

# *Assessing the European Union's support to Regional and Minority Languages*

*10 years after the Alfonsi Resolution  
(2013-2023)*

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI	Artificial Intelligence
CEF	Connecting Europe Facility
CEF.AT	Connecting Europe Facility Automated Translation
CJEU	Court of Justice of the European Union
CLIL	Content Language Integrated Learning
CoFoE	Conference on the Future of Europe
CSPM	Civil Society Platform on Multilingualism
DSMS	Digital Single Market Strategy
ECI	European Citizens Initiative
ECRML	European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages
ECSPM	European Civil Society Platform for Multilingualism
EEA	European Economic Area
ELE	European Language Equality
ELEN	European Language Equality Network
ELG	European Language Grid
ELRC	European Language Resource Coordination
EP	European Parliament
EPRS	European Parliament Research Service
ESLC	European Survey on Language Competences
EU	European Union
FUEN	Federal Union of European Nationalities
LT	Language Technologies
MEP(s)	Member(s) of the European Parliament
MT	Machine Translation
NPLD	Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity
OLS	Online Linguistic Support
OMC	Open Method of Coordination
PQ	Parliamentary Question
RML(s)	Regional and Minority Language(s)
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
WG(s)	Working Group(s)

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study assesses the EU's support to Regional or Minority Languages (RMLs) over the *Europe 2020* decade, and more specifically after the 2013 *European Parliament Resolution on Endangered European Languages and Linguistic Diversity* – the so-called *Alfonsi Resolution*. The Resolution noted that Europe's endangered languages do not receive enough specific attention within the Commission's multilingualism policy and that funding for these languages has been diminishing over the years, a situation that must not be allowed to continue into the next multiannual financial framework (2014-2020). This report will trace the evolution of the EU support to RMLs over this period.

The study uses public policy analysis, and more specifically the *policy cycle* as an analytical tool to assess the conceptualisation, planning, execution and evaluation of the EU's approach to RMLs.

### *Key findings*

The *Europe 2020* Agenda has prioritised languages from an economic perspective through **three** of its seven flagship initiatives: a) *Youth on the move*, which links languages to mobility and youth employment; b) the *Digital Agenda for Europe*, which speaks of the need to develop a new generation of web-based multilingual applications and services, and c) *the Agenda for New Skills and Jobs*, where languages are considered a strategic element for economic growth and jobs. RMLs are absent in the Commission's priorities and initiatives, and only appear in EU rhetoric and political statements.

The EP has recurrently noted the alarming rate at which RMLs are disappearing and has requested the Commission and the Council to take more action in the field of RMLs. The Commission justifies the lack of specific action for RMLs on the grounds that minority or endangered languages do not belong to the competences of the EU as they are the sole responsibility of its Member States. The report highlights that cooperation in any policy field, including RMLs, is possible at EU level thanks to the *Open Method of Coordination (OMC)*, an EU instrument to identify “good policy practice from among the grand reservoir of diverse policy approaches in the European arena and propose common actions”. The study demonstrates that the OMC has been widely used for issues related to foreign language learning but not on issues related to promoting and protecting RMLs.

Despite the insistence on the lack of competences on RMLs, the Commission recently launched (2022) a **specific call to protect Europe's most vulnerable languages**: *Safeguarding Endangered Languages in Europe*, under the *Horizon Europe Framework Programme*. This

shows that it is perfectly plausible to develop a specific line of action for RMLs within the current EU legal framework and that it is a matter of political will. This call should not be an isolated initiative but part of a larger policy approach to RMLs. This study shows that there is no larger policy approach on RMLs at EU level.

The *Europe 2020* decade has witnessed what is probably the most ambitious and far-reaching **civil society initiative** to place RMLs on the EU Agenda: *The Minority SafePack Initiative*. More than one million EU citizens, regional governments, NGOs and associations have demanded more EU action to protect RMLs. The Commission, however, considers that the current support to RMLs is sufficient, a position recently backed by the CJEU (2022). The political and legal battle to promote RMLs is far from being closed as FUEN, the initiators of the *Minority SafePack Initiative*, has appealed the Court's decision (2023).

There is a lack on data on **specific funding** for RMLs, which does not allow us to offer a detailed, fully-fledged analysis of the number of RMLs projects funded by the EU. The absence of easily accessible figures only allows us to provide approximate figures. The figures available show that funding for RMLs continues to be minimal.

**Education and Language Technologies** are the two policy areas where languages have been prioritised during the *Europe 2020*. RMLs are not eligible to participate in any of the Commission's initiatives on languages. The study has identified numerous examples. These include the *Online Linguistic Support*, offered for the EU's 24 official languages plus other non-EU official languages such as Icelandic, Norwegian, Turkish, Macedonian or Serbian; *Europass*, offered in the 24 official languages plus other non-EU official languages such as Turkish, Macedonian, Norwegian and Icelandic; or the *Juvenes Translatores* translation contest, available only for the 24 EU official languages.

The same exclusion is observed in the field of **Language Technologies**: RMLs are not eligible to participate in any of the Commission's initiatives. Examples include *IATE* (the interactive terminology database available only in 24 official languages); the *Connecting Europe Facility Automated Translation Building Block* (CEF.AT), a service offered by the European Commission to help European and state public administrations exchange information across language barriers in the EU (available in the 24 official languages + Icelandic and Norwegian) or *e-translation*, the Commission's machine translation service (available in the 24 official languages plus Norwegian, Icelandic, Turkish, Chinese, Japanese, Russian and soon in Ukrainian).

The exclusion of RMLs in the Commission's initiatives is creating a **widening gap** between the languages deemed useful, necessary and linked to progress and growth while others – regional and minority languages – are absent and considered irrelevant. This, in turn, creates an artificial hierarchy through which languages are ranked and perceived as more or less

necessary. If RMLs are not incorporated in the new AI technologies, the extinction rate will accelerate, and the loss of Europe's linguistic diversity will be irreversible.

It is quite a paradox to note that while all EU-funded LT projects conclude that it is of paramount importance to include RMLs in LT products and services to avoid digital extinction, the Commission excludes them from its own LT services, widening language disparities

### ***Recommendations***

**Recommendation 1: Continue the line of action initiated in 2022 on *Safeguarding Endangered Languages in Europe***, aimed at enhancing cooperation at European level between key actors and stakeholders within endangered language communities. It should not be an isolated action but part of a larger strategy aimed at promoting RMLs at EU level.

**Recommendation 2: Include RMLs in all the Commission's initiatives aimed at promoting languages.** At present, RMLs are excluded from the Commission's initiatives such as the OLS, *Europass*, *Juvenes Traductores*, e-translation, IATE, among many others.

**Recommendation 3: Establish a set of EU-wide studies, benchmarks, statistics and guidelines to monitor the current situation of RMLs in Europe.**

**Recommendation 4: Earmarked funding for RMLs.** The information available on funding shows that it continues to be extremely low. The mainstreaming approach to funding shows that small language communities have to compete on equal footing with big ones, which widens the disparities between the big and the small. This report recommends establishing different types of safeguards such as, for example, specific mentions of support to RMLs in the different EU programmes (*Horizon*, *Erasmus+*, *Interreg*, etc.). This is perfectly possible within the current EU legal framework and would allow for more participation, transparency and visibility of RMLs in the various EU programmes.

**Recommendation 5: The reiterative requests for more action from the civil society (CoFoE, *Minority SafePack Initiative*) must be heard and transformed into concrete policy support to RMLs.**



## Introduction

Virtually all declarations of principles and speeches passed in the name of Europe celebrate linguistic diversity and consider it one of the cornerstones of the European project. *Linguistic diversity is part of Europe's DNA* is a recurrent statement used to define the European Union (EU). Official discourses highlight the need to support the languages of Europe, which include not only the 24 EU official languages but also Europe's 60 to 80 regional or minority languages (RMLs). To complete the linguistic landscape, we should add the languages brought by migrants as well as sign languages.

RMLs have always been portrayed as part and parcel of Europe's diversity, at least discursively. "Regional and minority languages are part of the European Union policy landscape on learning about diversity and language learning" – responded the current Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth Mariya Gabriel (2019-2024) when the European Parliament (EP) asked the Commission about EU support to Europe's RMLs in 2022<sup>1</sup>. Former Commissioner in charge of languages, Tibor Navracsics (2014-2019), committed himself at his hearing before the EP in 2014 to promoting all languages during his mandate, including RMLs, in the following terms: "I hope we can work together to make full use of this great opportunity to promote all of Europe's languages, no matter how many people speak them [...] We will do our best to preserve and protect minority languages"<sup>2</sup>. Along the same lines, the previous Commissioner in charge of multilingualism, Androulla Vassiliou (2010-2014), identified languages, including RMLs, as one of her political priorities for her mandate in the following terms: "Language learning and use help us both professionally and socially, opening people's minds to the cultural diversity which is an integral part of the EU's wealth. We must support not just the EU's official languages but Europe's regional and minority languages"<sup>3</sup>.

These are some of the many examples found about the political support to linguistic diversity, including RMLs, by the different Commissioners in office during the 2010-2020 decade. Despite the general recognition on the need to protect and promote RMLs, the current

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<sup>1</sup> Parliamentary Question (PQ) [E-000590/2022](#) *EU support for the promotion of multilingual education with special regard to regional and minority languages* (February 2022).

<sup>2</sup> Commitments made at the hearing of Tibor Navracsics, Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport. 1 October 2014. Available here: [IPOL BRI\(2014\)529090\\_EN.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> *My Political Priorities (2010-2014)*, by Androulla Vassiliou. Available [here](#).

indicators point at the alarming rate at which they are declining both in Europe and internationally. The latest major global study on languages entitled *Global predictors of language endangerment and the future of linguistic diversity* (2022) warns about the increasing loss of linguistic diversity worldwide, including Europe, and quantify the loss rate in the following terms:

*As with global biodiversity, the world's language diversity is under threat. Of the approximately 7,000 documented languages, nearly half are considered endangered. In comparison, around 40% of amphibian species, 25% of mammals and 14% of birds are currently threatened with extinction. The processes of endangerment are ongoing, with rates of loss estimated as equivalent to a language lost every one to three months and the most pessimistic predictions suggesting that 90% of the world's languages will be lost within a century. (Bromham et.al, 2022).*

These conclusions are also applicable in Europe. According to UNESCO, there are around 60 to 80 minority languages in the EU, most of them endangered languages, spoken by some 40 to 50 million speakers (European Parliament Research Service, EPRS, 2016). As indicated also in the EPRS report *Digital Survival of Lesser-Used Languages* (2020) “Regional and minority languages, [...] the 'lesser-used languages', are under serious threat of extinction”<sup>4</sup>. The report also highlights that one of the major threats to linguistic diversity – and especially to RMLs – is that new technologies are limited to a handful of major world languages, supported by machine translation and different other tools such as deep learning, to the detriment of the great majority of smaller languages. The real danger comes from an approach to linguistic diversity that includes some dominant languages but excludes all other.

The need safeguarding linguistic diversity is not only portrayed in political speeches and academia. It is also explicitly mentioned in different EU normative instruments. In broad terms, **article 3 of the Lisbon Treaty** states that the Union “shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity and shall ensure that Europe’s cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced”. The same commitment is expressed in **article 22 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights** of the European Union, which claims that “the EU shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity”.

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<sup>4</sup> [European Day of Languages: Digital survival of lesser-used languages | Think Tank | European Parliament \(europa.eu\)](https://www.europa.eu)

However, the **main responsibility** for the protection of RMLs – and for languages in general – lies with **EU Member States**. Nonetheless, the EU has the capacity to undertake actions aimed at safeguarding, promoting and supporting Europe’s linguistic diversity, including RMLs. As stated in article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), “the Union shall contribute to the development of the European dimension in education, particularly through the teaching and dissemination of the languages of the Member States”. These actions can range from policy recommendations, awareness-raising campaigns, coordination and support actions, funding networks or conducting research studies, among many others.

The European Parliament (EP) has long advocated for the need to show a stronger EU commitment towards Europe’s most vulnerable languages. Over the past decade, numerous have been the EP resolutions urging the European Commission and the Council to develop more actions vis-à-vis RMLs as we shall see in section 5.1 below. It was, however, the ***Resolution on Endangered European Languages and Linguistic Diversity***, adopted in 2013 by 92% of the EP votes, that has become the **landmark resolution** of the past decade on EU regional and minority languages for several reasons:

- It adopted a wholistic approach on the promotion of RMLs beyond the cultural/anthropological approach by stating that “the policies implemented should be taken not only of cultural and educational aspects but also of the economic and social dimensions”.
- It highlighted the need for concrete measures for RMLs in a wide range of policy fields such as social inclusion, youth, sport, education, research and development, media and channelled through different EU programmes such as the structural funds (Cohesion Fund, European Research & Development Fund, European Social Fund, European territorial cooperation), among others.
- It acknowledged that EU actions must adopt a long-term, transversal approach by stating that “long-term effort must be based on a diverse, coordinated planning of activities in various fields, in particular education, administration, media programmes [...] the arts and in all areas of public life, implying a need for resources to be made available over the long term”.

- It called for “constant support, via its various programmes, for transnational networks and European-level initiatives and activities that are designed to promote endangered languages”.
- It emphasised the fact that endangered languages “do not receive enough specific attention within the Commission’s multilingualism policy”, acknowledged that funding for these languages has been diminishing over the years – “a situation that must not be allowed to continue into the next multiannual financial framework (2014 2020)”.

The 2013 Resolution – also referred to as *the Alfonsi Resolution* (after the Member of the European Parliament who promoted it, M. François Alfonsi) also highlighted the need to evaluate the measures taken to promote Europe’s most vulnerable languages.

This study is aimed at evaluating the EU support for RMLs over the last decade and will provide an in-depth analysis of the current state of affairs of RMLs in Europe ten years after the approval of the *Alfonsi Resolution* back in 2013.

# 1. The EU's Language Policy towards RMLs from a public policy perspective

This study aims to analyse the EU's language policy vis-à-vis RMLs over the *Europe 2020* period, the decade for *Smart, Sustainable and Economic Growth* (2010-2020). The analysis will pay particular attention to the period comprising the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework, the seven-year period of the European Union in which the budget for the policy priorities is executed. It will also make references to the previous period (the so-called *Lisbon Strategy* comprising the period 2000-2010) and the current decade focused on the Green and Digital transitions, the so-called *twin transition*.

The report seeks to answer **three main blocks of questions** revolving around the following issues:

**a) The EU political discourses on languages versus the real actions**

- How does the EU rhetoric translate into concrete policy actions on RMLs?
- Which are these concrete actions and in which specific domains (education, social inclusion, social cohesion, economy, digital policies, regional policies, etc.)?

**b) A historical assessment. The evolution of EU support to RMLs**

- What has been the historical EU support to RMLs? This will help us analyse the evolution on EU support to RMLs in terms of policy priorities and funding.

**c) The effects of the EU language hierarchy for RMLs**

- How does the current EU language regime – with 24 official languages – affect RMLs in practical terms?
- What are the practical consequences of lack of EU official status?

These questions will be analysed from a **public policy analysis perspective**. Just like any other policy – environment, energy, education, etc. – the EU language policy, and specifically the language policy applied to RMLs, must be evaluated to assess how effective the actions taken (or not taken) are.

One could question the feasibility of evaluating a policy – language policy for RMLs – for which the EU has no general legislative competences. It must be said that the Commission has the power of initiating proposals and making recommendations on any issue deemed relevant at EU level, including language issues, even if it has no competences in the field. As highlighted above, in the field of education, article 165 of the TFEU states that the Union shall contribute to the development of the European dimension in education, particularly through the teaching and dissemination of the languages of the Member States. RMLs are also “the languages of the Member States” as the article is not restricted to the official languages of Member States.

Considering the alarming language endangerment figures highlighted above and considering the EP’s reiterated calls for more action on RMLs to protect and promote Europe’s languages, one might assume that the EU would develop a policy frame – within the remit of its competences – to avoid the disappearance of Europe’s RMLs. This report is aimed precisely at analysing EU actions, omissions, and the resulting effects for RMLs.

As noted in the introductory words of this study, the assessment will be developed through **public policy analysis**. It is beyond the remit of this report to explain in detail the different approaches and definitions of the *public policy analysis* concept. We will use the definition by Knoepfel et.al. (2007) to define it as “a set of intentionally coherent decisions or activities taken or carried out by different public – and sometimes private actors – whose resources, institutional links and interests vary, with a view to resolving in a targeted manner a problem that is politically defined as collective in nature” (Knoepfel et al. 2007, read in Gazzola, 2014, 53).

Those “decisions and activities” are easily identifiable – and much easier to analyse – when they appear in the form of concrete policy actions. However, there are also policy omissions, which are much more difficult to detect as they may not be viewed as policy devices even if they strongly affect *de facto* policies. As highlighted by Shohamy (2006) “Language policy should be not merely observed through declared political statements but rather through a variety of devices that are used to perpetuate language practices, often in covert and implicit ways [...]. Thus, it is only through the observation of the effects of these devices that the real language policy of an entity can be understood and interpreted.” (p.45-46).

Our analysis will necessarily go beyond the rhetorical statements and declarations of intentions and look **both at policy actions and policy omissions**. Put in other words, we shall analyse which actions are developed for RMLs, but also which policies and initiatives exclude them.

## 2. Analytical framework: the public policy cycle

To operationalise the analysis, we will use the conceptual tools developed in policy analysis, and more specifically the so-called *policy cycle*. The policy cycle describes the way in which a subject is managed in public policy – initial conceptualization, planning, execution and final evaluation. It is a **process-oriented analytical model** which views policy making as a series of activities divided into different steps<sup>5</sup>, as illustrated in figure 1 below:

**Figure 1. The Policy Cycle**



1. **Agenda setting.** The subject is perceived by public authorities as an element of concern that needs to be included in the public agenda.
2. **Policy formulation.** Policies are formulated taking the political, economic, social and institutional context. The political context influences policy priorities and objectives, the institutional context defines the [legal] framework under which objectives can be pursued, the economic context determines the types, structures or resources allocated whereas the social context influences the perception and the definition of the needs.
3. **Implementation.** The actual execution of policies formulated. This phase analyses the actual policy actions and how they are related to the intended results as well as the rationale for why the policy maker does what it does considering the objectives formulated in phase two.
4. **Evaluation of results.** The last step of the policy cycle focuses on the final assessment and revolves around the idea of how effective results have been.

