, economic and cultural dominance of more powerful countries, and languages respectively.



<sup>36</sup> Joshua A. Fishman (2002) Endangered Minority Languages: Prospects for Sociolinguistic Research. *International Journal on Multicultural Societies (IJMS)*, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 270-275

<sup>37</sup> UNESCO/UNU Conference. Is it Globalization that Endangers Languages? [online]. 2008. [Accessed 18 December 2017] Available from: [http://archive.unu.edu/globalization/2008/files/UNU-UNESCO\\_Ostler.pdf](http://archive.unu.edu/globalization/2008/files/UNU-UNESCO_Ostler.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> Suzanne Romaine (2002) The Impact of Language Policy on Endangered Languages. *International Journal on Multicultural Societies (IJMS)*, Vol. 4, No. 2 pp. 194-21



## 7.2. Language and Identity

George Steiner once said: “When a language dies, a way of understanding the world dies with it, a way of looking at the world”. As previously explained, a language, as a socially transmitted process is directly linked to culture and thus constitutes much more than simply the means of communication used by a group of people – it is a direct projection of their identity. Each language provides with an insight of a peoples’ mindset, elements of their sets of values, principles, traditions, norms and everyday life as experienced in the country where the particular language is spoken. Taking the aforementioned into account, it is not peculiar that there are indeed many untranslated words, collocations that make no sense when translated in other languages and words of the same root with completely different meaning in other languages or dialects. This linguistic variety and uniqueness precisely reflects the cultural distinctiveness of people.

In attempting to understand language as the display of the identity of the group of people that speaks it, it is important to consider the linkage between language and thought. As demonstrated in the Language of Thought Hypothesis (LOTH)<sup>39</sup>, ideas and thoughts formulated in a mental language are given shape and structure within their interpretation into the languages that we use as a common point of reference in order to communicate our ideas to other people. The linkage to thought, by definition, attributes a subjective aspect to the concept of language, which is evidently the mirroring of one’s personal viewpoint and identity. Therefore, it is only profound that a language depicts all the aforementioned distinctive cultural characteristics as well as contemporary norms within a society. In other words, it is of no wonder that even when examining the same language spoken in different parts of the world (e.g. English), there are fundamental differences in certain words, syntaxes, grammatical structures, collocations and accents.<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, words and references within a language or dialect indicate the collective historical memory of an ethnic group. Apparently, the different characterizations of historical events and the linguistic transformations within the course of years are a result of a unique viewpoint and interpretation of history.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, language is the product of influences and experiences of this group, such as the linguistic impacts of a

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39 Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. *The Language of Thought Hypothesis*. [online]. 2010. [Accessed 17 December 2017]. Available from: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/language-thought/>

40 UNESCO World Report. *Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue*. [online]. 2009 [Accessed 25 December 2017]. Available from: [http://www.un.org/en/events/culturaldiversityday/pdf/Investing\\_in\\_cultural\\_diversity.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/events/culturaldiversityday/pdf/Investing_in_cultural_diversity.pdf)

41 For example, the 1948 Palestine War between the Israelis and the Arabs is referred to as “War of Independence” from the former whereas as the “Nakba” (=disaster) from the latter.

conqueror and the extent to which an ethnic group has integrated those impacts while preserving its singularity.

Since language is the mirroring of a group's culture and identity, it is essential that different languages – less powerful or minority ones – are preserved in order for the distinctive characteristics of this group to be “represented” – and not silenced – in the “intercultural dialogue”.

### 7.3. *Intercultural Dialogue*

As pointed out in the UNESCO World Report “*Investing on Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue*”<sup>42</sup>, languages and cultures are not stagnant but rather the product of a constant “communication” and interaction, an exchange of ideas in a context of an extremely diverse international scenery. It is not possible to completely isolate a culture (and therefore a language) and taking that into account, perhaps it would be wiser not to think of culture in absolute terms and as a distinctive feature of a specific nation's or group's but as the result of interaction amongst communities.

However, at this point, there needs to be a clarification: when one speaks of dialogue (either interpersonal or intercultural), it is not in any way implied that one's identity is lost and assimilated or replaced by another. It merely refers to the opportunity to explore a different mindset, understand it and benefit from it according to one's judgment.<sup>43</sup> Intercultural dialogue is thus, based on the idea that human rights (which, by definition, are equal to all) will be preserved through the mutual understanding and the subsequent elimination of intolerance.

