

THE STATUS OF LANGUAGES

Does official recognition matter?

Barcelona, November 24 and 25, 2016

The regulation of languages in constitutional and legal norms, and the implementation by public authorities and social actors of policies aimed at safeguarding and promoting the use of languages in different areas is now a world-wide phenomenon.

Most countries include language clauses in their constitutions. The concept of official language is the most widely used in legal and constitutional texts when regulating the status of languages, but this notion does not mean exactly the same in the various legal and political contexts. Some countries choose other formulae to lay down the legal status of the languages present in their territory.

The action of public authorities and social actors in the field of languages, from a given legal framework, can be articulated around principles, tools or forms of intervention of variable content and intensity according to each context, though they usually share the aim of safeguarding and protecting their own local languages.

In accordance with Linguapax's mission of preserving linguistic diversity as a value to be promoted through different means, we intend to open the debate on the contribution of the legal framework and resulting language policies to the protection of local languages, in the light of the analysis of plural yet comparable experiences.

Updating this debate is necessary due to developments in the regulation of linguistic realities across the world, in the new forms adopted in language policies, as well as in their theoretical study. And it is oriented to examining the foundations of public decisions concerning the status of

languages and to exploring the legal and political elements that influence their materialisation or implementation, always with a view to identifying practical solutions applicable to the protection of linguistic diversity.

For this reason, we shall analyse the experiences of countries that exemplify this diversity across the world and that, from different perspectives, can provide elements of interest in the debate focused on issues such as:

- How can consensus in determining the status of languages be forged?
- What is the meaning and content of the official or other legal status of languages provided for in constitutions or legislation?
- What is the real or practical impact of the official legal framework, or of the recognition of other forms of status, on languages in shaping linguistic reality?
- What kind of interaction or forms of collaboration between public authorities and social actors can contribute to the objectives of language preservation?
- On the basis of what principles, including those not provided by law, and through what forms of intervention, are the linguistic policies of public authorities expressed?
- What distance is there, if any, between the legal framework of language protection and the practices of political and social actors involved in the protection of languages, and what reasons may help to explain the distance?

In order to obtain rich and accurate information and to be able to discuss the implications of the different political and legal models and options, we shall bring together legal experts, sociolinguists and activists from or familiar with the following countries: Finland, India, Malta, Paraguay, Slovenia, South Africa and Switzerland.

Provisional Programme

Thursday, November 24

9.00-9.30 · Registration

9.30-10.00 · Opening Session

10.00 -11.00 · **South Africa**. Speaker: Matthias Brenzinger, director of CALDI – Centre for African Language Diversity, Curator of TALA – The African Language Archive (University of Cape Town). Discussant: Francesc Xavier Vila, director of CUSC, UB.

11.00-11.30 · Break

11.30 - 12.30 · **Malta**. Speakers: Manwel Mifsud and Olvin Vella, University of Malta. Moderator: Miquel Strubell, sociolinguist.

12.30 - 13.30 · **India**. Ganesh Devy, Founder and director of the Bhasha Research and Publication Centre, in Vadodara, and Adivasi Academy, in Tejgadh, Gujarat. Discussant: Elvira Riera.

13.30-15.00 · Break

15.00 - 16.00 · **Finland**. Speaker: Markku Suksi, prof. Public Law, Åbo Akademi University. Discussant: Eva Pons, prof. Constitutional Law, University of Barcelona.

16.00- 17.00 · **Round table discussion** "English, official language everywhere?", with the conference speakers. Moderator: Emili Boix.

Friday, November 25

9.30-10.30 · **Slovenia** · Speaker: Sonja Novak, director of the Institute for Ethnic Studies, Ljubljana. Discussant: Pere Comellas, GELA, University of Barcelona.

10.30-11.30 · **Paraguay** · Speaker: Miguel Ángel Verón Gómez, director of the Yvy Marãe'ỹ association and former director of Language Planning of Paraguay. Discussant: Antoni Milian, prof. Administrative Law, Autonomous University of Barcelona.

11.30-12.00 · Break

12.00-13.00 · **Switzerland** · Speaker: Nicolas Schmitt, Institute of Federalism, University of Fribourg. Discussant: Emili Boix, prof. Catalan Language and Literature, University of Barcelona.

13.00-13.30 · **Conclusions**, by Joan Ramon Solé, Language Policy Department, Catalan Governement.

13.30-16.00 · Break

16.00 - 17.30 · **Round table discussion** "Linguistic diversity, new cultural expressions and emerging rights". (Open event)

Façade of the South African Constitutional Court

Registration: Online registration process open until November 20 through our website: <http://www.linguapax.org/english/what-we-do/conference-the-status-of-languages/> Fee: 30 € - Students fee: 10 € / A certificate of attendance will be delivered

Place: Conference room of the EAPC (Public Administration School of Catalonia), c/ Girona, 20 - 08010 - Barcelona

Languages: Interpretation will be provided in English/Catalan

Contact: info@linguapax.org

Organiser:

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