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<sup>5</sup> Different authors use a more extended model of the policy cycle. We shall use the four-stage model for analytical purposes. For a more elaborate proposal, see M. Gazzola (2016)

If we apply the policy cycle to our object of study – the analysis of the EU support to RMLs – the questions that will be tackled in this report under each phase are the following:

## 1. Agenda setting

This phase will analyse how languages, including RMLs, are conceptualized in EU rhetoric and to what extent they have (not) been considered a priority in the *Europe 2020* Agenda. The following questions will be covered under this section:

- a) How are **languages** embedded in the **EU's political agenda**?
- b) What are the arguments used to **justify public intervention in languages**, even if languages are not an EU competence? What **choice of intervention** is justified?
- c) Given the current processes of accelerating language endangerment both worldwide and in the EU, **where do RMLs rank in the EU agenda**?

## 2. Language Policy Formulation

This phase will look at the language policies formulated, considering the political, economic, social and institutional **context**. The following questions will be covered under this section:

- a) What have been the **key priority policy areas** identified in the *Europe 2020* Agenda?
- b) What **language policies** have been **formulated**?
- c) What place for RMLs? Are there **specific language policy measures**?
- d) What (if any) **institutional structures** have been put in place to support linguistic diversity and, more specifically, RMLs?
- e) What is the **funding** allocated to the support of RMLs?

One of the specific elements under the policy formulation phase is the **involvement of the different stakeholders** in policy formulation. In public policy, stakeholder engagement is considered a positive element, given that they help in identifying the needs and collaborating in policy implementation. The analysis will therefore look at how (or if) the demands of the different RML stakeholders have been incorporated into the decision-making process. To cover these aspects, this report will also look at these specific issues:

- f) Who are the **main stakeholders** at EU level working in the field of RMLs? What are their concrete **demands**?



- g) **Participation channels.** Is there any **specific channel** – formal and/or informal – through which stakeholders can convey their demands to EU officials?
- h) **Incorporation of demands.** Have their demands been (totally or partially) satisfied? How?

### 3. Language Policy Implementation

This phase refers to the concrete **analysis of the actual policy developments** concerning languages in general, with a special focus on RMLs. It will look at the policy developments emanating from action plans, recommendations, resolutions, decisions, reports, briefings or research actions conducted by the three main EU institutions (European Commission, European Parliament and Council of the European Union). As pointed out above, the analysis of any policy should not only entail **policy actions but also policy omissions**. The analysis of this phase will attempt to respond the following questions:

- a) How do policy goals on languages materialize into **concrete policies**?
- b) Are these concrete policy actions **addressed only to the EU's 24 official languages** only? Are they also open to RMLs? Any other language?
- c) Which of these policy actions are **addressed to RMLs**?

### 4. Evaluation of policy results

This phase will analyse three elements: **results, effects** and **consequences** by responding the following questions:

- a) What have been the **practical effects** of the EU's language policy for RMLs?
- b) Connecting the objectives with the results obtained, how **effective** has been the EU support to RMLs?
- c) What are the direct **consequences** of the EU's language policy on RMLs?

The following table provides an overview of the questions that will be answered in this report following the four-step policy cycle:

**Table 1.** Analysing the EU’s Language Policy vis-à-vis RMLs through the policy cycle

<b>1. Agenda setting</b>  The place of languages in the <i>Europe 2020 Strategy</i>	<b>2. Policy formulation</b>  Language policies formulated in the <i>Europe 2020 Strategy</i>	<b>3. Policy implementation</b>  Language policies implemented in the <i>Europe 2020 Strategy</i> (actions and omissions)	<b>4. Policy evaluation</b>  Evaluating the effects and consequences of the <i>Europe 2020 Strategy</i>
Do <b>languages rank</b> high in the <i>Europe 2020 Strategy</i> ? Which languages?	What are the <b>key priority policy areas</b> in the <i>Europe 2020 Strategy</i> ?	From language policy goals to <b>concrete language policies</b>	The <b>practical effects</b> of the EU’s language policy for RMLs
What are the <b>arguments</b> used to justify intervention in language policy at EU level?	Which concrete <b>language policies</b> have been <b>formulated</b> ?	Language policy actions <b>specifically addressed to RMLs</b> ?	The <b>effectiveness</b> of the language policy applied
What is the <b>place for RMLs</b> in the <i>Europe 2020 Strategy</i> ?	Any <b>specific language policy</b> for RMLs?	<b>Policy actions</b> only for the 24 official languages? Any other language? Identifying the <b>language policy omissions for RMLs</b>	The <b>consequences</b> of the EU language policy on RMLs
	What (if any) <b>institutional structures</b> have been created to develop the language policy?		
	<b>How much funding</b> allocated to languages in general and to RMLs in particular?		
	Who are the <b>main stakeholders</b> involved in the promotion of RMLs?		
	What are the <b>participation channels</b> for RMLs?		
	Are their <b>demands</b> partially or totally incorporated?		

### 3. Methodology

To address the wide range of questions posed, this report adopts a **mixed-methods approach**. I have integrated concepts and analytical tools developed in different bodies of knowledge such as *Legal Analysis*, *Policy Analysis* and *Discourse Analysis*.

A first approach has been the **analysis of EU legislation**. While it is true that the EU has no competences to develop a harmonized, prescriptive EU-wide language policy, its current legal framework includes the possibility of developing, encouraging and coordinating support actions to promote EU languages, including RMLs, as stated above. The analysis of the EU's legal framework will help us understand how languages are embedded in the EU's legal architecture and assess the effects of the current EU language regime on RMLs

A second method applied is *Document Analysis*. This includes primary sources mainly from the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union (action plans, resolutions, decision, conclusions, recommendations, etc.) as well as secondary sources (scholarly research). Reference to the Council of Europe's Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML) will also be made as it is the only legally-binding international Treaty devoted exclusively to the protection of RMLs.

A third method applied in this research has been *Discourse Analysis*, which has allowed me to link the concepts of language policies and language ideologies. As regulatory tools governing how languages should coexist and be used in specific social, political, institutional and economic contexts, language policies are always inherent representations of language ideologies, i.e., beliefs, visions and conceptions of the role of certain language(s) held by different (most commonly institutional) social actors (Krzyzanowski. & Wodak, 2011).

By using *Discourse Analysis* as a methodology, we want to measure the distance between official rhetoric versus the concrete policy actions. *Discourse Analysis* will also allow us to unveil how the different language categories (EU official, regional or minority languages, migrant languages) are conceptualised and the value attributed to each category.

## 4. Building the dataset

The analysis covers the *Europe 2020* period (2010-2020), with a particular emphasis on the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework. Reference will often be made to the previous decade (the so-called *Lisbon Strategy*, 2000-2010) as well as the current 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework.

The corpus has been collected through the following sources:

1. The EU strategies and discourses on language – **the *politics of language*** – have been analysed mainly through speeches and statements of EU representatives – mainly Commissioners and MEPs – as well as press releases. These have been collected through three main sources:
  - a. The [Commission’s Strategic Plans](#), which includes the multi-annual strategic and management plans and the yearly work programmes.
  - b. The [Press Corner Service of the European Commission](#), which includes all speeches, statements and press releases issued by the Commission since 1974.
  - c. The [European Parliament’s Plenary Search Service](#), which allows us to trace all the Parliamentary questions posed by MEPs to the European Commission and their answers as well as written declarations.
  
2. The EU policy developments – **the *policies of language*** – have been analysed using the following sources:
  - a. The [Funding & Tender Opportunities Portal](#) of the European Commission, [CORDIS](#) (the Commission’s Research & Development Programmes) and the new portal [Kohesio](#), a recently-created comprehensive knowledge database offering easy and transparent access information on projects and beneficiaries co-funded by the EU Cohesion policy during the 2014-2020 programming period.

Particular attention is paid to two main programmes in which languages play a nuclear role: *Erasmus+* and *Creative Europe*. These two programmes are analysed through the [Erasmus+ Project Research Portal](#) and the [Creative Europe Project Results](#) Platform. These portals provide a compilation of projects on languages developed during the period 2014-2020. The section on [Policy priorities](#) for the period 2019-2024 has also been scrutinised.

- b. The Commission's initiatives, projects or services involving languages, including the *Juvenes Traslatores* contest, the *e-translation* service, the IATE terminology database, the *Online Linguistic Support* (OLS) or *Europass*, among others.
- c. Funding analysis. To analyse the amount of funding devoted to RMLs, we have used two main sources: The *Erasmus+* and *Creative Europe* project platforms highlighted above, which provide concrete figures on the funding allocated to different projects, and secondary sources dealing specifically with RML funding.

## 5. The EU's Language Policy through the Policy Cycle: a practical analysis

After highlighting the methodological approach in sections above, the following section offers an in-depth evaluation of the EU's language policy with a special focus on RMLs. The sections below follow the four-stage policy cycle previously discussed:

- 5.1 The *Agenda Setting*. This section will analyse the priorities of the EU for the *Europe 2020* Strategy and the role of languages within the strategy, including RMLs.
- 5.2 The *Policy Formulation* section will explore the specific priority areas and the language policies formulated. It will also analyse the institutional structures, the funding allocated specifically for RMLs and the role of the different RML stakeholders involved in policy formulation.
- 5.3 The *Policy Implementation* section will analyse how policy goals have materialised in concrete policy actions.
- 5.4 The *Evaluation* section will provide an overview of the results, effects and consequences of today's language policy.

## 5.1 Agenda setting

The main goal of this section is to assess how languages have been integrated in the *Europe 2020* Agenda. More specifically, the following questions will be covered:

5.1.1 What is the place for **languages in the *Europe 2020* Agenda**? What are the arguments used to justify EU intervention in the field of languages (if they are not an EU competence?)

5.1.2 What is the place of **RMLs in the *Europe 2020* Agenda**?

### 5.1.1 What place for languages in the *Europe 2020* Agenda?

On March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2010, the European Commission unveiled its ten-year strategy plan: *Europe 2020. A Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth*. In a context of deep economic crisis, the primary goal of the Commission was to “come out stronger from the crisis and turn the EU into a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy delivering high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion”. The *2020* Strategy put forward three priorities:

1. **Smart growth**: developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation.
2. **Sustainable growth**: promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy.
3. **Inclusive growth**: fostering a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion.

More specifically, the Strategy identified seven *flagship initiatives* for the *2020* decade:

1. Innovation Union: research & innovation
2. Youth on the Move: young people & education
3. A Digital Agenda for Europe
4. Resource Efficient Europe
5. An industrial policy for the globalisation era
6. An Agenda for New Skills and Jobs
7. A European Platform Against Poverty

The **provisions related to languages** are explicitly mentioned in *three* specific flagship initiatives:

Initiative 2: *Youth on the Move*.

Initiative 3: *Digital Agenda for Europe*.

Initiative 6: *Agenda for New Skills and Jobs*.

The *Youth on the Move* initiative refers to languages as a “key competence for the knowledge economy and society” and link them to the need of “working and studying abroad, particularly for young people” (p. 6). The *Digital Agenda for Europe* speaks of the need “to develop a new generation of web-based applications and services, including for multilingual content and services, by supporting standards and open platforms through EU-funded programmes” (p.24).

It is, however, the *Agenda for New Skills and Jobs* where languages occupy a more prominent position. Languages are considered a skill needed to “make a rapid and successful transition to employment” (p.17). They are considered strategic elements for competitiveness, mobility, growth and job creation and Member States are encouraged to facilitate the development of a European framework defining the basic skills, including foreign languages, that are needed to achieve the strategic goals. The emphasis on the instrumental value of languages for mobility, growth and jobs is systematically observed in the analysis of all political speeches, interventions and strategy documents referring to languages.

The support to languages often follows a similar pattern: from a discursive point of view, there is always a symbolic recognition of linguistic diversity as a core element of Europe’s values and identity. Parallel to this discourse, there is a more pragmatic, proactive set of language policy priorities in the *Europe 2020 Agenda*: the learning of **foreign languages**. We have referred to this as the **symbolic vs. pragmatic multilingualism**.

This dichotomic duality is systematically observed in discourses and policy documents aimed at highlighting the EU priorities on languages. Among the many examples found, we can cite the following three to illustrate this point:

To mark the European Day of Languages 2014, the then Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, Androulla Vassiliou (2010-2014) highlighted the need to consider languages as one of the priorities in the EU agenda in the following terms:

*[...] languages are an essential part of our **shared identity** as Europeans. Nothing encapsulates the EU motto “United in diversity” better than the EU’s 24 official languages, its numerous dialects and*



*minority languages. Just like their speakers, all languages are different and unique and do not describe the world in quite the same way. In another sense, all languages are the same, in that everything that can be said in one language can also be said in every other. This ability to overcome difference through communication and mutual understanding is the great gift of languages. It is also what the European project is all about.*

*On a **more practical level**, languages are valuable **tools** to get the most from life's experiences, whether for work, study or just travelling. In an increasingly interconnected and competitive world, the knowledge of languages is an essential skill for all of us: for students wishing to study abroad and businesses looking to expand on new markets; for workers in search of better job opportunities; for scientists and academics collaborating across borders; in other words, for all those who wish to make the most of the wealth of opportunities that Europe has to offer, be they educational, professional or cultural.*

*That is why the promotion of multilingualism, and the improvement of language teaching and learning are mainstays of EU policy.*

*Androulla Vassiliou, European Day of Languages 2014*

**[emphasis added]**

This speech succinctly summarises the EU agenda when it comes to languages. Two levels are identified: a symbolic level – with the habitual rhetoric referring to values and identities – and a pragmatic level, considering languages as a *tool* and a priority skill to be promoted for mobility, jobs and growth.

The same line of reasoning is observed in the subsequent Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Tibor Navracsics (2014-2019), where foreign language learning is consolidated as one of the EU priorities from an economic angle. The need for “Europeans to improve their language skills” was the core idea of the European Day of Languages 2016. On the same occasion but in 2019, the need for young people to acquire language skills and master at least two foreign languages “remained a priority at EU level” (figure 2 below).

**Figure 2.** Commissioner Navracsics political message at the occasion of the European Day of Languages 2016 and 2019



**Source:** Commissioner’s institutional Twitter account

The symbolic-pragmatic rhetoric is also systematically observed in Council documents. Among many others, we can cite the [\*2011 Council conclusions on Language competences to enhance mobility\*](#), which highlighted “the importance of a good command of foreign languages as a key competence essential to making one's way in the modern world and labour market” or the [\*2014 Council Conclusions on Multilingualism and the Development of Language Competences\*](#), which explicitly mentions languages as one of the *Europe 2020* strategic priorities by stating that “language competences contribute to the mobility, employability and personal development of European citizens, in particular young people, in line with the objectives of the *Europe 2020* Strategy for growth and jobs”.

The EU priorities within the *Europe 2020* Strategy focus on the creation of a European framework that defines the basic skills needed to achieve the economic targets set within the Strategy. In this sense, language – and more specifically foreign languages – have become a

tool to achieve these goals. Other values related to languages – communication, social cohesion, democratic participation or transparency – are backgrounded as EU strategic priorities. They are rarely mentioned and, when they are, it is done in purely symbolic terms.

The analysis shows the language policy prioritised during the 2020 decade narrows its meaning down to (foreign) language skills and competences. Languages are defined primarily via their economic – and not social – importance. The market-oriented approach to multilingualism observed in the *Europe 2020* Strategy consolidates the priorities initiated in the previous decade, the *Lisbon Strategy* (2010), aimed at making the EU “one of the world’s most competitive knowledge-based economies”. As observed by Krzyzanowski & Wodak “the Lisbon Strategy laid the foundations of the skills and competitiveness approach to languages – and to many other policies. Other EU political priorities of the early 2000 – on inter alia, multilingualism in European society (European Social Model) or on the democratic character of multilingual communication in the EU – were backgrounded or even silenced in the EU Language Policy. In the European Knowledge-Based Economy (KBE) [of the Lisbon Strategy], language and multilingualism gradually became equalised with other KBE-related skills such as knowledge of information and communication technologies” (2011: 132).

The progressive *economisation* of language policies – initiated in the 2010 *Lisbon Strategy* and consolidated in the *Europe 2020* Strategy – have had a major impact on the way languages are conceptualized and prioritised in EU politics. Languages are described mainly as ‘skills’ and discussed from the perspective of foreign language learning. While the official EU political rhetoric continues to portray linguistic diversity as one of Europe’s greatest assets, the EU priorities on multilingualism point at an increasing *commodification* of languages, conceptualized and represented as a set of bounded, marketable communicative skills that can be advertised, bought and sold as mere commodities for economic growth, mobility and jobs. This commodification of languages has been singled out as one of the semiotic components of globalization in what has been referred to as the new *political economy of multilingualism* (see Krzyzanowski & Wodak 2011). The analysis of the EU priorities of the *Europe 2020* strategy confirms the consolidation of this trend.

### ***What choice of intervention is justified?***

As highlighted in the introductory section above, the EU has no competences in developing a prescriptive EU-wide language policy. However, intervention in the field of (foreign) language learning is justified as needed to enhance language competences of Europeans. It is, therefore, the **field of education** where a more direct intervention is observed. The [2011 Council conclusions on language competences to enhance mobility](#) overtly stated that “European cooperation plays a useful role in identifying the language competences to be developed, as well as the most effective methodologies and the most favourable conditions for doing so”. Despite the lack of competences, there is an explicit goal to intervene – through cooperation – in the field of language learning. Article 165 of the TFEU mentions explicitly that “the Union shall contribute to the development of the European dimension in education, particularly through the teaching and dissemination of the languages of the Member States”.

Cooperation and support of a policy field, including languages, is possible at EU level thanks to the so-called ***Open Method of Coordination (OMC)***. This mechanism was established in the Lisbon European Council of 2000 to “provide orientation towards common outcomes or objectives in a given policy area”. It is an instrument to identify “good policy practice from among the grand reservoir of diverse policy approaches in the European arena”. The OMC empowers the European Commission to undertake actions of cooperation and support deemed relevant at EU level.

