



**CONGRÉS MUNDIAL SOBRE POLÍTICAS LINGÜÍSTICAS**  
**CONGRÈS MONDIAL SUR LES POLITIQUES LINGUISTIQUES**  
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**WORLD CONGRESS ON LANGUAGE POLICIES** Barcelona, 16-20 d'abril de 2002



## ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND NGOs TO PROMOTE MINORITY LANGUAGES

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### Abstract

1. People often do not give languages any cultural value; for centuries they considered the language only the mean of communication with other people. As the authorities dictated the official language, people accepted it as "higher" level language. Normally only "elite" spoke the official language, while other languages were wide used among population. The example of Latin in Europe.

2. In 18th and 19th Century in Europe the literacy grew up and the language became important means of communication and social relation. States understood it first and forced people to speak "official" languages, or better the languages used by the authorities. The birth of the so-called "nation states" strengthened such policy. Those speaking other languages were considered lower class people, because there were unable to communicate with authorities.

3. The term "minority languages" appeared in the 20th Century, after WWI, but it developed only after WWII. The term entered in official policies of international institutions only after the fall of the wall of Berlin (1989).

4. Civil society realised the importance of minority languages 40 years earlier. Immediately after WWII several NGOs were established with the purpose to protect and promote minority languages. They have been mostly oriented in achieving collective rights rather than individual rights. With few exceptions they had no request about changes of State borders.

5. For decades civil society had been fighting mostly for a legal status of the languages, being aware that language should be recognised by authorities to involve people to use it. Bilingual signs, use of language in administrative life, education and media have been the main fields of interest. These fields could give language the prestige needed to convince speakers to use it.

6. We can affirm that the role of NGOs and the civil society in general has been essential for the preservation of minority languages so far. States have understood very late that languages are common cultural heritage. Neither NGOs have considered them from this point of view, having fought mostly for the legal status, but they had prominent role in preserving the languages up to now.

7. Nowadays the work of the civil society is not enough any more. Radio, television and electronic media are dominating the society and unless the authorities strongly intervene to protect the languages, they will disappear.



8. The basic word now is multilingualism. It seems clear that the modern society could not develop if people will not communicate. So they should be trained to speak more than one language, but among the languages should be their own language. In this new conception minority languages get new role.

9. In last ten years many European States accepted the principle, that minority languages are part of the common States' heritage and not any more item of interest of speakers only. Europeans have accepted the globalisation and specifically the European integration process in economy, in sciences and generally in life under conditions, that peculiarities, specifically cultural and linguistic diversity, should be preserved.

10. At the same time the role of the civil society, including NGOs, changed. They are not considered any more enemies or counterparts of the States, but they cooperate with the authorities in developing the promotion and protection of minority languages. Such a policy unfortunately has not been accepted generally, but there are more and more States following such direction. It could be the way to prevent minority languages from dying.