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[Press release](#) | 24.01.2013

MEPs set to investigate language diversity

The European Parliament is set to examine in detail the issue of language diversity and protecting endangered languages in Europe, for the first time in a number of years. There has been no major, in-depth international study into endangered languages since the 1990s.

Leading the work is the European Parliament's only Corsican-speaking MEP, **François Alfonsi**. He says it's high time for the European Parliament and Commission to take stock of Europe's diverse linguistic tapestry, and propose measures to ensure language diversity can thrive.

But whilst promising that his report will praise those EU member states that are most successful in protecting endangered languages, the Corsican MEP said those European states which don't come up to scratch could be named and shamed.

M. Alfonsi is preparing the report for the European Parliament's Culture Committee which held a first exchange of views this week. A draft is expected to be put before the committee in April, which will be put to the vote in June.

Explaining the thinking behind the report, M. Alfonsi said:

"Language diversity needs to be seen as an economic as well as a cultural imperative. It's more relevant and important today than ever before.

"This issue has been largely ignored at EU level over the past decade and this has to change. We need to take stock of Europe's linguistic diversity and produce a clear picture of the state of health of Europe's languages.

"There are examples of good practice where intervention has been able to reverse the decline in some languages. But others are in a more delicate state, and without intervention and support they will struggle to survive in a globalised world.

"This is not just an issue for regional or local languages. It's just as important for state languages which also face challenges, particularly in this digital age. Take Irish Gaelic as an example - being the state language of Ireland and an official EU language isn't enough by itself for the language to thrive. And if that can be said for Irish, then which will be next? Estonian perhaps, or Maltese?

"It's important that we wake up to these challenges now before it's too late to intervene effectively."

"We will be culturally impoverished, and I believe economically impoverished, if we see a decline in language diversity in Europe. We must set out a clear picture of the status quo, and identify the political, financial and administrative support that will be needed by Europe's languages in future."

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