Cooperation through the OMC in the field of languages was initiated in the 2010 *Lisbon Strategy* and has been consolidated in the *Europe 2020* Agenda. As highlighted in the study *European Strategy on Multilingualism. Policy and Implementation at the EU level* (Saville & Gutiérrez, 2016) “the growing importance of languages and education in the *Lisbon Strategy* meant that the European Commission had to not only develop action plans [...] but also to increase the reach of these plans and to monitor progress made” (p.15).

The *Europe 2020* Strategy has also prioritised the OMC in the field of foreign language learning. The Commission and Member States have strengthened coordination and support through a series of programmatic and structured dialogues aimed at laying the foundations of a

European coordinated approach to (foreign) language learning<sup>6</sup>. As overtly stated in the 2011 *Council Conclusions on language competence to enhance mobility* cited above: “The work being done by Member States in the framework of the Open Method of Coordination, with the support of the Commission, in order to strengthen the contribution which language education can make to enhancing the employability of young people in a labour market where knowledge of foreign languages can provide a distinct advantage”.

A number of studies, indicators and benchmarks have been promoted over the decade to justify public intervention through the OMC. All these initiatives follow the abovementioned market-oriented approach to languages. Among others, we could cite the following:

1. A special Eurobarometer on Languages ([European and their Languages](#)) in 2012, indicating that “a vast majority of Europeans (77%) claim that languages should be a top EU priority”. As stated by the then Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, Androulla Vassiliou (2010-2014): “This Eurobarometer shows that multilingualism and language learning matter a great deal to people and that is something we should rejoice in. But we must also do more to improve the teaching and learning of languages. Being able to communicate in a foreign language broadens your horizons and opens doors; it makes you more employable and, in the case of businesses, it can open up more opportunities in the Single Market”.<sup>7</sup> The launching of the Eurobarometer – and its conclusions – have served to legitimate further intervention at EU level on language learning, as we shall see below.
2. The first-ever [European Survey on Language Competences \(ESLC\)](#) is also published in 2012, concluding that “there is an overall low level of competences in both first and second foreign languages in Europe” and makes, therefore, a series of recommendations focused exclusively on the market-oriented approach:
  - *Language competences still need to be significantly improved, and educational systems must step up their efforts to prepare all pupils for further education and the labour market.*

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<sup>6</sup> For a more detailed account on the initiatives created within the framework of the OMC, see 5.2.2 on Institutional structures

<sup>7</sup> Statement available at the European Commission’s Press Corner Service: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_12\\_679](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_12_679)

- *Educational systems can make a positive difference with an early onset of foreign language learning, increase the number of foreign languages learnt and promote methods enabling pupils and teachers to use foreign languages for meaningful communication in lessons.*
- *The importance of the English language as a basic skill and as a tool for employability and professional development requires concrete actions to further improve competences in this language.*

The report also recognises the importance of linguistic diversity but admits that some languages are more relevant than others to enter the job market, establishing a language hierarchy:

- *While all languages are not equally relevant when entering the labour market, linguistic diversity remains vitally important for cultural and personal development.*

This approach confirms what was already pointed out in the 2008 European Parliament report *Multilingualism: Between Policy Objectives and Implementation*, which already noted this dichotomic approach to languages: “Multilingualism and linguistic diversity are sometimes conflicting policy agendas. Language learning policy has tended to be influenced by ‘harder’ priorities like economic competitiveness and labour market mobility, and linguistic diversity policies by ‘softer’ issues like inclusion and human rights. Multilingualism policy has been more highly prioritised than linguistic diversity policy in terms of concrete actions”.

3. The Commission Staff Working Document [Language competences for employability, mobility and growth](#) (2012). This document is part of a larger Commission initiative – [Rethinking Education. Investing in skills for better socioeconomic outcomes](#) (2012)– offering an analysis of the role languages should place in the *Europe 2020* Agenda. The document makes a series of recommendations based on the mobility, growth, competitiveness and jobs: “language competences will contribute to achieving the objectives of the *Europe 2020* strategy of growth and jobs as they will foster the mobility of workers and students and will improve the employability of the European

workforce...Language competences should be useful in real life and match, in particular, labour market needs”.

As shown in these examples, policy intervention in the field of languages is justified following a strictly economic reasoning. This approach was initiated in the previous *Lisbon 2010* Strategy decade and has been consolidated as a top priority in the *Europe 2020* Strategy. This approach conceptualises languages as tools explicitly directed at increasing global competitiveness of the EU economy, defined primarily as *skills* indispensable to pursue the *Europe 2020* goals of growth and jobs. Languages – but not all languages – gradually became equalised with other skills such as knowledge of information and communication technologies (ICT).

The utilitarian approach to multilingualism is strategically legitimised and consolidated through a series of studies, indicators and benchmarks which further justify policy intervention in the field. Put in other terms, the studies, indicators and benchmarks highlighted above serve to further develop policies along the same lines.

Setting a hegemonic paradigm is especially concerned in establishing the reality [of the *Europe 2020* Strategy for growth and jobs] through the compilation and repetition of statistical indicators, through the development of benchmarks and league tables, and through the elaboration of an interwoven set of useful concepts, slogans, and buzzwords. These can then be applied to generate a relatively simple set of policy prescriptions and legitimations to be applied to many sectors, many scales, and many countries.

### **5.1.2 What place for RMLs in the Europe 2020 Agenda?**

The analysis above on the role of languages in the *Europe 2020* Strategy shows a **complete lack of reference** to the protection or promotion of RMLs in any of the key policy documents or in any of the three flagship initiatives that make explicit reference to languages (*Youth on the Move*; a *Digital Agenda for Europe* and the *Agenda for New Skills and Jobs* (2010)). As highlighted in the section above, the strategic focus has been on languages for mobility, growth and jobs, in line with the previous decade, with a special emphasis on foreign language learning.

Despite not having competences on languages, cooperation in language policy – mainly in the field of education and foreign language learning – has been possible thanks to the OMC. Cooperation at EU level is not observed when dealing with RMLs. The analysis shows that beyond the rhetoric of diversity, the EU has not included the protection and promotion of RMLs as a policy issue in the EU agenda, despite the all the evidence pointing at the decreasing number of speakers in practically all regional languages of Europe.

The EP *Resolution on Endangered European Languages and Linguistic Diversity* already stated that “the issue of endangered languages does not receive enough specific attention within the Commission’s multilingualism policy” and requested that “this situation must not be allowed to continue into the next multiannual financial framework (2014-2020)”. The analysis of the agenda priority for the *Europe 2020* Strategy shows that RMLs have been neglected, and are only marginally present in the sphere of rhetoric.

Over the period analysed, we have identified two main lines of action<sup>8</sup> aimed at putting RMLs on the EU agenda over the period analysed:

- a) The European Parliament and its longstanding attempts in favour of RMLs.
- b) The *Minority SafePack Initiative*, the civil society voice requesting more actions for RMLs in Europe.

#### ***5.1.2.1. The EP: longstanding attempts to put RMLs on the EU Agenda***

The actions of the European Parliament during the period analysed have continued to reflect a consistent effort to support RMLs. This support is not new. It dates back from the late 1970’s, when the EP began to develop a series of initiatives calling for the Commission to take action in the field of regional or minority languages.

The *Europe 2020* decade has witnessed a series of resolutions, declarations, reports and initiatives aimed at giving visibility to RMLs and ensuring that they are included in the EU agenda. They revolve around the following issues:

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<sup>8</sup> There is a wider number of initiatives and organisations working in the field of RMLs in Europe, namely the *Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity* (NPLD) and the *European Language Equality Network* (ELEN), among others. These institutions will be analysed under section 5.2.4. *Stakeholders involved in the promotion of RMLs. Who is who?* below.



- Acknowledgment that regional or minority languages in Europe face an accelerating trend of assimilation and loss.
- Recognition of the increasing linguistic and cultural impoverishment with the EU, something that the EU is required to protect, as stated in the Treaties.
- Systematic reference to Treaty articles that open the possibility of EU intervention in the field of minority language promotion/protection. Especially relevant is article 6 of the TFEU, which recognizes that the EU has competences in the fields of culture and education to carry out actions to support, coordination or supplement the actions of the Member States or article 165 on education and languages.

The following chart includes a summary of the main initiatives undertaken by the EP over the period analysed.

**Table 2.** The EP initiatives in support of RMLs. An overview (2013-2021)

Year	Title	Overview
2021	<i>European Parliament resolution of 20 January 2021 on achieving an effective policy legacy for the European Year of Cultural Heritage</i>	The EU urges the Commission to take greater action to promote linguistic diversity, including minority languages, and to establish and implement concerted and coordinated measures
2021	Written letter by MEPs to Commission president Ursula von der Leyen requesting more actions to protect RMLs, within the framework of the <i>Minority SafePack</i> initiative	A group of 79 Members of the European Parliament address a joint letter to the President of the Commission to express their concern about the lack of action by the Commission vis-à-vis the <i>Minority SafePack</i> Initiative stating “ <i>the decision of the Commission is damaging for the democratic life of our Union, damaging for the trust of national and linguistic minority communities in our institutions and not least the EU’s internal and international credibility when standing up for our values</i> ”.
2020	<i>European Parliament resolution of 17 December 2020 on the European Citizens’ Initiative ‘Minority SafePack – one million signatures for diversity in Europe</i>	The EP expresses its strong concern about regional or minority languages and underlines the need to take more action in this area.  It calls on the Commission and the Member States to promote language learning throughout the EU, including RMLs.  It gives the explicit support to the civil society-led initiative <i>Minority SafePack</i>
2018	<i>European Parliament resolution of 13 November 2018 on minimum standards for minorities in the EU</i>	The EP notes the decline of minority languages in Europe and urges the Commission to adopt a mechanism to monitoring the health of linguistic and cultural diversity in the EU
2018	<i>European Parliament resolution of 7 February 2018 on protection and non-</i>	The EP highlights that minority rights have not been high enough on the EU agenda and expressed the concerns about the lack of a

	<i>discrimination of minorities in EU Member States</i>	comprehensive EU response and protection when it comes to linguistic and other minority rights. The EP calls for effective EU-wide monitoring of the situation of autochthonous and linguistic minorities.
2018	<i>European Parliament resolution of 11 September 2018 on language equality in the digital age</i>	The EP notes the danger of digital extinction for minority languages and urges the EU Council to draft a recommendation on the protection and promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity in the EU.
2016	<i>European Parliament resolution of 23 November 2016 on sign languages and professional sign language interpreters</i>	The EP stresses the need to increase support and specific provisions for sign languages, as full-fledged (minority) languages in the EU.
2015	<i>European Parliament <u>Written Declaration</u> submitted under Rule 136 of the Rules of Procedure (0046/2015) on the protection and promotion of regional and minority languages in the EU</i>	A group of 30 Members of the European Parliament send a written declaration to the Commission requesting additional actions to protect and promote endangered languages and to provide increased financial support to these languages.
2013	<i>European Parliament resolution of 11 September 2013 on endangered European languages and linguistic diversity in the European Union</i>	The EP reiterates that endangered languages do not receive enough specific attention within the Commission's multilingualism policy and calls for the need to adopt a transversal approach (from social policies, to education, culture, economics, etc.)

Source: own elaboration

These actions reveal the continuing EP efforts to include RMLs in the EU Agenda. While it is true that these actions – mainly resolutions – are highly useful in terms of visibility, they are not binding upon Member States. Put in other terms, there is no obligation to transform these recommendations into actual EU policies. These actions have, therefore, limited effects in terms of agenda setting.

Other than these resolutions, another important channel to influence the EU agenda within the European Parliament is the Parliamentary Questions (PQ) posed by Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to the Commission and the Council. They are a direct form of parliamentary scrutiny of other EU institutions and bodies. PQs are a valuable source of information for several reasons: firstly, they allow us to measure the interest and claims by MEPs on languages, including RMLs, and secondly, they provide us detailed and specific feedback on the Commission/Council's response vis-à-vis the concrete issue requested.

The [European Parliament's Search Service \(EPRS\)](#) has allowed us to collect all the PQs tabled during three Parliamentary terms (2009-2014; 2014-2019 and the current 2019-present, December 2022). To retrieve the information, five keywords have been used in the EPRS database: *multilingualism*, *linguistic diversity*, *regional languages*, *minority languages*, and *endangered languages*. The following table provide a succinct quantitative analysis of the number of questions posed over the past decade (2009-present, October 2022)<sup>9</sup>.

**Table 3:** Number of Parliamentary Questions on languages tabled by MEPs at the EP (2009-2022)

Parliamentary term	Keywords used for the search				
	<i>Multilingualism</i>	<i>Linguistic diversity</i>	<i>Regional languages</i>	<i>Minority languages</i>	<i>Endangered languages</i>
<b>2019-present (December 2022)</b>	33	19	17	3	0
<b>2014-2019</b>	49	48	12	38	5
<b>2009-2014</b>	96	103	50	106	7

Source: own elaboration

Even if some PQs use various terms simultaneously, their analysis has allowed us to systematize and categorise qualitatively two issues: a) the type of request by MEPs when it comes to languages, including RMLs b) the response of the European Commission to PQs. The following is a succinct qualitative analysis of both the PQs posed and the answers given by the Commission:

Under the term *multilingualism*, MEPs have expressed two main sources of concern:

- a) The **increasing presence of English** in EU institutions to the detriment of other EU official languages. The analysis shows that number of PQs related to this issue has notably increased, especially during the 2014-2019 term. Some MEPs consider that many websites are not available in their EU official language and demand that all languages – EU official languages – are treated equally. Some examples include the following: lack of interpretation in meetings (2018, PQ [E-003270-18](#)), EU Funding portal only in English (2016, PQ [E-008848-16](#)), non-protection of EU official languages in the Digital Single Market (2015, PQ [E-008908-15](#)), languages in which documents in DG Trade only in English (2014, PQ [E-008031-14](#)), among many others.

<sup>9</sup> Note that some PQs might appear under different terms simultaneously.

These concerns have been confirmed in the recent EP report [The European Union's approach to multilingualism in its own communications policy](#) (2022), which points at the lack of a coherent language policy in the EU communication strategy (resulting in absence of different EU official languages in many websites) in the following terms:

*The study reveals significant variations in the availability of multilingual content that ought to be available in all official languages. This is the result of an assessment of multilingual scores based on the application of the multilingual needs typology to the websites of EU institutions. The European Commission and the European Central Bank websites do not perform well in the publication of sections with “mostly core” and “mostly primary” content that should be available in all EU languages. By contrast, the performance of the websites of the European Council/Council of the European Union, the CJEU and the European Court of Auditors is very good. The European Parliament also has a relatively high score. Another important conclusion is that the language regimes of EU institutions, bodies and agencies are not sufficiently transparent and formalised. The regimes are sometimes not specified or are often unclear. Similarly, most EU institutions and bodies have published a website language policy, but most agencies have not done so. This is inconsistent with European Ombudsman recommendations calling for the policy on the use of official EU languages to be clearly defined and published. The wide range of language regimes, practices and website language policies are not systematically monitored and reviewed by the EU. This is detrimental for transparency and accountability as well as hampering a more formalised approach to multilingual communication with common standards. (p.11)*

- b) The **protection of Europe's most vulnerable languages**. The term *multilingualism* is also used, to a much lesser extent and often used interchangeably with the term *linguistic diversity*, to claim more protection and promotion for RMLs in Europe. MEPs repeatedly highlight the need for the Commission to take a more proactive approach for Europe's lesser used languages. PQs revolve around the issue of funding (2015, PQ [E-005776-15](#)); the need for concrete support actions (2014, PQ [E-008846-14](#); 2016, PQ [E-003503-16](#)); or RML discrimination (2015, PQ [E-011958-15](#)).

Along the same lines, the term *linguistic diversity* is used to demand more promotion, protection for RMLs. Under this term (as said above, often used interchangeably with the term *multilingualism*), MEPs constantly request the Commission to develop concrete actions and concrete funding, along the lines of the EP *Resolution on Endangered Languages* (2015, PQ [E-009027-15](#)); demand more protection for minority language rights (2018, PQ [E-000145-18](#); 2015, PQ [E-015486-15](#)), and emphasise the urgent need to protect Europe’s most endangered languages (2018, PQ [E-002634-18](#); 2016, PQ [E-009515-16](#)), among many others.

We have also analysed the reply given by the European Commission to the PQs posed on languages. Table 4 below provides a succinct qualitative analysis of the response provided

**Table 4:** The European Commission’s responses to MEP’s Parliamentary Questions on languages

MEPs concerns in PQs	European Commission’s reply
<p>Increasing presence of English to the detriment of other official languages.</p> <p>MEPs request equal treatment of all EU official languages.</p>	<p>The European Commission expresses its commitment to official multilingualism: “The Commission is firmly committed to multilingualism and puts considerable effort into providing as much information as possible in all EU official languages”.</p> <p><i>Commission’s response:</i> <a href="#">E-008031/2014 (ASW)</a></p>
<p>MEPs request more action to protect and promote RMLs</p>	<p>The European Commission’s response to the reiterative demands for more action and funding for RMLs can be divided into three elements:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Positive rhetoric about linguistic diversity.</li> <li>2. <b>No specific policies</b> for RMLs.</li> <li>3. <b>No specific funding</b> for RMLs.</li> </ol> <p>The following responses serve to illustrate these three points:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Positive rhetoric about linguistic diversity</b>  <i>“The Commission recognises the importance that minority languages represent in Europe’s cultural and linguistic heritage”.</i>  <i>Commission response:</i> <a href="#">E-008846/2014(ASW)</a></li> </ol> <p><i>But...</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. <b>Lack of specific initiatives</b>  <i>The European Commission has no specific powers in the area of language policy in general, and the protection of endangered languages in particular.</i>  <i>Whilst respecting the responsibility of national and regional bodies in these areas, the Commission encourages all those concerned — public authorities, providers of education services, employers’ organisations, trade unions and the media — to promote</i></li> </ol>

	<p><i>respect for the rich linguistic and cultural heritage of our continent.</i></p> <p><i>Commission's response: <a href="#">E-008168/2015(ASW)</a></i></p> <p><b>3. Lack of specific funding for regional or minority languages</b></p> <p><i>The Commission has no specific financial instrument dedicated to the preservation of European minority languages. Language policy at national level including the protection of regional, minority or endangered languages does not belong to the competences of the EU and is the sole responsibility of its Member States.</i></p> <p><i>Commission's response: <a href="#">E-005776/2015 (ASW)</a></i></p>
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Source: own elaboration

PQs have proven to be a rich source of information that have allowed us to trace both the interest of MEPs in the field of languages, including RMLs, and to evaluate the response given by the Commission. The analysis confirms the lack of action expressed by the Commission to develop any set of actions for RMLs on the grounds that the promotion of RMLs fall outside the remit of the Commission's competences. While this is true, we have seen above that the OMC could be one of the many instruments available aimed at "providing orientation towards common outcomes or objectives in a given policy area". The promotion of RMLs could very well be one of those policy areas. The analysis has shown that it is not the case.

