



ELEN

EUROPEAN LANGUAGE EQUALITY NETWORK

**ELEN Recommendations for EU
Measures for European Endangered
and Minoritised Languages**

ELEN Recommendations for New EU Measures for European Endangered and Minoritised Languages.

Regarding the upcoming UN Special Rapporteur for Minorities “country” visit to the EU in January 2026, listed below are ELEN’s recommendations for urgent new EU Measures for endangered and minoritized European languages.

The ELEN proposals were drafted after an extensive consultation with the ELEN membership and the UN Special Rapporteur on measures that need to be taken by the EU in order to address the language endangerment crisis and the need for financial support for projects and NGOs that are working to address what is a worsening situation.

The recommendations make two priority calls. Firstly, for a **Strategic Framework for European Minoritised and Endangered Languages** and, secondly, for an **Emergency Committee for European endangered languages with its own budget line to finance endangered and minoritized language projects.**

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

1) European Strategic Framework for European Minoritised and Endangered Languages

- Establish a **Strategic Framework for European Minoritised and Endangered Languages** similar to the Roma Strategic Framework.¹
- In 2011 the European Commission adopted in 2011 an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies focussing on four key areas: education, employment, healthcare and housing.
- The Framework invited all Member States to present the European Commission with their strategy for Roma inclusion or for specific policy measures for the Roma within their wider social inclusion policies. The main responsibility as well as the competences to improve the situation of all marginalised people, including the Roma, rest with the Member-States.
- Given the precedent set by the Framework Strategy for the Roma ELEN recommends that a strategy is set up for European minoritised and endangered languages.

The call to prioritise a **new Strategic Framework for minoritized and endangered languages** works at many levels:

- 1) The strategic framework structure is already a structure that is utilised by the EU, for example, the strategic framework for the Roma.
- 2) A strategic framework is well suited to long-term projects, therefore well suited to long term language recovery and the planning needed for that, and would give us the time to build up support and political will for all the other measures that we require.
- 3) Roma NGOs have informed us that the structure is helpful and does work.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma/eu-framework/index_en.htm

The strategy would prioritise urgent cases, e.g. endangered languages, and then work to establish long-term EU support for endangered and minoritized languages including tabling legislation for further measures.

2) Emergency Committee for European endangered and minoritised languages.

We need to avoid the one-size-fits-all approach that a lot of current minoritised language measures are aimed at. Clearly, Catalan is not in the same situation as Breton, Basque is not in the same situation as Sardinian, yet at the international and European level they are lumped under one bracket. Furthermore, while Catalan is not endangered in Catalonia, it is endangered in northern Catalonia. We need policies and measures that reflect these different sociolinguistic realities.

- a) The EU-backed Committee led by ELEN would work to establish a detailed analysis of each endangered European language; it would ascertain the level of endangerment, what has and is causing endangerment, the social density of its speaker base, its current legal protection (if any), and make recommendations for each language that will prevent further decline and lead to language recovery.
- b) In order to take immediate action to begin the work that will help address language decline, the Committee will have a budget line where ELEN, in partnership with the EU, would be able to finance endangered and minoritised language projects directly, which EBLUL, ELEN's predecessor organization, used to be able to do. This was foreseen in the 2003 EP Report "Regional and less-used languages in Europe in the context of the enlargement and cultural diversity" (Legislative Report - INI 2003/2057)² but was never implemented. Another similar comparison is the MARIO project in eastern Europe where a partnership of NGOs (MRG and Pilnet) have a budget under the CERV programme to finance numerous micro-projects for minorities.
- c) Many minoritized and endangered language organisations simply do not have the financial and operational capacity to participate on EU funded projects. It's time for the EU to realise this and look at how it can directly fund European endangered language projects. This used to be possible under Budget Line B3-1006 which funded the operating costs of the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages (EBLUL) up until it was cut by the EU in 2008, against the advice of its own evaluators.

Recommendations for the mid- and long term.

3) EU Regulation on endangered languages

If the EU can protect endangered birds, fish and plants, why can't it protect Europe's minoritised and endangered languages?

² https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:313a238b-cdd4-49e0-900c-e32a9569af6c.0004.02/DOC_99&format=PDF

ELEN proposes that the EU develop an EU Regulation that works to promote and protect Europe's endangered languages. While we have 'respect for linguistic diversity' at the heart of the European project, one cannot *respect* something and idly stand by and watch it disappear.

4) EU Regulation on minoritised European language rights

ELEN wishes to discuss and develop an EU Regulation on the meaningful respect for linguistic diversity and the prohibition, preferably the abolition, of discrimination on the grounds of language.

The Regulation could be restricted in scope and only applied to European minoritised and endangered languages.

Its primary function would be to substantively promote and protect these languages and to ensure RML speaker rights.

5) EU Language Commissioner or Ombudsperson

Several countries, e.g. Canada, Ireland and Wales, have language commissioners who work to ensure the protection of language rights.

In order to effectively manage its linguistic diversity and uphold RML speaker rights ELEN proposes that the post of EU language commissioner or ombudsperson is created.

Alternatively, that the existing EU Ombudsperson (according to 228 TFEU) explicitly includes the protection of linguistic minority rights within its remit.

6) ELEN/EU Languages Observatory.

For example, the Catalan, Basque³, and Galician language observatories.

Support ELEN in setting up a Europe-wide language observatory that monitors and collects data on all RMLs in Europe, including on their sociolinguistic situation, numbers of speakers, as well as incidences of discrimination.

The languages observatory would comprise part of the Language Commissioner's Office.

7) Language discrimination as a form of racism, recognition of minoritised language rights as a fundamental right.