Today, more than ever, intercultural dialogue is considered imperative in face of the increasingly large number of acts of violent extremism around the world (in those specific cases we can refer to “interreligious dialogue”).<sup>44</sup> The subsequent better understanding among nations, along with other factors that would eliminate it (e.g. measures in education) constitutes the long-term policy that could be most efficient in combating it. Furthermore, the economic crisis and wars worldwide have intensified

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<sup>42</sup>UNESCO World Report. *Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue*. [online]. 2009 [Accessed 25 December 2017]. Available from: [http://www.un.org/en/events/culturaldiversityday/pdf/Investing\\_in\\_cultural\\_diversity.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/events/culturaldiversityday/pdf/Investing_in_cultural_diversity.pdf)

<sup>43</sup>Raimon Panikkar (1979) has once eloquently said: “*Dialogue is fundamentally opening myself to another so that he might speak and reveal my myth that I cannot know myself because it is transparent to me, self-evident. Dialogue is a way of knowing myself and of disentangling my own point of view from other viewpoints and from me, because it is grounded so deeply in my own roots as to be utterly hidden from me*”. UNESCO World Report. *Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue*. [online]. 2009 [Accessed 25 December 2017]. Available from: [http://www.un.org/en/events/culturaldiversityday/pdf/Investing\\_in\\_cultural\\_diversity.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/events/culturaldiversityday/pdf/Investing_in_cultural_diversity.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> UNESCO. Intercultural Dialogue. [online]. 2017. [Accessed 17 December 2017] Available from: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/dialogue/intercultural-dialogue/>

migration and refugee waves and therefore intercultural dialogue is deemed necessary in order for the receiving countries and societies to be able to integrate migrants and refugees – while avoiding both their marginalization and social exclusion as well as racism towards them.

#### ***7.4. Endangered Languages and the Internet***

With the use of the internet on all aspects of everyday life, it could be mentioned that the internet is another dimension to which the broad country relations (economic, political and cultural) that are enabled within globalization can be revealed. Consequently, it does not seem strange that there are indeed dominant as well as excluded languages in cyberspace.

There are various factors that contribute to this inequality, accurately depicted by Daniel Pimienta<sup>45</sup>. He created a structural model to explain the reasons that lead to disproportional representation of languages on the internet and referred to the potential access (*“the possibility for a person or group of people to have the physical means of using ICT”*, meaning Information Communication Technology) to technological infrastructure that is not feasible for many communities, the cost of access in case they are in fact available in a (mainly minority) community, the “functional literacy” of people in order to use the internet as a portal of expression and finally the computerizing of the alphabet, which is an essential issue when it comes to minorities and indigenous peoples’ languages and dialects.

While it does not occur to most of the people that the internet could in some way be a projection of power, as Charlie Ess noted in the 2004 Conference organized by the ICIE (International Centre for Information Ethics), the Internet, having been developed in western countries, it has largely promoted a particular lifestyle and culture, in which it is connected as a concept. He also refers to “computer-assisted colonization”, the intentional or unintentional cultural imperialism as a result of extensive internet use without the inclusion of multiple cultures. In attempting to “connect the world”, there could instead, severely resulted in the endangerment of the preservation of minority cultures and languages that are ignored and excluded.<sup>46</sup>

#### ***7.5. Endangered Languages and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development***

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<sup>45</sup> Daniel Pimienta 2005, Linguistic Diversity in Cyberspace; Models for Development and Measurement. *Measuring Linguistic Diversity on the Internet*, UNESCO Publications for the World Summit on the Information Society, pp 13-34

<sup>46</sup> Daniel Pimienta 2005, Linguistic Diversity in Cyberspace; Models for Development and Measurement. *Measuring Linguistic Diversity on the Internet*, UNESCO Publications for the World Summit on the Information Society, pp 13-34



The preservation of endangered languages through the implementation of public policies and international action with that aim is, by definition, compatible with the concept of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Building upon the Millennium Development Goals, the (often referred to as) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are an important initiative towards achieving prosperity and ensuring the dignity of all, under the scope of the general goal of rendering a sustainable future for the next generations.<sup>47</sup>

More specifically, Goal 10: *Reduced inequalities* refer mainly to income inequalities and the need for economic and social inclusiveness.<sup>48</sup> The marginalization and employment exclusion of people, who speak less powerful languages is one of the factors leading those groups to change their attitude towards their own language, rendering later implemented policies completely unnecessary since by that time, the speakers themselves have no concern about preserving their own language.

Goal 11: *Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable* is precisely the prerequisite that needs to be met in order for the minority languages and dialects to – not only be preserved but also – flourish along with the dominant languages.



Finally, Goal 17: Partnership for all Goals refers to the effective collaboration of governments, the private sector and civil society.<sup>49</sup> Governments of countries with decreased soft power and less powerful languages, the private sector and the linguistic prerequisites for employment as well as parts of civil society that focus on endangered languages make clear that groups of people whose language is endangered – not

<sup>47</sup> Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. [online]. 2017. [Accessed 23 December 2017]. Available from: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

<sup>48</sup> United Nations. *Sustainable Development Goals, Goal 10: Reduce Inequality within and among countries*. [online]. 2017. [Accessed 22 December 2017]. Available from: <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/inequality/>

<sup>49</sup> United Nations. *Sustainable Development Goals, Goal 17: Revitalize Global Partnership for Sustainable Development*. [online]. 2017. [Accessed 21 December 2017] Available from: <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/globalpartnerships/>

only could – but ought to take part in the sustainability process.

## 8. Actions that have already been taken

In an attempt to preserve endangered languages, UNESCO has taken important steps both for the immediate protection of languages and the awareness of people in the long-term. Some of them are:

### a) *UNESCO Interactive Atlas*

The UNESCO Interactive Atlas, in the context of a joint partnership between UNESCO and TALKMATE<sup>50</sup>, aims to the preservation of endangered languages by keeping record of the languages that face endangerment as well as their level of endangerment (as explained earlier). It is a systematic approach that in addition to providing with a clear picture of the problem, it also raises public's awareness and visualizes the extent of the linguistic loss.