#### ***5.1.2.2. The Minority SafePack: the civil society initiative aimed at raising minority language rights in the EU (2013-present)***

The 2013-2023 timespan has witnessed what is probably one of the most remarkable civil-society, bottom-up attempts to include RMLs in the EU Agenda. In July 2013, the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN) formally submitted what was called the *Minority Safepack. One million signature for diversity in Europe* to the European Commission. This initiative was aimed at proposing a series of legislative measures to protect and promote language minorities in Europe. For the first time ever, FUEN used a new European instrument of direct democracy implemented in 2012, the *European Citizens' Initiative* (ECI). The ECI states that if more than one million signatures from seven Member States are collected, the

European Commission must listen to the request expressed by the citizens and decide what action to take regarding the issue proposed.

On September 13<sup>th</sup>, 2013, the Commission poured cold water on the Initiative as it refused to register the *Minority SafePack*<sup>10</sup> on the basis that “there is no legal base in the Treaties” to foster legislative measures for RMLs in the EU. In so doing, the Commission closed the door to any action in the field of RML promotion. It is quite a paradox to note that two days before this decision, on 11 September 2013, the EP adopted by an overwhelming majority (92% of the votes) the *Resolution on Endangered European Languages and Linguistic Diversity in the European Union*, the *Alfonsi Resolution*, which called on the Commission, as highlighted in the introductory section of this report, to lay down specific European measures to preserve, protect, and promote endangered languages. Two EU institutions – the European Commission and the European Parliament – with two different, opposing views on what to do vis-à-vis RMLs.

The Commission’s refusal to register the *Minority SafePack Initiative* led FUEN to take the case before the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU). In ruling [T-646/13](#), of 3 February 2017, the CJEU annulled the Commission’s decision to reject the registration. Following the Court’s ruling, the Commission had no choice but to register the *Minority SafePack Initiative* in March 2017. It was a first, partial victory for FUEN and regional or minority languages.

For the *Minority SafePack* to be successful, FUEN had to collect more than one million signatures from seven Member States before 3 April 2018. It successfully gathered 1,128,422 valid statements of support and reached the necessary threshold in eleven Member States (out of the seven needed). On 15 October 2020, FUEN presented the *Minority SafePack Initiative* at a public hearing before the European Parliament in Brussels and at the European Parliament Plenary in Strasbourg on 14 December 2020. The proposals originally revolved around 11 issues, 9 of which were registered by the Commission. These were the following:

1. EU-Recommendation for the protection and promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity.

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<sup>10</sup> Commission Decision C(2013) 5969 final of 13 September 2013 refusing the request for registration of the proposed European citizens’ initiative entitled ‘*Minority SafePack – one million signatures for diversity in Europe*’.

2. Funding programmes for small linguistic communities.
3. The creation of a Language Diversity Centre.
4. The objectives of EU's regional development funds to include the protection of national minorities and the promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity.
5. Research about the added value of minorities to our societies and Europe.
6. Approximating equality for stateless minorities e.g., Roma.
7. A single European copyright law, so that services and broadcast can be enjoyed in the mother tongue.
8. Freedom of service and reception of audio-visual content in the minority region.
9. Block exemption of regional (state) support for minority culture, media and cultural heritage conservation.

On 17 December 2020, the EP expressed its support by adopting the *Resolution of 17 December 2020 on the European Citizens' Initiative 'Minority SafePack – one million signatures for diversity in Europe*, approved by a majority of the votes (524 out of the 694 MEPs present).

According to the ECI rules, the Commission was required to state its position vis-à-vis the *Minority SafePack's* concrete proposals. In January 2021, the Commission published the *Communication from the Commission on the Minority SafePack Initiative – one million signatures for diversity in Europe*, in which re-affirmed its position vis-à-vis RMLs in Europe.

The arguments used by the Commission follow the same line of reasoning: it acknowledges the importance of Europe's cultural and linguistic diversity but refuses to create a specific framework to protect RMLs for three main reasons:

- a) *There are already mechanisms in place such as the Council for Europe's Charter for Regional or Minority Languages or the European Centre for Modern Languages, with which it cooperates.*

This argument gives the implicit idea that no further action is needed.

- b) *All EU programmes are open to all languages.*

As we shall see in section 5.3 below, there are many Commission initiatives that are open to non-EU languages (Chinese, Ukrainian, Norwegian, Turkish, Icelandic, etc.) but not to RMLs.



c) *The Commission has no legislative competences to promote regional or minority languages.*

As reiterated above, EU action is possible in any policy field, including languages, through the *Open Method of Coordination*. This mechanism, as pointed out above, is useful to “provide orientation towards common outcomes or objectives in a given policy area” and an instrument to identify “good policy practice from among the grand reservoir of diverse policy approaches in the European arena”. Put in other terms, even if the EU has no competences in language policy, it can adopt measures of cooperation and support. It is a matter of political will.

Following the Commission’s decision, a variety of stakeholders – from European-wide associations such as the Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity (NPLD), the European Language Equality Network (ELEN), NGOs or regional governments expressed their disappointment on the Commission’s decision. Along these lines, a group of 70 MEPs, headed by the co-chairs of the Intergroup for Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages, François Alfonsi, Kinga Gál and Loránt Vincze, sent a [letter](#) to the president of the Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, expressing their disappointment at the decision, demanding that the reiterative EP petitions for the protection of RMLs be heard and urging the Commission to reconsider its position in the following terms:

*Together with the over 1.1 million European citizens who have put their trust in the very demanding procedure of the European Citizens Initiative, we express our deep disappointment at the decision of the College of Commissioners on the ECI Minority SafePack [...] With its decision, the Commission also disregarded the repeated calls of the European Parliament for the EU to support its traditional minorities, their languages and cultures.*

*The decision of the Commission is damaging for the democratic life of our Union, damaging for the trust of national and linguistic minority communities in our institutions and not least the EU’s internal and international credibility when standing up for our values. We can only hope that the Commission will correct this error in the future and give the Union’s national and linguistic minorities the attention they deserve.*

The Commission’s president response left no doubt: “the Commission considers that at this stage no new legal acts are necessary”<sup>11</sup>.

Against this scenario, on 24 March 2021 FUEN brought an action again before the CJEU requesting that the *Communication from the Commission on the Minority SafePack Initiative – one million signatures for diversity in Europe* be annulled. On 9 November 2022, the General Court of the CJEU confirmed the Commission’s decision of not taking any specific measures for RMLs. The Court justified its reasoning in the following terms:

*The action taken by the European Union to emphasise the importance of regional or minority languages and to promote cultural and linguistic diversity is sufficient to achieve the objectives of the initiative”<sup>12</sup>....The Commission has justifiably considered that the tasks performed, the objectives pursued and the activities undertaken by the Council of Europe’s European Centre for Modern Languages (‘the ECML’) are capable of contributing to the achievement of the objectives pursued by that proposal of strengthening awareness of the importance of, inter alia, regional or minority languages and of promoting diversity at various levels.*

Unsatisfied with the Court decision, FUEN filed an appeal with the CJEU on 23 January 2023. As stated by FUEN President and also MEP, Loránt Vincze, “we are confident that the Court of Justice will overrule the General Court's decision of last November [2022], which is not in line with its previous judgments concerning the European Citizens' Initiatives”<sup>13</sup>.

The *Minority SafePack Initiative* can be considered as the most ambitious bottom-up attempt to place regional and minority languages on the EU Agenda. The November 2022 Court decision represents a major setback in the promotion of RMLs in Europe. It remains to be seen whether the appeal filed in January 2023 will reverse this situation or will confirm the Commission’s decision to take no complementary actions vis-à-vis RMLs.

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<sup>11</sup> Full response by president Von der Leyen available here [Open letter to Mrs. Věra Jourová and Mrs. Ursula Von der Leyen on the Minority SafePack Initiative - Rasmus Andresen \(rasmus-andresen.eu\)](#)

<sup>12</sup> Case T-158/21. Judgement of the General Court (Eighth Chamber), 9 November 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Press release available at [Appeal filed against the lower court decision on the Minority SafePack \(fuen.org\)](#)

## KEY FINDINGS

1. The *Europe 2020* Agenda has prioritised languages from an economic perspective through **three** of its seven flagship initiatives: a) *Youth on the move*, which links languages to mobility and youth employment; b) the *Digital Agenda for Europe*, which speaks of the need to develop a new generation of web-based applications, including for multilingual content and services and c) *the Agenda for New Skills and Jobs* where languages are considered a strategic element for economic growth and jobs.
2. Regional and minority languages only appear in EU rhetoric and political statements but are not mentioned in any of the specific Commission's priorities of the *Europe 2020* Agenda. It can be claimed that the motto *United in Diversity* should only be regarded as a desirable principle of governance used in rhetorical speech and referring to the existence of linguistic diversity as an EU value and core principle. When referring to RMLs, that principle does not come with a set of concrete actions, recommendations or policy initiatives.
3. The *Europe 2020* Strategy has witnessed the consolidation of a dual terminology to refer to Europe's multiplicity of languages: *linguistic diversity* versus *multilingualism*. There are tensions between these two dimensions of the EU policy on multilingualism: a *sentimental dimension* under the term *linguistic diversity* and associated with the notions of culture, identity, respect, intercultural dialogue and EU values but without concrete policy initiatives (symbolic multilingualism) and the *utilitarian dimension*, which has been clearly prioritised and focuses entirely on the functional and economic importance of language skills and the economic value of languages for the economy, growth, and jobs. The first dimension –the sentimental one– is applied to the EU's RMLs whereas the utilitarian dimension is applied to (foreign) language learning.
4. Through constant resolutions and Parliamentary Questions, the EP has noted the alarming rate at which RMLs are disappearing and has repeatedly requested the Commission and the Council to take more action in the field of RMLs. The Commission justifies the lack of specific action for RMLs on the grounds that minority or endangered languages does not belong to the competences of the EU and is the sole responsibility of its Member States. It must be highlighted that cooperation in any policy field, including RMLs, is possible at EU level thanks to the so-called *Open Method of Coordination* (OMC), an EU instrument to identify "good policy practice from among the grand reservoir of diverse policy approaches in the European arena and propose common actions". Put in other terms, even if the EU has no competences in language policy, including RMLs, it can adopt measures of cooperation and support.

5. The *Europe 2020* decade has witnessed what is probably the most ambitious and far-reaching civil society initiative to place RMLs on the EU Agenda: *The Minority SafePack*, an initiative initiated by FUEN in 2013 which made a series of concrete policy recommendations to the Commission promote RMLs. The initiative faced political and legal opposition. As for political opposition, the Commission considered that additional measures to promote RMLs are not necessary and rejected the *Minority SafePack Initiative*. FUEN has taken the case to the CJEU, which confirmed the Commission's decision (2022). Unsatisfied with the CJEU, FUEN appealed the Court's decision (2023). Ten years after the initial proposal, the political and legal battle to place RMLs on the EU agenda remains open.

## 5.2 Language Policy Formulation: policies, institutional structures, funding and stakeholders

Following the public policy cycle, this section looks at the language policies formulated. This section will therefore analyse the following elements:

- 5.2.1 The EU **key policy priority areas** and how **RMLs** are embedded.
- 5.2.2 The **institutional structures** created for language policy formulation.
- 5.2.3 The **funding** allocated for languages, with a special focus on RMLs.
- 5.2.4 Identifying **stakeholders** working in the field of RMLs. Who is who?

### 5.2.1 The EU policy priorities on languages: an analysis

Language is a transversal issue that can be embedded into larger policy objectives. As such, language issues are present in practically all policies, from immigration (and the linguistic integration of migrants) to labelling and consumption (with the languages included in product labels) to name only a few. It is beyond the scope of this report to go into the daunting task of analysing the linguistic aspects of all EU policies. We shall therefore concentrate on those specific policies that have **languages as their main object of policy action**, with a special focus on RMLs.

As stated in section 5.1 above, the provisions related to languages appear explicitly mentioned in **three specific flagship initiatives** of the EU2020 strategy: *Youth on the Move* (2010); a *Digital Agenda for Europe* (2010) and, and very prominently, in the *Agenda for New Skills and Jobs* (2010). Within this framework, Member States are encouraged to develop a European framework defining the basic language skills that are needed to achieve the priority and strategic goals of economic growth and jobs.

Following these overarching EU priorities, the **policies formulated** during the *Europe 2020* strategy have had as their core objective to improve Europeans' language skills. We observe that the **field of education** has been the core area where languages have played a nuclear role. The focus on education and language is justified due to the relatively low level of foreign language skills by the European citizens, especially youngsters, and the need to increase their

knowledge. As we shall see in the lines that follow, all the policy priorities of the *Europe 2020* strategy have been geared towards achieving these goals.

As succinctly summarized in section 5.1 above, the European Commission published for the first time ever the *European Survey on Language Competences* (2012), which measured the level of foreign languages by young Europeans (14-15 years of age). As noted by the European Commission in a specific Eurobarometer on languages: “there is a gap between aspirations and reality when it comes to foreign language skills in practice: tests carried out among teenage pupils in 14 European countries show that only 42% are competent in their first foreign language and just 25% in their second. A significant number, 14% in the case of the first foreign language and 20% in the second, do not achieve even the level of 'basic user'.”<sup>14</sup> As stated by Commissioner Vassiliou (2010-2014) “we must also do more to improve the teaching and learning of languages. Being able to communicate in a foreign language broadens your horizons and opens doors; it makes you more employable and, in the case of businesses, it can open up more opportunities in the Single Market”<sup>15</sup>.

Within this framework, the Commission laid the foundations of the *Europe 2020* Strategy on language-in-education policies in the document *Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes*, presented also in 2012. The document highlighted the fact that “despite investment in many countries, education systems in a number of Member States are still not efficient enough to cope with today’s challenges”<sup>16</sup>, adding in its accompanying document<sup>17</sup> the following statement:

*Language skills are a “must” for the modern economy ... Europe’s vision for 2020 is to become a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy. Therefore, improving the outcomes of education and training and investing in skills in general – and language*

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<sup>14</sup> Press release: Eurobarometer: 98% say language learning is good for their children, but tests highlight skills gap (June 2012)

<sup>15</sup> European Commission Press Release of 21 June 2012  
[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_12\\_679](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_12_679)

<sup>16</sup> *Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes* COM(2012) 669 Final.  
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52012DC0669&from=EN>

<sup>17</sup> Commission Staff Working Document Language competences for employability, mobility and growth. Accompanying the document Communication from the Commission *Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes* /\* SWD/2012/0372 final \*/

*skills in particular – are important prerequisites to achieve the EU goal of increasing growth, creating jobs, promoting employability and increasing competitiveness. The ambition is to achieve better functioning of EU labour markets, to provide the right skills for the right jobs and to improve the quality of work and working conditions. In this context, foreign language proficiency is one of the main determinants of learning and professional mobility, as well as of domestic and international employability. Poor language skills thus constitute a major obstacle to free movement of workers and to the international competitiveness of EU enterprises (p.4).*

Language policies are justified on purely economic grounds. Europeans need better language skills to serve the labour market, increase employability and mobility. To achieve these goals, the European Commission states that “it will use European platforms of dialogue such as the Open Method of Coordination in the field of Education and Training [...] as well as the funding instruments to stress the sense of urgency on the priorities identified here.”<sup>18</sup>

As highlighted above, the EU has no competences on education or languages but can foster policy actions thanks to the OMC. The Commission “stresses the sense of urgency on the priorities identified [of investing in language skills]”. This sense of urgency is embedded at the core of the *Europe 2020* Agenda: the lack of language abilities is hindering labour mobility in the EU, the fact that only 42% of young students are competent in their first foreign language and just 25% in their second, as shown in the European Survey on Language Competences (2012) discussed above.

The policies formulated during the *Europe 2020* Strategy have revolved around the economisation of languages. This approach was initiated in the 2010 *Lisbon Strategy* and more specifically at the Presidency Conclusions of the European Council, held in Barcelona in 2002, which called for action “to improve the mastery of basic skills, in particular by teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age” (p.5). In language policy terms, the *Lisbon Strategy* resulted in what different authors have called “the disappearing EU society and the instrumentalization of languages” (Krzyzanowski & Wodak, 2011) or, put in other terms, the

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<sup>18</sup> *Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes* COM(2012) 669 Final.

adoption of a purely utilitarian dimension focusing entirely on the functional importance of language skills and the economic value of languages for the economy, growth and jobs.