The Council of Europe European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) Recommendation 7 stipulates that language discrimination is a form of both direct and indirect racism.⁴

ELEN recommends that the EU ensures that the scope of discrimination covered by the EU under Article 10 of the TFEU, currently including discrimination on the grounds of race, includes language discrimination.

EU to ensure that the Fundamental Rights Agency adopts this approach and mainstreams it into its work.

8) EU Infringement proceedings for contravening the Charter of Fundamental Rights (CFRts)

³ For example, the Basque language rights observatory Behatokia, <http://behatokia.eus/>

⁴ http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/activities/GPR/EN/Recommendation_N7/default_en.asp

Ensure that the EU is both empowered and motivated to take infringement proceedings⁵ against states in cases of language discrimination, using Art 21. Charter Fundamental Rights, the Race Equality Directive, and precedents set by Rule of Law. ⁶

For example, the EU opened infringement proceedings vs. Slovakia regarding Roma education (2015),⁷ and the Czech Republic in 2014.⁸

The EU invoked Art. 21 of CFRts and Race Equality Directive (2000/43/EC (RED)) Articles 2.2a, 2.2b, 2.3, 3.1.g)

ELEN proposes that the EU use the infringement mechanism to protect RML speaker rights.

Infringement proceedings were established by Article 258 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. It provides the Commission with an effective legislative tool to ensure compliance with EU law. If the Commission believes a Member State to be in breach of EU law and considers the measures taken by the Member States to address the Commission's concerns as insufficient, the Commission may bring the matter to the Court of Justice for the European Union. If the Court finds a Member State has failed to fulfil an obligation under the Treaties, it will require the state to take the necessary measures to comply.

ELEN proposes that persistent violations of the ECRML and/or FCNM acts to trigger EU infringement proceedings against a Member State.

ELEN also proposes that the EU uses the new Rule of Law mechanism to block EU funding to States that act discriminate and/or act against their RMLs, and contravene the ECRML and FCNM.

9) Language discrimination to be included as one of the grounds of discrimination in Article 19 of the TFEU.

Apart from unjustifiably excluding European citizens from language rights, not including language in Article 10 makes the TFEU inconsistent with the Charter of Fundamental Rights which does include languages as a ground for discrimination.

10) Full implementation of the European Parliament Ebner Report (INI 2003/2057), EU support for ELEN.

ELEN is the only civil society network in Europe representing millions of speakers of RMLs, many of which are endangered and many of which are discriminated against on a daily basis. It replaced EBLUL in 2011.

Former EU Commissioner Juncker, on becoming Commission President, stated to the Parliament that outstanding EP legislative INI Reports would be implemented by COMM.

The 2003 Ebner Report ⁹ (2003/2057 INI), a legislative own initiative report, stipulated that EBLUL should continue to receive funding (B.12) yet, despite recommendations to continue

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/atwork/applying-eu-law/infringements-proceedings/index_en.htm

⁷ <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/press-releases/european-commission-targets-slovakia-over-roma-school-discrimination>

⁸ <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/press-releases/brussels-takes-action-against-czech-republic-over-roma-school-discrimination>

⁹ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+REPORT+A5-2003-0271+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=ro>

funding from the Commission's own assessors Ernst and Young, funding was cut in 2009 and EBLUL closed.

In 2011 EBLUL members formed ELEN to replace EBLUL. We are the only civil society non State backed or owned network that works to protect and promote European lesser-used languages comprising 182 member organisations representing 50 languages in 25 European states.

ELEN members are calling on the EU to ensure that the Ebner Report is fully implemented by ensuring core funding for ELEN's everyday operational costs. This will ensure that it can participate fully with the EU, UN, and Council of Europe, and to conduct effective language revitalisation projects for endangered European languages.

11) A European Commissioner responsible for European linguistic minorities.

ELEN recommends that the Commission have a Commissioner that is preferably dedicated to working on linguistic minorities, or has it as part of his/her remit. Considering that nearly 50 million people speak a RML, 10% of the EU population, it is vital that the EU acts to focus and maintain this focus on this important policy area.

12) A consultative body of the European Parliament on minoritised and endangered language issues.

ELEN has called for a dedicated body in the European Parliament to work exclusively on linguistic minority issues, issues that affect at least 10% of the EU population.

One example of a body that could be followed is that of the DROI sub-committee attached to the LIBE Committee. Currently linguistic minority issues are often confined to the Culture Committee and an Intergroup, even though many challenges facing concern broader civil rights issues and should be dealt with in the LIBE Committee.

13) EU Language Plan

ELEN recommends that the EU adopt an EU Language Plan that meaningfully promotes equality and usage for all European minoritised languages, as recommended in the Commission's NGO Platform for Multilingualism Report.¹⁰

ELEN has been working for EU official status for Catalan, Basque and Galician, a measures strongly supported by Spain. Of note is that during this campaign there has been a new focus on how the EU could easily add these languages. Therefore, ELEN expects that the EU reports on how official status could be implemented for all European minoritized languages.

European law expert Prof. Niamh Nic Shuibhne (Univ. of Edinburgh) has commented that: "While there are language rules and regulations there is to date no coherent legally binding language policy for the EU either at the level of the institutions or in Member States. There is no Treaty provision which underpins the various facets of EU language involvement. And similarly, there is no overarching language 'policy' which measures EU language involvement against a series of tasks, goals or objectives, which co-ordinates the interaction of the different elements of language involvement, or which manages their relative priority or weighting in the EU sphere. In a sense, then, many ingredients are present, but there is no recipe, and there is no composite product or result either. The Commission initiative on multilingualism is an EU policy on multilingualism, certainly, but it is not a holistic EU language policy in itself."

¹⁰ http://elen.ngo/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/report-civil-society_en.pdf