### b) *Recent UNESCO Initiatives*

#### I. Broadband Commission:

The establishment of the Broadband Commission for Digital Development in 2010 came five years after the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), and ten years after the launch of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Broadband Commission for Digital Development supports that high-speed, high-capacity broadband connections to the Internet are an essential element in modern society, with wide economic and social benefits. Its mission is to promote the adoption of broadband-friendly practices and policies so that the entire world can take advantage of the benefits that broadband can offer.<sup>51</sup> This initiative aims at the expansion of the internet to all peoples including speakers of minority languages.

#### II. World Summit on Information Society

Cultural and linguistic diversity (WSIS Action Line C8), while stimulating respect for cultural identity, traditions and religions, is essential to the development of an

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<sup>50</sup>UNESCO. *Launch Partnership with Beijing 200H Education Technology Co. Ltd. (TALKMATE)*. [online]. 2016. [Accessed 12 December 2017]. Available from: <https://en.unesco.org/events/launch-partnership-beijing-200h-education-technology-co-ltd-talkmate>

<sup>51</sup>UNESCO. *Communication and Information*. [online] 2017. [Accessed 19 December 2017]. Available from: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/access-to-knowledge/linguistic-diversity-and-multilingualism-on-internet/special-initiatives-and-events/>

Information Society based on the dialogue among cultures and regional and international cooperation. It is an important factor for sustainable development.<sup>52</sup>

Action Line C8, Cultural Diversity and Identity, initiated by UNESCO, brought some important aspects of this topic to the attention of influential stakeholders in the field of Information with the aim of ensuring the linguistic and cultural preservation of marginalized communities in a world that is becoming increasingly intertwined through the internet. Consequently, the implementation of national policies that are in harmony with this concept were highly encouraged. A very important step was the suggestion to enhance local media and the creation and distribution of software supporting local languages in order for the Information Society to include minorities.<sup>53</sup>

### III. Internet Governance Forum

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) resulted in the creation of the multistakeholder Internet Governance Forum – an annual forum in which international agencies, governments, Internet professionals, business and civil society organizations can explore, on equal footing, the development on the Internet and its interaction with other area of public policy.<sup>54</sup>

## 9. Points to be addressed

- How can globalization become an opportunity to preserve languages and promote intercultural dialogue?
- Which measures should be adopted and implemented by governments in order to preserve linguistic diversity?
- Are there any cases in which globalization has contributed to the preservation of endangered languages?
- Why is it necessary to preserve minority languages?
- In what ways can governments could promote intercultural dialogue?
- How can SDGs' implementation be combined with the preservation of endangered languages?
- Which are the main reasons why past language policies and initiatives had failed?

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<sup>52</sup>UNESCO. *Communication and Information*. [online] 2017. [Accessed 19 December 2017]. Available from: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/access-to-knowledge/linguistic-diversity-and-multilingualism-on-internet/special-initiatives-and-events/>

<sup>53</sup>World Summit on the Information Society. *Plan of Action* [online] 2003. [Accessed 17 January 2018]. Available from: <http://www.itu.int/net/wsis/docs/geneva/official/poa.html#c8>

<sup>54</sup>UNESCO. *Communication and Information*. [online] 2017. [Accessed 19 December 2017]. Available from: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/access-to-knowledge/linguistic-diversity-and-multilingualism-on-internet/special-initiatives-and-events/>

- In what ways can the Internet be used in order to promote intercultural dialogue and the preservation of languages?
- Which are the reasons why this matter has not been decisively addressed and resolved so far?
- How could minority language speakers be empowered in order to keep a positive attitude towards their language?

## 10. Conclusion

Through its programmes on the protection of endangered languages, UNESCO wishes to contribute to the safeguarding and transmission of cultural diversity, linguistic diversity and the diversity of our living or intangible heritage.

Languages have always been developing and splitting. However, the scale in which languages are disappearing nowadays appears to be unprecedented. For languages to survive in modernity, is not an easy challenge: the language has to be used in a large number of relevant domains, for instance in education, the media and public space; it also has to be highly thought of by its speakers. For this to be possible, extensive language documentation, selection or creation of a standard form of the language, standardized writing system, development of teaching materials and collection and publication of literary and other texts seem as necessary measures.

If we want to make a difference and if we want to be able to measure the impact of the implementation of language policies and planning activities, we need figures, not just about numbers of languages and speakers, but also about the status, corpus and acquisition of languages. UNESCO's Intangible Heritage Section will be happy to continue the development of detailed indicators that will allow us to measure and monitor the developments of languages, and especially endangered languages.

Over the past decades much has been learnt by many minority language communities on how to promote and regenerate their languages. This knowledge needs to be able to be used, in order to preserve languages considered as being endangered. In other words, there needs to be a highly structured way of sharing good practice, which is based on good networking between all minority language communities.

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