This utilitarian approach – initiated in the 2010 *Lisbon Strategy* – has been fully developed during the *Europe 2020* strategy. We observe an evolution in the questioning of some concepts, more specifically the concept of *multilingualism* and *mother tongue*. As stated by the Commission itself: “Understanding and addressing today’s societal, economic and technological challenges requires ‘re-thinking’ some concepts of language learning, including literacy, multilingualism and mother tongue...The increasing number of multilingual children challenges us to fundamentally rethink language learning.”<sup>19</sup> (p.3). For the first time, the Commission acknowledges that the mother-tongue-plus-two policy must be adapted to the increasingly multilingual Europe:

*“An increasing number of young people in European school systems speak a different language at home than in the classroom. In 2015 and 2016 alone, more than 2.5 million asylum applications were made in European Member States, of which close to 550,000 were by children under the age of 14. More than one in ten 15-years old learners in European schools were first-or-second-generation migrants. We must ask how relevant is the ‘mother tongue plus two’ recommendation for those young people whose mother tongue is different from the language of schooling”?*<sup>20</sup> [emphasis added]

The new approach acknowledges that migration and mobility have resulted in a much more complex linguistic landscape and that the mother-tongue-plus-two policy adopted back in 2002 needs to be revisited. The revision of these old concepts is materialised in a new piece of legislation – in the form of recommendations – on language in education: the *Council Recommendation of 22 May 2019 on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages*, urging Member States to cooperate in the field of language learning in education systems. The 2019 Recommendation no longer speaks of mother tongue plus two, highlights the low level of competence in foreign languages by the European population (pointing at the abovementioned data), stresses the need for better multilingual competence to increase

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<sup>19</sup> European Commission (2017). *Rethinking language education in schools*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available <https://ecspm.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Rethinking-Language-Education.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> *Op.cit.*)



mobility and urges Member States to initiate reforms towards the development of a common European Education Area in 2025. The Recommendations urges Member States to rethink the teaching and learning of languages in the following manner.

*“Multilingual competence is at the heart of the vision of a European Education Area. With increasing mobility for education, training and work inside the Union, increasing migration from third countries into the Union, and the overall global cooperation, education and training systems need to reconsider the challenges in teaching and learning of languages and the opportunities provided by Europe's linguistic diversity”.*

As we shall see in section below, RMLs are absent in the new approach to multilingual competences in the EU.

#### ***5.2.1.1 Any place for RMLs in the new EU policy priorities on languages?***

The same sense of urgency to support the learning of (foreign) languages is not seen when it comes to the formulation of policies aimed at avoiding the loss of endangered languages. When requested by MEPs or other stakeholders to take action and formulate language policies to promote RMLs, the line of reasoning follows the same pattern: *“The Commission has no policy competence to adopt any measures concerning the preservation of endangered languages, as such policy falls under the responsibility of the Member States. Member States are expected to use all legal instruments available to them in order to guarantee that fundamental rights of national minorities living on their territories are protected in accordance with their constitutional order and obligations under international law, such as the European Charter for regional or minority languages of the Council of Europe”*. This was the answer<sup>21</sup> given by Commissioner Navracsics (2014-2019) when asked by an MEP through a PQ on whether the Commission intends to adopt the measures recommended in the 2013 *Resolution on Endangered Languages*<sup>22</sup>. The Commission's response leaves little room for interpretation: no action will be taken to promote RMLs.

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<sup>21</sup> Answer given by Commissioner Navracsics on behalf of the European Commission on 23 April 2015 [E-001410/2015 \(ASW\)](#)

<sup>22</sup> Parliamentary Question [E-001410/2015](#)

The demands to develop a specific line of action and a specific legal base for RMLs at EU level has been one of the most demanded issues during the 2020 decade, as shown in the PQs analysed and the *Minority SafePack Initiative* discussed in section 5.1 above. However, the Commission has continuously used the same line of reasoning to claim that RMLs fall outside the remit of its competences: language policies are mainstreamed and no specific policies or funding for RMLs are envisaged.

We must go back to the early 2000 to fully understand the lack of specific funding for RMLs. The first policy actions to support RMLs were developed thanks to a separate budget line, which allocated specific funding for projects on RMLs (budget line B3-1006, established at the insistence of the European Parliament in 1983, and maintained until 1998). Following the Court of Justice Judgement C-106/96 of 12 May 1998, the budget line was suspended, because of the lack of a legal basis. In 1999 and 2000 (through budget line B3-1000) funding continued as a pilot scheme to support the promotion of “lesser used languages and cultures”. From 2000 onwards, policy actions have been *mainstreamed*, that is, opened to all languages, irrespective of number of speakers, endangerment situation or specific needs.

The *mainstreaming* response has been systematically given by the Commission when asked for the specific policy actions aimed at supporting RMLs. “The Erasmus+ programme supports the learning of all languages, irrespective of their number of speakers. The learning of languages is streamlined throughout the programme so **there is no dedicated sub-programme supporting the learning and teaching of minority languages in particular**”. [emphasis added]. This was the response<sup>23</sup> given by Commissioner Navracsics to a PQ<sup>24</sup> on specific policy actions formulated to support RMLs in the field of education. Along the same lines, the Parliament requested the Commission for more information on “additional measures adopted [by the Commission] for the protection of linguistic minorities in Europe”.<sup>25</sup> The response followed the mainstreaming argument of “all programmes open to all languages”:

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<sup>23</sup> Commission written answer [E-003503/2016 \(ASW\)](#)

<sup>24</sup> Parliamentary Question *Multilingualism and support for the learning and teaching of minority languages* ([E-003503-16](#))

<sup>25</sup> Parliamentary Question *Protection of Minority Languages in Europe* [E-002634-18](#)

*With regard to the promotion of regional and minority languages, the European Union has the role of supporting and supplementing Member State action. In this respect, the Commission has adopted recently a proposal for a new Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to teaching and learning languages. This new initiative highlights the importance of valuing linguistic diversity in schools, including with reference to minority or migrant languages, and offers a comprehensive approach to improving language education in schools.<sup>26</sup>*

The analysis of the actual policy documents on languages shows that other than some descriptive publications such as the report *Teaching of Regional and Minority Languages in Schools in Europe* (Eurydice Report) published by the European Commission in 2019, RMLs are rarely mentioned specifically in the recommendations and are often covered under the umbrella term *linguistic diversity*.

The following table summarises the main policies formulated over the 2020 decade and analyses the place of RMLs within those policies. As we shall see, reference is almost non-existent.

**Table 5.** EU Policy developments on education and references to RMLs

Year	Policy	Approach	Reference to RMLs
2020	<i>Communication from the Commission on achieving the European Education Area by 2025</i>  COM(2020) 625 final	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Language learning and multilingualism: mobility to study and work abroad (economic approach).</li> <li>➤ Linguistic diversity: valorisation of Europe's diversity</li> <li>➤ Mobilisation of learners' linguistic backgrounds: specific mention to students with a migrant background.</li> <li>➤ Recommendation to "further implement the 2019 Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages".</li> </ul>	RMLs not explicitly mentioned (only the term "linguistic diversity")
2019	<i>Council Recommendation of 22 May 2019 on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Multilingual competences for mobility, jobs and economic growth in a context of increasing migration.</li> </ul>	Reference to RMLs is explicit but portrayed in a descriptive manner:  <i>"More than half of the Member States officially recognise regional or minority</i>

<sup>26</sup> Commission written answer [E-002634/2018 \(ASW\)](#)

	(2019/C 189/03)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Insistence on the need for a global education system.</li> </ul>	<i>languages within their borders. The languages added by the immigrant or refugee populations complete the linguistic picture in Europe”</i>
<b>2018</b>	<i>Commission Staff Working Document Accompanying the document Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages</i> SWD/2018/174 final	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Public opinion supports EU policies in the field of language learning</li> <li>➤ European Survey on Language Competences (ESLC) reveals low level of competence in foreign languages.</li> <li>➤ More action needed to foster (foreign) language learning</li> </ul>	Reference to the existence of RMLs in some regions. No specific action proposed.
<b>2012</b>	<i>Communication from the Commission. Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes</i> COM(2012) 669 final	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Exclusive focus on foreign languages; factor for competitiveness.</li> <li>➤ Languages: needed to increase levels of employability and mobility of young people.</li> <li>➤ Poor language skills: major obstacle. Businesses require the language skills to function in the global marketplace.</li> </ul>	No reference to RMLs
<b>2012</b>	<i>Commission Staff Working Document</i> <i>Language competences for employability, mobility and growth. Accompanying the document Communication from the Commission Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes /* SWD/2012/0372 final */</i>	Language competences will contribute to achieving the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy of growth and jobs.	No reference to RMLs
<b>2011</b>	Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 ‘Youth on the move’ — promoting the learning mobility of young people (2011/C 199/01)	Importance of language learning and acquiring intercultural competences starting at early stages of education, by encouraging quality linguistic and cultural preparation for mobility.	No reference to RMLs

Source: own elaboration

### 5.2.2 The institutional structures created for language policy formulation

As highlighted in the introductory section of this work, the analysis of the institutional structures put in place to develop any policy serves as an indicator of the importance, dimension and strategy given by the institution to that particular policy. The EU's language policy experienced a powerful momentum in the *Lisbon Strategy*, and more specifically during the period **2007-2010**, where the Commission created a **specific structure for languages: an entire portfolio devoted to multilingualism**. This period consolidated the market-oriented approach to languages, as shown by the different initiatives developed over this period:

- The elaboration of the *ELAN report Effects on the European Economy of Shortages of Foreign Language Skills in Enterprise* (2007), the goal of which was “to provide the Commission and decision-takers in Member States with practical information and analysis of the use of language skills by SMEs and the impact on business performance”.
- The creation of the *Business Forum on Multilingualism* (2007) aimed at “exploring how language skills can have an impact on trade and jobs in the European Union”, which issued, in turn, a series of recommendations in 2009.
- The creation of the *European Strategy for Multilingualism* (2008) and a series of initiatives such as the *Languages Help Businesses* (2009-2011) report, encouraging the Commission to incorporate the market-oriented approach to languages in the subsequent *Europe 2020* strategy.

As shown in the analysis above, the commodification of languages – initiated in the 2010 *Lisbon Strategy* – has also been at the core of the *Europe 2020* Strategy. However, this decade has witnessed a remarkable downsizing in the structures devoted to languages. The *Europe 2020* decade began with the suppression of the Commissioner for Multilingualism and the creation of a larger portfolio on Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth (Commissioner Androulla Vassiliou, 2010-2014). The downsizing culminated in the elimination of the term *languages* in the portfolio of Commissioner Tibor Navracsics for the period 2014-2019 (Education, Culture, Youth and Sport) as well as in the current Commission (Mariya Gabriel, Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, 2019-2024).

To the progressive elimination of the Multilingualism portfolio, we must add the reconfiguration of the Commission's unit dedicated to languages. Over the *2020* decade,

languages issues have oscillated between the Directorate-General on Education and the Directorate-General on Employment. Under the current Commission (2019-2024), languages are included in the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, in a unit called Schools & Multilingualism (EACB.2), in line with the prioritisation of languages in education discussed above. We have also observed the structural importance of languages in technology as we have detected a specific unit on multilingualism within the Directorate-General for Communications, Networks, Content and Technology (DG-CNECT) named *Accessibility, Multilingualism and Safer Internet* (CNECT.G.3). As we shall see in section 5.3 on projects executed, **education and language technologies are the two main areas of intervention.**

The downsizing in the Commission's formal structure has not stopped enhanced cooperation with Member States in matters related to languages through the *Open Method of Coordination*. This cooperation has been formally structured through the *Education and Training Strategic Framework* (ET 2020), and more specifically, through the creation of *Working Groups* (WG) composed by national experts nominated by each Member State as well as key external experts and stakeholders. The 2020 decade has witnessed a remarkable proliferation of WGs focused on the languages-for-growth-and-jobs approach. The following is the list of all the WGs created on languages over the decade:

- 2010-2011. *Thematic Working Group on Languages for Jobs*. Created by the Commission to make policy recommendations to Member States about the role of languages to increase employability. One tangible contribution of this WG was the *Languages for Jobs – delivering multilingual communication skills for the labour market* report (2011).
- 2012-2014. *Thematic Working Group on Languages in Education and Training*. The continuation of the WG on Languages for Jobs. In April 2012, the European Commission proposed creating this new WG. The focus was entirely on education, in line with the strategic priorities of the *Europe 2020* decade. The new mandate for this group included exploring new approaches to language learning and teaching for mobility and employability throughout the life span.
- 2014-2015. *Thematic Working Group on Transversal Skills*. This group focused on three separate sets of transversal skills: entrepreneurship, digital skills and languages, and built on the work completed by the previous working groups in these three areas. Languages were particularly relevant in this WG.

- 2016-2018. Setting of different ET 2020 Working Groups revolving around educational issues.
  - **Working Group on Schools:** focused on inclusive multilingual education within the framework of increasing migration.
  - **Working Group on Promoting Citizenship:** focused on languages for social cohesion, avoiding marginalization and encouraging the learning of the host society’s language for migrant integration.

As for RMLs, no WG has ever been proposed by the European Commission even if the possibility exists through the same OMC procedures. As pointed out above, the OMC is a useful mechanism that empowers the European Commission to undertake actions of cooperation and support deemed relevant at EU level. The analysis shows that the OMC has only been used to materialise the intended purpose of languages for growth and jobs and not RMLs

The only structure available promoted by an EU institution to channel the voice of RMLs is the EP’s *Intergroup Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages*. Its function is to promote awareness of national and linguistic minority issues in Europe. Originally established in 1983, the Intergroup has traditionally been a cross-party platform serving as a forum to exchange ideas and views on the situation and future of traditional minorities, national communities and languages. It should be noted that it is not a formal or permanent structure of the European Parliament<sup>27</sup>.

### 5.2.3 Funding for Regional or Minority Languages

Funding is probably one of the most debated issues when dealing with RMLs. As explained above, the 1998 Court of Justice Judgement C-106/96 suspended the specific budget line for RMLs because of the lack of a legal basis. In 1999 and 2000 (through budget line B3-1000), funding continued as a pilot scheme to support the promotion of “lesser used languages and

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<sup>27</sup> The role and task of the EP’s Intergroup is fully developed under section 5.2.4 on the *Stakeholders involved in RML promotion*.

cultures”. The specific budget line for such projects was suppressed in 2001. Since then, the Commission has refused to take any action along these lines, as noted in section 5.1.2 above.

The lack of specific funding for RMLs has been a source of concern not only for minority language communities themselves but also but several EU institutions, mainly the Committee of the Regions and the European Parliament. In its *2011 Opinion on Protecting and developing historical linguistic minorities under the Lisbon Treaty*<sup>28</sup>, the Committee of the Regions called for “a specific policy on linguistic minorities that is adequately funded and underpinned by a firmer legal basis”. As pointed above, the European Parliament has repeatedly requested specific funding for the EU’s most vulnerable languages: the 2013 Resolution on endangered European languages and linguistic diversity in the European Union highlighted the fact that endangered languages “do not receive enough specific attention within the Commission’s multilingualism policy”, acknowledged that funding for these languages has been diminishing over the years – “a situation that must not be allowed to continue into the next multiannual financial framework (2014 2020)”.

Along the same lines, one of the core demands of the *Minority SafePack Initiative* – as well as the minority communities themselves – has been to set specific funding programmes for RMLs. The Commission’s position has been clear on this issue: “the Commission considers that at this stage no new legal acts are necessary” responded the Commission’s president Von der Leyen to the letter signed by more than 70 MEPs requesting more action for RMLs within the framework of the *Minority SafePack Initiative*. The Court ruling of 9 November 2022 confirmed the Commission’s position vis-à-vis RMLs by stating that: “the action taken by the European Union to emphasise the importance of regional or minority languages and to promote cultural and linguistic diversity is sufficient to achieve the objectives of the [*Minority SafePack*] initiative”. The Court decision leaves little room for further action in the promotion of a specific budget line for RMLs.

The lack of a specific budget line for RMLs makes it difficult to assess as there no specific “entry point” where this information can be collected. As indicated by K. Cunningham, former senior policy officer on languages at the European Commission “RMLs are not a specific sub-

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<sup>28</sup> OJ C 259, 2.9.2011. *Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on ‘protecting and developing historical linguistic minorities under the Lisbon Treaty’*



category in any of our automatic data collection tools. It falls under language teaching and learning or in some cases other headings under the culture programme” (personal communication, July 14, 2020; in Kuipers-Zandberg & Schukking, 2021).

Despite the lack of a single entry point to analyse funding for RMLs, we have researched into different sources to offer an approximate analysis. The information collected comes from two different sources:

- a) **Primary sources:** these include the analysis of the specific programmes in which languages occupy a prominent position (collected using the different search platforms such as the *Erasmus+ Search Platform* or CORDIS, the European Commission's primary source of results from the projects funded by the EU's framework programmes for research and innovation (FP1 to *Horizon 2020*). These specific programmes include mainly *Erasmus+*, the EU funding programme for education, but also other programmes such as *Horizon 2020*, *Creative Europe*, *Europe for Citizens*, *European Territorial Cooperation/Interreg* programmes or through the European Structural and Investment Funds, to name only a few. Language, as a transversal issue, can be potentially present in practically all EU programmes. It is, however, beyond the scope of this research to go into all the programmes in detail.

Primary sources also include the following other sources:

- The answers given by the European Commission to the Parliamentary Questions posed by MEPs. As shown in section 5.1.2 above, funding is one of the main subjects of inquiry.
- The publication of the report *Linguistic Diversity in the European Union, the case of Regional and Minority Languages. Compilation of projects co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme and Creative Europe (2014-2020)*
- The briefing note submitted by the European Commission on RML support to the European Parliament and requested by MEP François Alfonsi.<sup>29</sup>

- b) **Secondary sources.** These include the two main publications dealing specifically with the issue of funding for RMLs over the past years:

- Kuipers-Zandberg, H., Schukking, A. (Climent-Ferrando, V; Van der Meer, C, coord.) (2021). *Accessibility for Regional or Minority Languages to EU*

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<sup>29</sup> Reference number *Ares (2021)7552283*. Date 07/12/2021

*Programmes. A practical Assessment* published by Mercator Research Centre.

- Gazzola, M., Grin, F., Häggman, J., & Moring, T. (2016). The EU's Financial Support for Regional or Minority Languages: A Historical Assessment. *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 33- 66.

One of the first observations, in line with the mainstreaming policy approach, is the lack of explicit reference to RMLs in the EU's funding programmes analysed. As shown in table 6 below, only the *Erasmus+* programme refers indirectly to minority communities in broad terms.

**Table 6.** References to languages in some of the EU's funding programmes

Programme	Period	Main objectives	Languages	Reference to RMLs
<i>Erasmus+</i>	2014-2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Social inclusion</li> <li>▪ Job opportunities</li> <li>▪ Adult learning</li> <li>▪ Collaboration &amp; mobility within EU partner countries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Multilingualism: one of its cornerstones</li> <li>➤ Language learning and linguistic diversity</li> </ul>	Specific mention: "people belonging to national or ethnic minority"
<i>Horizon 2020</i>	2018-2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Innovation</li> <li>▪ Science</li> <li>▪ Leadership</li> <li>▪ Societal challenges</li> </ul>	No specific mention	No specific mention. General mention "social/cultural diversity"
<i>Interreg</i>	2014-2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Research &amp; innovation</li> <li>▪ ICTs</li> <li>▪ Competitiveness &amp; SME</li> <li>▪ Low-carbon economy</li> <li>▪ Combating climate change</li> <li>▪ Environment and resource efficiency</li> <li>▪ Sustainable transport</li> <li>▪ Employment &amp; mobility</li> <li>▪ Social inclusion</li> <li>▪ Better education &amp; training</li> <li>▪ Better public administration</li> </ul>	Cultural diversity is mentioned. No specific mention on languages.	No specific mention.

<i>Creative Europe</i>	2014-2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Supporting culture and audio-visual sector</li> <li>▪ Cross-border cooperation</li> <li>▪ Networking</li> <li>▪ Literary translations</li> </ul>	Generic reference to “linguistic diversity”	RMLs mentioned in the FAQs. No further reference
Structural & investment Funds	2014-2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Research and innovation</li> <li>▪ Digital technologies</li> <li>▪ Supporting the low-carbon economy</li> <li>▪ Sustainable management of natural resources</li> <li>▪ Small businesses</li> </ul>	No specific mention	No specific mention

**Source:** adapted from Kuipers-Zandberg &Schukking (2021)

This lack of concrete reference to RMLs has been object of scrutiny by the European Parliament. A specific PQ on funding was posed by MEP Loránt Vincze<sup>30</sup> on why “*Erasmus+* is the only programme that mentions RMLs, but these languages are marginally present in EU funding”, to which Commissioner Gabriel responded that “based on projects’ summaries accessible in the Erasmus+ Projects Results’ Platform, a minimum of 440 projects have addressed aspects of minority languages under Erasmus+”.<sup>31</sup>

Following the response by Commissioner Gabriel, we have conducted research in the [Erasmus+ Project Results Database](#) to obtain more information about these 440 projects. We have used the following keywords: *multilingualism; linguistic diversity; regional languages; minority languages; endangered languages and “teaching and learning of foreign languages”* (the latter term appears as a predefined term in the database).

In line with the strategic priority of the *Europe 2020* strategy, language learning/teaching in education is by far the area with more projects funded under the Erasmus+ programme, with more than 22,000 projects funded over the period 2014-2020. As for RMLs, the results are remarkable lower: 62 projects when we use the term “*minority languages*”; 18 projects when

<sup>30</sup> *EU support for the promotion of multilingual education with special regard to regional and minority languages (PQ E-000590/2022)*

<sup>31</sup> Answer given by Ms. Gabriel on behalf of the European Commission [E-000590/2022 \(ASW\)](#).

we use the term “*regional languages*” and 10 projects when we search through the term “*endangered languages*”. It should be said that some of the projects under the heading “*linguistic diversity*” or “*multilingualism*” might also include RMLs. Table 7 below provides an overview of the results obtained.

**Table 7:** Number of projects related to languages in the Erasmus+ programme (2014-2020)

<b>Erasmus +</b>	<b>No of projects</b>
<i>All Erasmus+ projects (2014-2020)</i>	172,678
<b>Keyword</b>	
<i>Teaching and learning of foreign languages</i>	22,278
<i>Multilingualism</i>	1,862
<i>Linguistic diversity</i>	1,009
<i>Minority languages</i>	62
<i>Regional languages</i>	18
<i>Endangered languages</i>	10

**Source:** own elaboration

As a transversal issue, language projects can also be potentially funded under many other EU programmes. We have also analysed those programmes where RMLs are likely to be funded. These are *Creative Europe*, *Horizon 2020*, *European Regional Funds* and *Social Cohesion Funds* and *Interreg*.

The *Creative Europe* programme covers broadly the culture and the media sectors. Projects can be searched through the [Creative Europe Project Search Platform](#). As shown in table 8 below, translation is the activity where more projects have been funded 286 (out of 4,709 projects funded by the programme during the 2014-2020 period). Some of these projects might also include RMLs. Only four projects mention specifically RMLs.

**Table 8.** Number of projects related to languages in the *Creative Europe* programme (2014-2020)

<b>ALL</b>	<b>N. of projects</b>
<i>Creative Europe (2014-2020)</i>	4,709
<b>Keyword</b>	
<i>Translation</i>	286
<i>Linguistic diversity</i>	48

<i>Multilingualism</i>	3
<i>Minority languages</i>	4
<i>Regional languages</i>	No results
<i>Endangered languages</i>	No results

**Source:** own elaboration using the *Creative Europe Project Results Platform*

The *Creative Europe* programme also includes the *European Capitals of Culture* initiative. Over the period analysed, two capitals of culture – Donostia-San Sebastian 2016 and Leeuwarden 2018 – have incorporated RMLs as a core element in their cultural projects.

*Horizon 2020* represented the EU’s research and innovation programme for the period 2014-2020. Project funding is searched through the [CORDIS](#) database (the European Commission's primary source of results from the projects funded by the EU's framework programmes for research and innovation). Some 12 projects directly refer directly to minority languages whereas 6 include the specific term “endangered languages”, as shown in table 9 below.

**Table 9.** Number of projects related to languages in the *Horizon 2020* programme

Keyword	Number of projects
<i>Multilingualism</i>	57
<i>Linguistic diversity</i>	45
<i>Minority languages</i>	12
<i>Regional languages</i>	2
<i>Endangered languages</i>	6

**Source:** own elaboration (search comprising the period 2014-2022)

Another source of information has been the new (2022) European Commission’s portal [Kohesio](#). It is a new online platform containing information of all EU-funded projects since 2014 under the following programmes: *European Regional Development Fund* (ERDF), the *Cohesion Fund*, and the *European Social Fund* (ESF).

The search for funded projects related to languages has yielded to the following results, summarized in table 10 below:

**Table 10.** Number of projects related to languages retrieved through the *Kohesio* Search Platform

Keyword	Number of projects
<i>Multilingualism</i>	792
<i>Linguistic diversity</i>	30

<i>Minority languages</i>	4
<i>Regional languages</i>	3
<i>Endangered languages</i>	No results

**Source:** own elaboration

As for the *Interreg* programmes, the search platform used ([Interreg Europe. Approved projects](#)) did not yield to any results. This confirms the recent findings by Kuipers-Zandberg & Schukking (2021), which claim that “no specific data could be found”. These authors propose the use of the [Keep.eu](#) database and conclude that “according to this database, there were only two *Interreg* projects that had a focus on RMLs. It has become clear that it is not possible to get a complete overview through the database, and it is impossible to tell how many projects truly had RML as (one of) their objectives” (p.28). The two projects retrieved through the [Keep.eu](#) database are listed in table 11 below.

**Table 11.** Number of projects related to languages retrieved through the [Keep.eu](#) platform

Project	Description	Budget
<i>Collaboration platform for minority languages at Nordkalotten</i>  Year: 2020-2021	Cooperation between speakers of minority languages in the borders of Sweden and Norway (Torpedal and Kven populations).	Total budget/expenditure: EUR 201 426.00  EU funding: €130 726.00  Full information <a href="#">here</a>
<i>Enhanced Access in School Yordaneshty and Balcauti cross-border rural area between Romania and Ukraine</i>  Year: 2020-2022	Improving access to education and the quality of education including the teaching of minority languages in rural communities located in the Romanian-Ukrainian border area by rehabilitating the educational infrastructure, endowing the schools with new technologies.	Total budget/expenditure: EUR 329 202.00  EU funding: €296 281.00  Full information <a href="#">here</a>

**Source:** own elaboration

One the elements found is the considerable amount of funding for language technologies (LT). As we shall see in section 5.3.3 below, this domain has experienced a powerful momentum over the period analysed and the projects executed during this period are remarkable, especially during the second half of the 2020 decade. As indicated by acting director of DG Connect, Javier Hernández-Ros in his presentation on *Multilingualism and Language Technologies in the EU*, “over 200 MEUR funding to date has been devoted to supporting R&I projects on machine translation development, computer-assisted translation, neural machine translation,

speech technologies and language resources in *Horizon 2020* (2014-2020) and in the F7 Programme (2007-2013)”.

Following the data compiled and shown in the preceding table, we have calculated a rough estimate of the percentage of funding allocated to RMLs. To do so, we have confronted the total amount of projects related to languages and the projects specifically related to RMLs (obtained under the keywords *regional languages, minority languages, endangered languages*). We must emphasise that this is a rough estimate given the lack of specific data on RMLs. This estimate allows us to have a general overview of the weight of RMLs in EU funding.

**Table 12.** Funding for languages and for RMLs over the period 2014-2020 (estimate)

Programme	Total number of projects devoted to languages	Projects related to RMLs (in relation with total number of projects on languages)	
		Absolute No.	%
<i>Erasmus+</i>	22,278	100	0.0044
<i>Creative Europe</i>	337	3	0.89
<i>Horizon 2020</i>	102	12	11.7
<i>Regional Funds (Cohesion Funds, Social Funds; Regional Development Funds)</i>	822	7	0.85
<i>Interreg</i>	Not available	2	Not available

**Source:** own elaboration

It is quite a paradox to note that despite the Commission’s reiterative statements on the lack of a specific line of action and funding for RMLs, it recently launched (2022) a specific call on *Safeguarding Endangered Languages in Europe*, under the *Horizon Europe Framework Programme*<sup>32</sup> aimed at achieving the following outcomes:

- *Enhance cooperation at the European level between key actors and stakeholders within endangered languages communities.*
- *Empower local communities and promote citizens’ engagement in the sustainable management of their own linguistic resources, in line with the principles of the Faro Convention.*

<sup>32</sup> *Research and innovation on cultural heritage and CCIs - 2022 (HORIZON-CL2-2022-HERITAGE-01)*

- *Suggest strategies to involve young people in the (re)discovery of their linguistic heritage and its importance for the development of their identity and community building.*
- *Promote equality and linguistic diversity in line with the EU's motto 'United in Diversity' and its work to reinforce the central role of multilingualism in Europe.*
- *Strengthen the identification, inventory and transmission of regional, minority and local languages as vehicles of oral expressions and traditions, in line with the principles of the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.*

Funding for this project amounted to 3 MEUR over the period 2023-2025 and was awarded to one single consortium ([RISE UP. Revitalising Languages and Safeguarding Cultural Diversity](#))<sup>33</sup>. It is somewhat surprising to read the constant reminders by the European Commission of lack of competences to develop actions related to RMLs and, at the same time, observe that this type of calls – a very rare exception we must say – are launched. This type of initiative is the tangible evidence that it is perfectly plausible, within the current EU policy framework, to develop specific actions aimed at supporting RMLs. It is a matter of political will.

#### **5.2.4 Stakeholders working in the field of RMLs. Who is who?**

This section provides an overview on who is who in the promotion of RMLs at EU level, the channels available to participate in policy making and how (or if) their demands are (partially) satisfied.

Over the 2020 decade, three have been the main stakeholders working specifically to promote RMLs at EU level: the **Federal Union of European Nationalities** (FUEN), the **Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity** (NPLD) and the **European Language Equality Network** (ELEN).

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<sup>33</sup> Grant Agreement: 101095048 (2023-2025)



**FUEN** was founded in 1949 and comprises today more than 100 organisations from 36 countries across Europe (not just the EU). It works on issues related to national minorities, not only language.

The **NPLD** was created in 2008 to raise the voice of Regional and Minority Languages in Europe. The Network includes more than 40 members, mainly regional governments (13), universities, NGOs and language associations across Europe. It is mainly the regional governments and institutional voice of Europe's RMLs.

**ELEN** was established in 2011 based on the former **European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages, Eurolang (EBLUL)** and currently comprises more than 60 organisations, from umbrella organisations to individual language NGOs. It is mainly the civil society voice on RMLs in Europe.

To these three main lobby and advocacy networks at EU level we must add a network focused exclusively on academic and policy research related to RMLs in Europe: the **Mercator Research Network**. It was founded in 1987 by three institutions: Mercator Education (the forerunner of Mercator European Research Centre), Mercator Legislation (CIEMEN, University of Barcelona) and Mercator Media (University of Aberystwyth, United Kingdom). Each focused on a different aspect of multilingualism and the position of minority languages. The Network has incorporated two other institutions: the Research Institute for Linguistics - Eötvös Loránd Research Network (Budapest, Hungary) and the Institute for Slavic and Baltic languages, Finnish, Dutch and German (University of Stockholm, Sweden).

Other than in their habitual interaction with EU officials, these stakeholders have been able to channel their claims to the EU institutions through three main formalised participation channels<sup>34</sup> over the period analysed (other than their regular bilateral contact with EU institutions):

- a) The Civil Society Platform on Multilingualism, European Commission (2009-2014).
- b) The Intergroup for Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages at the European Parliament.

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<sup>34</sup> To these channels we must add the *Minority SafePack* Initiative, initiated by FUEN in 2013 thanks to the *European Citizens' Initiative*, a new (2012) citizens participation channel in EU policy making, as explained in section 5.1 above.

c) The Conference on the future of Europe (2021-2022).

- a) **The Civil Society Platform on Multilingualism (CSPM)** was launched in October 2009 by the European Commission as a platform to hear proposals in the field of multilingualism (not just RMLs) useful for the design and implementation of the subsequent 2014-2020 funding programmes.

The CSPM set four working groups (WGs) to debate these issues:

**WG1: Education** (including language learning, minority languages, lesser used languages, early language learning, motivation and promotion).

**WG2: Linguistic diversity** and social inclusion (minorities, host country language learning, intercultural dialogue).

**WG3: Translation and terminology** (literary translation, subtitling, culture, terminology).

**WG4: Language policy and planning.**

The CSPM was formed by 29 members, which submitted its [policy recommendations](#) for the areas that specifically concern it. The **specific recommendations on RMLs** revolved around the following core ideas:

- Strong support for the 2013 EP Resolution on Endangered Languages and Linguistic Diversity.
- Direct support to endangered languages through a specific budget line.
- Creation of an EU Language Observatory.
- Creation of a Language Ombudsperson to work on language discrimination issues
- EU Directive on language rights.

None of these proposals were incorporated in the 2014-2020 financial framework. The CSPM came to an end in 2014<sup>35</sup>. However, in late 2015, the new administration of the European Commission – which had decided in 2014 to suspend the autonomous Multilingualism Unit of the DG Education and Culture – decided not to continue with the CSPM.

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<sup>35</sup> For a full account of the CSPM history, please visit the following site [Our History – ECSPM](#)

Despite this decision, some members of the CSPM decided to continue but as **the voice of the civil society**, not of the Commission, or any other supra-national or governmental body. With a slightly different name and the acronym ECSPM (*European Civil Society Platform on Multilingualism*), what was a just body of European associations became a legal entity with its own rules and priorities with regard to multilingualism issues and ways of operating. It has now a solid structure and is fully operative.

**b) The Intergroup for Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages at the European Parliament**

As pointed out in section 5.2.2 above, the Intergroup was created in 1983 and serves as a meeting point for EP political groups, institutions, NGOs and language communities' representatives. It is an unofficial structure of the European Parliament where MEPs from different political parties and minority language communities themselves exchange views on a regular basis on national and minority language issues. The Intergroup has been key in making RMLs visible at EU level as it has brought the main stakeholders together, promoted EP actions (reports, resolutions...) which have served to ensure that RML issues are on the EU agenda.

**c) The Conference on the future of Europe (2021-2022)**

The Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) was a series of consultations between April 2021 and May 2022 aiming to collect ideas for EU reform from European citizens and to implement the proposals emanated from EU citizens themselves. This participation channel must be interpreted in a broader context: it comes at a time where there is a widely shared view that there is democratic deficit in the EU and citizens feel detached from EU politics.

The above-mentioned three organisations – FUEN, NPLD and ELEN – actively participated in the CoFoE and submitted a series of proposals aimed at ensuring that RMLs are included in the EU agenda. The following table summarises the proposals of each organisation to the CoFoE.

**Table 13.** Proposals of ELEN, FUEN and NPLD to the CoFoE

Proposals on RMLs by FUEN, ELEN, NPLD		
FUEN	ELEN	NPLD
An EU policy framework for the benefit of persons belonging to autochthonous national and linguistic minorities	Regulation/ Directive for Endangered Languages	The promotion and protection of the European linguistic diversity
Incorporating the monitoring of the situation of autochthonous national and linguistic minorities into the EU's rule-of-law monitoring mechanism	EU Languages Commissioner, with the remit to ensure minoritised language rights	
Protecting autochthonous national and linguistic minorities by making the Copenhagen criteria a continuous obligation for all Member States	Regulation/ Directive for minoritised language rights	
Building a common framework of EU minimum standards for the protection of rights of persons belonging to national and linguistic minorities		
Protecting autochthonous national and linguistic minorities through legislation, the promotion of existing best practices and stepping up against attempts to restrict their rights		
Protecting autochthonous national and linguistic minorities through strengthened cooperation on standards and rights between the EU and the Council of Europe		
Protecting vulnerable regional and minority languages through the establishment of a European Language Diversity Centre		
Promoting cultural diversity and rights of autochthonous national and linguistic minorities through unrestricted cross-border access to audio-visual services for EU citizens		

**Source:** own elaboration

The different citizens' proposals made at the CoFoE were collected and published in the report *Conference on the future of Europe. Report on the Final Outcome* of May 2022. The report makes **one direct reference to RMLs**. It is included under *Proposal 48. Culture and Exchanges* in the following way:

*Promote multilingualism as a bridge to other cultures from an early age. Minority and regional languages require additional protection, taking note of the Council of Europe Convention on Minority Languages and the Framework Convention for the*

*Protection of National Minorities. The EU should consider setting up an institution promoting language diversity at the European level.*

It is quite a paradox that citizens demand **additional protection for RMLs** and the creation of an institution promoting linguistic diversity at EU level while, at the same time, the Commission considers that it is already doing enough for RMLs, as observed in its response to the *Minority SafePack Initiative*, analysed above.

This is clear example of the **mismatch between citizens and EU institutions**: a top-down approach – where the Commission refuses to develop any specific line for RMLs on the grounds that it is beyond its competences – vis-à-vis a more bottom-up societal demands, which claim more EU action for RMLs.

## **KEY FINDINGS**

1. The 2020 decade has witnessed a proliferation of Working Groups created within the framework of the OMC through which Member States have cooperated in the field of language-in-education policies. This has been possible with the support of statistics, benchmarks, indicators and guidelines on language competences fostered by the Commission (European Survey on Language Competences, Eurobarometer on Europeans and their Languages, etc.) which point at the need for youngsters to improve their level of foreign languages for mobility, growth and competitiveness purposes. No Working Group on RMLs has been created, and data at EU level on the current situation of RMLs is non-existent.
2. There is also a lack on data on specific funding for RMLs, which does not allow us to offer a detailed, fully-fledged analysis of the number of RMLs projects funded by the EU. The absence of easily accessible figures only allows us to provide approximate figures. The figures available show that funding for RMLs continues to be minimal.
3. The civil society has been key in demanding more EU action to RMLs. There have been numerous initiatives over the past decade: the *Minority SafePack Initiative*, the Conference on the Future of Europe and the Civil Society Platform on Multilingualism have all advocated for the need of stronger EU support to RMLs. To these we must add the different organisations working in the field of RMLs – FUEN, NPLD and ELEN – comprising regional governments, NGOs and language associations working to promote RMLs at EU level.
4. The civil society demands for more EU support on RMLs do not match EU action: the Commission often reiterates the fact that RMLs are beyond its remit and that no additional actions on RMLs are necessary. There is a widening mismatch between the civil society and the EU institutions.
5. Despite the insistence on the lack of competences on RMLs, the Commission recently launched (2022) a specific call to protect Europe’s most vulnerable languages: *Safeguarding Endangered Languages in Europe*, under the *Horizon Europe Framework Programme*. This shows that it is perfectly plausible to develop a specific line of action for RMLs within the current EU legal framework. It is a matter of political will.

### 5.3 Policy implementation: from language policy goals to concrete language policy actions

This section analyses the concrete **policies implemented** aimed at promoting languages at EU level, with **special emphasis on RMLs**. It will analyse how the policy goals highlighted in section 5.2 are **materialised into concrete policy actions**. It will specifically look at how RMLs are embedded – or omitted – in the policy actions developed.

As shown in the preceding section, the analysis of the different type of projects implemented shows that **education** has been, by far, the area in which more projects on languages have been implemented, in line with the strategic priorities of the *Europe 2020* Strategy. Another important line of policy observed has been projects related to **Language Technologies (LT)**. The number of EU initiatives executed in this sphere has grown exponentially over the past few years. These two areas of action – education and LT – have been complemented with constant statistics, benchmarks and data to legitimate policy action. As we shall see in the following three sections, the absence of RMLs in EU policy actions is creating a **widening gap between EU official languages and RMLs**.

#### 5.3.1 Data to legitimate policy actions

One of the main policy actions executed in the field of languages in education during the *Europe 2020* decade has been the systematic collection of data on foreign language competences by the European population, especially by young people. Initiated with the first-ever [European Survey on Language Competences \(ESLC\)](#) in 2012 (analysed above), the decade has witnessed a whole range of initiatives aimed at providing information on foreign language competences needed for the labour market and monitoring. These concrete actions have been justified through three main arguments:

- Lack of data on actual language skills of people in the EU and the need for a reliable European-wide system to measure progress achieved.
- Low level of competences in both first and second foreign languages in Europe.
- The need for language competences to prepare all pupils for further education and the labour market.

To these actions we must add the periodic statistics on foreign language competences published by the European Commission on a regular basis<sup>36</sup> aimed at monitoring progress and providing information on the current state of affairs.

The series of studies, indicators and benchmarks published over the decade have been used to legitimise and consolidate the implementation of language policies with an exclusive market-oriented mindset, justified by repeating the same refrain: Europeans lack foreign language skills for mobility, growth and jobs and, therefore, action is needed in this field.

The compilation and repetition of statistical indicators and the elaboration of an interwoven set of concepts, slogans and buzzwords over the decade have consolidated a hegemonic paradigm on languages in the EU, which considers them as mere commodities from an economic point of view, in what has been referred to as the new *political economy of multilingualism*, as explained in section 5.1 above.

**No statistics, benchmarks or indicators are promoted at EU level on RMLs**, despite the alarming rate at which they are declining or despite the insistence by the EP and the civil society urging for more action at EU level. The reiterative attempts by MEPs to raise this issue – through the resolutions, initiatives or PQs highlighted in the preceding pages – have been met with the same type of reply: “Language policy at national level including the protection of regional, minority or endangered languages does not belong to the competences of the EU and is the sole responsibility of its Member States”<sup>37</sup> .

As acknowledged by the Commission itself: “With regard to the promotion of regional and minority languages, the European Union has the role of supporting and supplementing Member State action”<sup>38</sup>. However, actions geared towards mapping the reality of RMLs through indicators, benchmarks or statistics are absent, even if they could very well qualify as “supplementing actions”. Put in other terms, the EU recognises and values linguistic diversity, including RMLs, but **data are only promoted when referring to foreign languages**. To date,

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<sup>36</sup> For a full account, please visit [Foreign language skills statistics - Statistics Explained \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&plugin=1)

<sup>37</sup> Response given by Commissioner Navracsics to [PQ E-005776/2015](#)

<sup>38</sup> Response given by the Vice-president of the European Commission, Ms. Jourová, to [PQ E-002634/2018 \(ASW\)](#)



the EU has no data on the degree of endangerment of the different minority languages of Europe as actions at EU level on this issue have been absent in the Europe 2020 agenda.

As shown under section 5.2.3, only recently (2022), the Commission launched the *Safeguarding Endangered Languages in Europe*, through the Horizon Coordination and Support Action, aimed at creating a “European language preservation ecosystem [...] and analysing the sociolinguistic, legal and economic situation of European endangered languages, of the reasons behind their endangered status”<sup>39</sup>. It remains to be seen whether the winning project – [RISE UP](#), which will run from 2023-2025 – will serve as the basis to map the current state of affairs.

### **5.3.2 Languages in education: a key EU priority on education and training**

As summarized in table 5 above, education has been the key area in which language policies have been implemented mainly through the *Erasmus +* programme and, to a much lesser extent, *Creative Europe* (broader issues on Culture) and *Horizon 2020* (mainly research), which are open to all languages, including RMLs. To analyse the different projects executed under these programmes, we have looked mainly into the [Erasmus+ Project Research Portal](#), which includes the list of the main projects funded and executed over the period 2014-2020. We have also looked at the report [Linguistic Diversity in the European Union: the case of Regional and Minority Languages Compilation of projects co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme and Creative Europe \(2014-2020\)](#), which has provided an overview of the specific projects funded by the EU and executed by minority language communities themselves.

The analysis of the language projects executed show a difference between those referring to RMLs and those referring to the rest of EU languages. Projects on RMLs focus mainly on valuing diversity, fostering local identity, preserving languages, and exchanging good practices on issues related to language revitalization in schools<sup>40</sup>. By contrast, we observe that projects related to languages in general (not specific to RMLs) focus on issues such as communication in foreign languages, mobility of students and teachers, and the use of English as a language

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<sup>39</sup> *Safeguarding endangered languages in Europe*. Topic ID: HORIZON-CL2-2022-HERITAGE-01-01

<sup>40</sup> For a general overview of EU-funded projects on RMLs, see the publication [The case of Regional and Minority Languages Compilation of projects co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme and Creative Europe \(2014-2020\)](#)

of instruction in school subjects (CLIL, Content Language Integrated Learning), in line with the priorities of student mobility and foreign language learning of the decade.

The analysis confirms the symbolic-pragmatic dichotomy approach to languages highlighted above. On the one hand, we observe a line of projects focused on the “harder priorities” of multilingualism – labour market mobility, competitiveness, growth and jobs – and, on the other, projects related to “softer” issues (inclusion, values, identity and preservation), which are those projects in which RMLs take part. This confirms what was highlighted in section 5.1.1 above: “Multilingualism and linguistic diversity are sometimes conflicting policy agendas. Language learning policy has tended to be influenced by ‘harder’ priorities like economic competitiveness and labour market mobility, and linguistic diversity policies by ‘softer’ issues like inclusion and human rights. Multilingualism policy has been more highly prioritised than linguistic diversity policy in terms of concrete actions”.

This gap between the different “categories” of language becomes evident in many of the Commission’s policy initiatives and has **negative consequences for RMLs**. One of the most evident examples is the *Online Linguistic Support (OLS)* platform. It is an online platform launched by the European Commission in 2014 designed to “help Erasmus+ participants improve their knowledge of the language in which they will work, study or volunteer abroad”. The platform consists of mandatory language tests which participants are required to take before their period abroad. After the test, they are offered optional language courses which are designed to help them. The OLS was created “as the lack of language skills remains one of the main barriers to the participation in European education, training and youth mobility opportunities”.<sup>41</sup>

Over the period 2014-2020, more than 2 million *Erasmus+* participants have benefited from OLS’ assessment tools and almost one million (963,000 participants) have taken language courses to improve their language skills, as indicated in the Erasmus+ 2020 annual report<sup>42</sup> (p.26).

As of 1<sup>st</sup> July 2022, the OLS is available through the EU Academy website and is available in the EU’s 24 official languages plus in other non-EU official languages such as Icelandic,

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<sup>41</sup> [Online Language Support | Erasmus+ \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu/erasmus-plus/online-linguistic-support)

<sup>42</sup> The full Erasmus + 2020 Evaluation report can be viewed here: [Erasmus+ annual report 2020 - Publications Office of the EU \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu/erasmus-plus/annual-report-2020)

Norwegian, Turkish, Macedonian or Serbian. To this we must add the *OLS for Refugees Initiative*, against the background of increasing migration flows into the EU after 2015. This initiative added Arabic to the list of languages.

**RMLs**, however, are **absent from the OLS initiative**. By excluding RMLs from the OLS initiative, the Commission widens the gap between those languages that are perceived as useful and important to learn for mobility and job purposes, and those that are not, exacerbating the abovementioned symbolic-pragmatic multilingualism dichotomy. This, in turn, shapes the perception of individuals on languages: whereas some are visible, useful and necessary, others are deemed as irrelevant from the main EU initiatives on education and languages.

Over the past few years, several MEPs have repeatedly requested the Commission to explain the reasoning behind the decision of omitting RMLs from this initiative: MEPs D. Riba and J. Solè posed the question Languages in the *Erasmus+ OLS platform* (PQ [E-002531/2022](#)) on 7 July 2022 and MEP I. Bilbao posed a question (PQ [E-002490/2022](#)) on 8 July 2022 about the exclusion of RMLs from the OLS digital platform to which the European Commission responded in the following terms:

*“The Online Language Support platform (OLS) now provides language learning content and language community building in all languages listed in Article 55 of the Treaty on European Union as well as in the official languages of non-EU countries formally associated to the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes. While recognising the great contribution made by more than 60 regional or minority languages to Europe’s cultural and educational diversity, the Commission is not envisaging to expand the number of languages currently covered by the Online Language Support platform.*

*The Spanish Erasmus+ National Agency, (SEPIE — Servicio Español para la internacionalización de la educación), is fully aware of this situation, and they did not submit an official request for Catalan, Galician and Basque to be included in the OLS.”<sup>43</sup>*

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<sup>43</sup>Joint answer given on 9 September 2022 by Ms. Gabriel on behalf of the European Commission [E-002490/2022 \(ASW\)](#)

Following the response, the NPLD Chair, M. Sureda, met with Commission's official in charge of Multilingualism & Schools, Anna Solè, on 28 November 2022 to formally request the inclusion of RMLs in the OLS. Parallel to this, the EP's Intergroup for Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages has included this issue on the subjects to be discussed during its February 2023 meeting. It remains to be seen whether these reiterative requests will result in the inclusion of RMLs into the OLS platform.

Along the same lines, *Europass* – a European Commission initiative aimed at helping young people create CVs, cover letters and to find jobs and courses in the EU – offers information in the 24 official languages plus other non-EU official languages such as Turkish, Macedonian, Norwegian and Icelandic. Once again, **RMLs are excluded from *Europass***, conveying the message that RMLs are not useful to find a job.

We can find a wide range of other initiatives in which RMLs are formally excluded from participating: the *Juvenes Traslatores*, a language competition in schools among European youngsters to reward the best translators in the EU and foster intercultural dialogue – only available in the 24 EU official languages.

By omitting RMLs from these and other initiatives, the Commission further exacerbates the symbolic-pragmatic multilingualism dichotomy highlighted above: some languages are deemed useful and necessary while others (RMLs) are considered irrelevant – given that they are absent from EU policy action. This, in turn, creates an artificial hierarchy through which languages are ranked and perceived as more or less necessary, qualifying some languages and disqualifying others.

### 5.3.3 Language technologies: a widening gap between RMLs and EU official languages

The analysis of the different projects executed over the 2020 decade has brought to the surface the pivotal importance of **Language Technologies (LT)**. LT Projects have been implemented mainly through the *Horizon 2020* programme but also under *Erasmus+*<sup>44</sup>. As indicated in

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<sup>44</sup> See, for instance, the *Digital Language Diversity Project (DLDP)*, funded under *Erasmus+* No. 2015-1-IT02-KA204-015090, specifically for Regional and Minority Languages, the *European Language Equality (ELE)* project, which has received funding from the European Union under the grant agreements № LC-01641480 – 101018166 (ELE) and № LC-01884166 – 101075356 (ELE 2) or the different EU funded projects funded developed by **META-NET** (Multilingual Europe Technology Alliance) through *Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation programme*: [CRACKER](#) (grant agreement no.: 645357). Formerly co-funded by FP7 and ICT PSP through the contracts [T4ME](#) (grant agreement no.: 249119), [CESAR](#) (grant agreement no.:

section 5.2.3 above, over 200 MEUR 200 MEUR funding to date has been devoted to supporting R&I projects on machine translation development, computer-assisted translation, neural machine translation, speech technologies and language resources in *Horizon 2020* (2014-2020) and in the *F7 Programme* (2007-2013).

One of the most direct observations from the analysis is that language technologies have gone from research laboratories into numerous industrial applications in many different areas over the past few years. These applications include spelling and grammar checkers, speech and speaker recognition, machine translation for text and audio, speech synthesis, spoken dialogue, text and document understanding, generation and summarization, as well as sentiment and opinion analysis, question answering, information retrieval and knowledge access, etc.

There are many known examples of what has been referred to as *Artificial Intelligence* (AI) in our daily lives. We can think of digital personal assistants (e.g., Siri or Alexa), intelligent cars, chatbots (e.g., in banking or customer support), finance, health care or agriculture. Over the past years, the number of concrete applications of AI products has increased exponentially. Thanks to the growing attention and intensified efforts invested, AI is now advancing rapidly and applies to a variety of fields, including health care, manufacturing, administration – or cross-border communication.

These new technological products are mainly based on the training of neural algorithms on large amounts of textual and oral data. The most recent technological breakthroughs, namely transformer-based models, transfer learning techniques or deep neural machine translation have shown great potential for democratising access to advanced solutions also for under-resourced languages, helping bring leading technologies to languages with smaller markets by substantially reducing application development costs. For this to happen, we need adequate policies aimed at ensuring that all language communities produce these textual and oral data which, in turn, are inserted in open-source (multilingual) software.

The analysis of the *Europe 2020* Strategy has shown that LTs have ranked high on the EU agenda. This is perceived by the remarkably large number of projects funded by the EU over

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271022), [METANET4U](#) (grant agreement no.: 270893) and [META-NORD](#) (grant agreement no.: 270899), among many others.

this period, as shown above. We have observed that the executing of these projects has been developed mainly through the creation of different LT Consortiums. The following lines are aimed at analysing the creation of these consortiums, their specific policy proposals and the inclusion/omission of RMLs in their reflections.

#### *5.3.3.1 META. Laying the foundations for an EU approach to LT (2010-2020)*

The *Multilingual Europe Technology Alliance* (META) is a consortium of researchers, commercial technology providers, private and corporate language technology users, language professionals and other information society stakeholders aimed at laying the foundations for a technologically multilingual Europe. It was created within the framework of the 2010 Digital Agenda and importance of a truly multilingual Digital Single Market (DSM). 60 leading research centres in 34 European countries created META-NET, a Network of Excellence dedicated to the technological foundations of a multilingual, inclusive, innovative and reflective European society. META-NET was partially funded by different EU projects T4ME (2010–2013; FP7), CESAR, METANET4U and META-NORD (2011– 2013; ICT-PSP), CRACKER (2015-2017, Horizon 2020).

Among the different tasks developed, we could highlight two:

1. [White paper series: Europe’s Languages in the Digital Age](#). A comprehensive study on 30 European languages that measured the level of digital vitality and level of support in terms of LT. It was a landmark publication as, for the first time, more than 200 experts presented a compendium on the main findings and challenges in 2012. It also included some RMLs: Welsh, Basque, Galician and Catalan. Welsh, Basque and Galician are considered to have “week or non-existent support” while Catalan is considered “fragmentary”.
2. The publication of the [Strategic Research Agenda for Multilingual Europe 2020](#), providing recommendations on how to address the gaps and problems and identifying priority research themes for European LT.

Both sets of documents emphasize the fact that the differences in technology support between English and the rest of languages is widening: “**Especially dramatic and alarming are the under-resourced languages**” while a “a particularly sensitive case is that of minority

languages, where language technology should be developed rapidly to help minority-language speakers access the Information Society” (p.60)

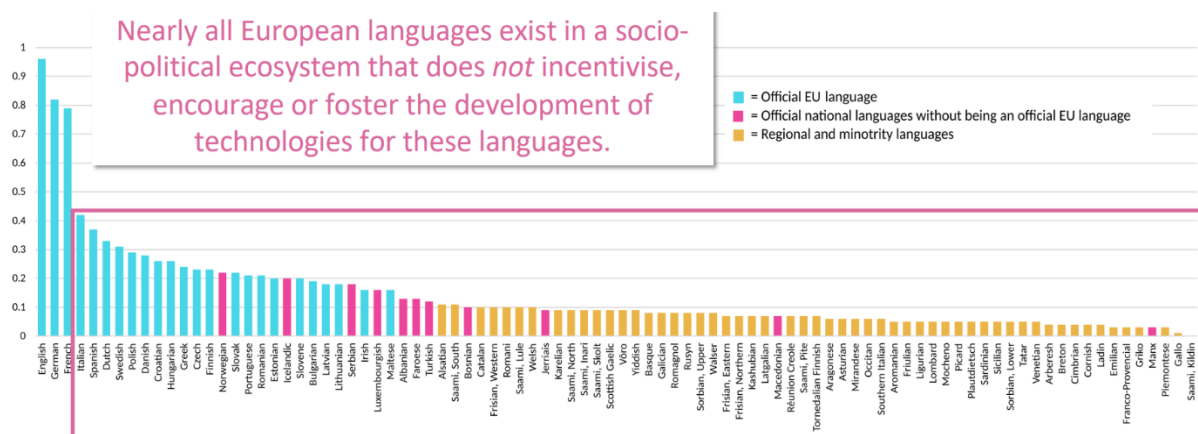
### 5.3.3.2 ELE: The European Language Equality Consortium (2021-2023)

The [European Language Equality Consortium](#) (ELE) was set to provide an update on the research undertaken by META-NET and propose a roadmap for achieving full digital language equality in Europe by 2030.

ELE was composed of 52 partners during the first term (January 2021-June 2022) whose main goal was to develop a strategic research, innovation and implementation agenda. The second phase of the project (ELE2) is composed of 7 members and runs from July 2022 to June 2023 has the goal of creating the *Roadmap for Language Equality* in the EU by 2030. ELE has received funding from the European Union under the grant agreements № LC-01641480 – 101018166 (ELE) and № LC-01884166 – 101075356 (ELE 2).

ELE has updated the META-NET White Paper Series, which dated from 2012, to include the recent developments on LT over the 2012-2022 period. It provides, therefore, recent information from all 30 languages included in the META-NET plus a large number of RMLs, covering up to [80 languages](#). ELE offers an in-depth analysis of the current situation of most European languages, as highlighted in figure 3 below, which shows the level of support (contextual score) to the different European languages, including RMLs. As show in the image, RMLs are the ones lagging in terms of technology support.

**Figure 3.** Level of LT support to European languages



Source: [Recommendations towards full language equality by 2030](#) ELE (2022)

Against this background, ELE 2 is entirely focused on the creation of a *European Roadmap for Language Equality in the EU* by 2030, identifying language resources and tools that are needed to level up the technological support for each language covered. It is worth noting that ELE 2 will cover more than 80 languages, including the main RMLs in Europe<sup>45</sup>.

The main parts of the roadmap are to provide the path and means needed to implement the Strategic Research, Innovation and Implementation Agenda (SRIIA), which has two main goals:

- Societal and economic goal: digital language equality (DLE) in Europe in 2030.
- Scientific goal: reach deep natural language understanding (DNLU) via state-of-the-art AI techniques in 2030.

The Roadmap's recommendations include EU-level legal protection for over 60 regional and minority languages and a virtual centre for language diversity, coordinated by ELE, comprised of leading LT/AI centres across Europe. It also recommends promoting a pan-European network of research centres, promoting that all EU-funded projects have a language diversity plan and that they develop better benchmarks and datasets for all languages, including RMLs.

### ***5.3.3.3 The European Language Grid (2019-2021)***

The history of the European Language Grid (ELG) dates back to 2010 and the original [META-NET](#) cluster of projects (T4ME, CESAR, METANET4U, META-NORD). Back then, it was suggested to create the "European Service Platform for Language Technologies" in 2013.

Against this background, the ELG was formally initiated in 2019 to gather all the different LTs and develop the primary [Platform for Language Technologies in Europe](#). The European Language Grid initiative has a network of 32 National Competence Centres (NCCs). The NCCs act as local and national bridges to the ELG consortium and the European Language Grid. The ELG received funding from the European Union's *Horizon 2020* research and innovation programme under grant agreement № 825627.

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<sup>45</sup> The list of languages covered can be viewed [here](#).



#### *5.3.3.4 The European Language Resource Coordination (2015-2022) and the Language Data Space (2023-onwards)*

The European Language Resource Coordination ([ELRC](#)) was launched by the European Commission to collect language resources for building machine translation systems for public service administrations across all EU Member States plus Iceland and Norway. This initiative became an unprecedented public-sector data collection effort. It aimed not only to close the gap between the capabilities of the current Machine Translation (MT) systems offered by the European Commission to the national administrations and the actual, day-to-day requirements of national public services across Europe, but also to support EU official languages plus Norwegian and Icelandic at the grass-roots level.

The ELRC has managed, maintained and coordinated the relevant language resources in all official languages of the EU and CEF associated countries. These activities have helped to improve the quality, coverage and performance of automated translation solutions in the context of current and future digital services but only in the EU's official languages plus those of the CEF associated countries. RMLs have remained outside its remit, creating a gap between the different types of languages.

ELRC ended in December 2022 and has shifted to the so-called *Language Data Space* (LDS), which will change the Language Resources collection approach from mainly public administration-centered towards business-oriented. The shift from ELRC to LDS is aimed at helping the European industry to compete globally with the LT services and to build trust throughout the language data sharing process.

#### *5.3.3.5 The Digital Language Diversity Project (September 2015-August 2018)*

The Digital Language Diversity Project ([DLDP](#)) focused exclusively on RMLs and the urgent need to include them in the digital world by empowering their speakers with the knowledge and abilities to create and share content on digital devices using their minority languages.

It focused on four main lines of action:

1. Creation of a survey on digital use and usability of regional and minority languages, detailing actual digital linguistic diversity in Europe and, in particular, the digital fitness of four regional/minority languages spoken in Europe: Basque in Spain, Breton in France, Karelian in Finland, Sardinian in Italy.
2. A Europe-wide applicable training programme targeted to regional and minority languages speakers to guide them towards effective production of digital content and language learning materials in their languages.
3. Recommendations about what needs and can be done for a language “to go digital”: challenges and difficulties, areas to be addressed, tools are available. These recommendations have been transformed into the so-called “digital language survival kit” – a tool for self-assessing the digital fitness of languages other than those comprised in the case study.
4. The creation of a *Roadmap to digital language diversity* for stakeholders and policy makers, detailing the institutional and technological challenges as well as the proposed solutions for paving the way to a more widespread use of all European languages over digital devices.

The DLDP Consortium was composed by five partners and was funded by *Erasmus+* No. 2015-1-IT02-KA204-015090. The results of these four lines of action are available through the [DLDP website](#).

The following table provides a succinct overview of the different consortia, the LT projects executed Ts, funding allocated under the different funding programmes (mainly *Horizon 2020* and *Erasmus +*), and the inclusion/omission of RMLs in their approach to LT.

**Table 14.** Language Technology projects and the inclusion of RMLs

<b>Consortium</b>	<b>Lines of action</b>	<b>EU funding</b>	<b>Weigh of RMLs</b>
<b>META-NET</b>	<p><a href="#">Europe’s Languages in the Digital Age. White Paper Series.</a></p> <p><a href="#">Strategic Research Agenda for Multilingual Europe 2020</a></p>	T4ME (2010–2013; FP7), CESAR, METANET4U and META-NORD (2011–2013; ICT-PSP), CRACKER (2015-2017, Horizon 2020).	<p>Includes analysis of four RMLs: Basque, Catalan, Galician and Welsh.</p> <p>Highlights that “A particularly sensitive case is that of less-resourced languages, where language technology should be developed rapidly to help minority-language speakers access education and the Information Society”.</p>
<b>ELE &amp; ELE2</b>	<p>Update of Europe’s Languages in the Digital Age (2022), covering some <a href="#">80 languages</a>.</p> <p><a href="#">Roadmap for Language Equality by 2030</a></p>	<p>ELE: Grant agreement № 01641480 – 101018166</p> <p>ELE2: Grant agreement № LC-01884166 – 101075356.</p>	<p>Full incorporation of RMLs in their work.</p> <p>Proposal to create EU digital protection for RMLs and a virtual centre for language diversity.</p>
<b>ELG</b>	Creation of a <a href="#">Platform for Language Technologies in Europe</a>	Horizon 2020: grant agreement № 825627	Open to all languages. No distinction between EU official or RMLs
<b>ELRC→LDS</b>	European Commission initiative to build <a href="#">MT systems for public administration in the EU</a> (plus Iceland and Norway).		Exclusion of RMLs. It only refers to “national languages” (but inclusion of non-EU languages such as Icelandic and Norwegian).
<b>DLDP</b>	Concrete <a href="#">tools and recommendations</a> specifically for RMLS	Erasmus+ No. 2015-1-IT02-KA204-015090	RMLs are the target languages

Source: own elaboration

### 5.3.3.6 The key role of the EP in the promotion of LT and languages

The European Parliament has been the leading institution at EU level in the promotion of inclusive LTs for all languages, irrespective of number of speakers or official status.

As highlighted in section 5.1, the EP adopted in 2018 its own-initiative *Resolution on Language Equality in the Digital Age*<sup>46</sup>, pointing at the urgent need to adopt holistic approach on LTs, expressing its concern about the digital extinction of under-resourced languages, especially RMLs. In its Resolution, the EP calls for a large-scale, long-term coordinated funding programme for research, development and innovation in the field of language technologies, at European, national and regional levels, tailored specifically to Europe's needs and demands. It could be claimed that the creation of the above-mentioned consortia responds to this recommendation.

The 2018 Resolution comes as the tangible result of ongoing EP debates around LT within the framework of *STOA, the Panel for the Future of Science and Technology of the European Parliament*. STOA is an official organ of the EP, active since 1987, responsible for technology assessment. Its task is to carry out expert, independent assessments of the impact of new technologies and identify long-term, strategic policy options useful to the Parliament's committees in their policy-making role. STOA's work is carried out in partnership with external experts.

Within this framework, STOA has held several workshops specifically related to LTs in the context of EU multilingualism:

In 2022, the [workshop](#) *Towards full digital language equality in a multilingual European Union* presented the results of the ELE project and the Roadmap towards full digital language equality by 2030.

In 2017, the [workshop](#) *Language equality in the digital age: Towards a Human Language Project* analysed the current status and trends of LT and the social – and linguistic – implication of not having a balanced level of technological support for all European Languages. The discussions of this workshop served as the basis for the 2018 EP Resolution.

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<sup>46</sup> European Parliament resolution of 11 September 2018 on language equality in the digital age ([2018/2028\(INI\)](#))

In 2013, the [workshop](#) *State of the art in machine translation - current challenges and future opportunities* analysed the different applications of MT and their use in public services and companies at that time.

The line of action undertaken by STOA on LT have served to lay the foundations for an informed debate at EU level on the contextual conditions needed for all European language to be digitally alive, which has been materialized in the publication of different research pieces of work such as the study [What if everyone spoke the same language](#) (2022) and the [Language equality in the digital age: Towards a Human Language Project](#) (2017).

#### ***5.3.3.7 Multilingualism and the Digital Single Market: increasing digital language inequalities***

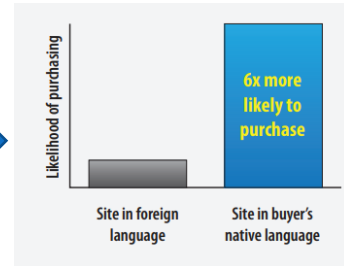
The different lines of action and projects on LT highlighted above have been implemented in the context of the *Digital Agenda for Europe* for the *Europe 2020* strategy, which speaks of the need “to develop a new generation of web-based applications and services, including for multilingual content and services, by supporting standards and open platforms through EU-funded programmes”, and most notably, the [Digital Single Market Strategy](#) (DSMS) adopted in 2015 as one of the Commission’s 10 political priorities of the second half of the 2020 decade.

The primary goal of the DSMS is to break down barriers of online activity and ensure that hurdles that restrict online access to goods and services are removed. Put in other terms, the idea of the DSMS is to go from 27 national digital markets to a single one. In this sense, the “language component” is a crucial ingredient. Unlike other markets such as China or the US, a single digital “European market” as such does not yet exist. It is still a collection of many separate smaller markets, divided by national regulations as well as different languages, including state languages but also RMLs.

Against this background, one may assume that an English-only DSM is the ideal solution for a unified DSM. The data available show quite the opposite. The study [Strategic Agenda for the Multilingual Single Market](#), published in 2015 within the framework of the Riga Summit

towards a Multilingual Single Market in 2015<sup>47</sup> – provides concrete data on the current language demands of Europeans, which show that RMLs are also requested in the digital sphere. Some concrete data will help us illustrate this point:

Customers are six times more likely to buy from sites in their native language



### English is not the answer

52% of EU customers **do not purchase** from English-language sites.

Adding even a few languages to an SME's website beyond English can have a **major impact on revenue**. Large organizations today often localize products and websites into fifty or more languages to increase market share.



52% of EU customers ***do not*** purchase from English-language sites.

Online content in hitherto dominant languages is declining and “long-tail” languages are rising. Absolute numbers are rising for all languages, and much more significantly so for less common languages.



One **concrete example**: *Basque, Galician, and Catalan* all have an increasing share vis-a-vis Spanish; even though the numbers are small, they indicate a long-term shift.

Adding even a few languages to an SME's website beyond English can have a major impact on revenue



Large organizations today often ***localize products and websites*** to increase market share

<sup>47</sup> The report was one of the tangible results of two *Horizon 2020* projects: *CRACKER* (Horizon 2020, grant agreement No 645357) and *LT Observatory* (Horizon 2020 grant agreement No 644583)

More than half of EU citizens → language-blocked from participation in European Commission’s initiatives



**290 million EU citizens excluded**

Over half of EU citizens are language blocked from interacting with the European Commission’s web resources for citizen participation.

Speakers of English, French, German can participate fully

Speakers of other languages are language blocked from full participation

This is confirmed by the recent EP study (October 2022) *The European Union’s approach to multilingualism in its own communications policy*, which concludes that “the language regimes of EU institutions, bodies and agencies are not sufficiently transparent and formalised. The regimes are sometimes not specified or are often unclear. Similarly, most EU institutions and bodies have published a website language policy, but most agencies have not done so. This is inconsistent with European Ombudsman recommendations calling for the policy on the use of official EU languages to be clearly defined and published”. (p.11).

Along the same lines, as analysed under section 5.1 above and summarised in table 4, one of the main language concerns of the EP – channelled to the Commission through numerous Parliamentary Questions – has been the increasing presence of English to the detriment of other official languages.

Language Technologies (machine translation, neural machine translation, etc.) are key if we want a full, equitable DSM.



Translation opens **20 times its cost** in revenue opportunity. However, **translation remains too expensive** for many European SMEs, blocking this opportunity and limiting economic growth in Europe. Lowering these costs is a strategic opportunity for high-quality automatic translation.

### 5.3.3.8 The European Commission’s approach to multilingualism in its own LT and digital policy

In parallel to the different research and innovation-oriented projects executed on LT and AI funded through *Horizon 2020*, the European Commission has implemented its own approach on LT and AI in its multilingualism policy, applied mainly through the Directorate-General of Communications Networks, Content and Technology (DG CONECT) – more specifically the

*Accessibility, Multilingualism and Safer Internet Unit* – in close cooperation with Directorate-General for Translation.

To understand the current use of LT and AI within the EU, we must go back to the early 90's and the creation of EURAMIS (the *European Advanced Multilingual Information System*), the translation memory build by the European Commission provided by all EU institutions. This large multilingual corpus – only available for the EU official languages – has been the basis for the Machine Translation Engine used today by the European Commission.

The Commission's Machine Translation Service has been the basis of the so-called *Connecting Europe Facility Automated Translation Building Block* (CEF.AT). The CEF.AT is a service offered by the European Commission to help European and state public administrations exchange information across language barriers in the EU. The ultimate purpose of CEF.AT is to make all Digital Service Infrastructures (DSIs) multilingual.

Unlike general-purpose web translators, CEF.AT is adapted to specific terminology and text types that are typical for the usage context (e.g., tender documents, legal texts, medical terminology), given that it has been feed by the millions of sentences translated over the years and managed by EURAMIS. It enables multilingual operation of digital services and can be used to reduce the time and cost of translating documents.

The promotion of the use of common building blocks is a way to lower barriers for technical integration and provide tried and tested solution components that will speed up the delivery of Digital Public Services, that work across borders, in a cost-efficient manner. The goal of the CEF Automated Translation building block is to setup a platform enabling multilingualism of public digital services and public administration, facilitating the interactions with and between actors in the EU Member States. It has three specific goals:

- a. To integrate AT in digital services so that public administration, citizens and businesses in the EU can use these services in their own language.
- b. Support the work of translators through AT services.
- c. to facilitate cross-border information exchange.



Machine Translation at the European Commission is operational since June 2013 and is currently used by EU institutions and bodies as well as Public Administrations in the EU Member States and EEA countries.

Building on these MT services, the European Commission launched on 15 November 2017 *e-Translation*, an online machine translation service intended for European public administrations, SMEs, University language faculties, or for *Connecting Europe Facility* projects. It has reused its linguistic data (EURAMIS database) by feeding it into the development of new tools and applying cutting-edge AI technology to these data. e-Translation also applies Neural Machine Translation (NMT). NMT is a sub-field of MT utilizing neural network techniques to predict the likelihood of words in sequence. For NMT to work properly, we must train the network with millions of sentence pairs (translations already done and validated in the past through EURAMIS). NMT represents a huge leap forward and a new paradigm that is transforming our economy and society, as language technologies are behind virtual every product we use.

For all languages to be included in this new paradigm, we must have millions of sentence pairs in the different languages to train the network and make it neural. And this is where the problem arises. RMLs have not been given access to any of the EU language management resources, despite the technical feasibility, the reiterative claims made by the RML communities themselves and despite all the recommendations by all experts on the need to include under-resourced languages in all digital and LT developments.

The following lines include some concrete Commission LT services that exclude RMLs and are creating a widening gap between EU official languages (plus other State languages) and RMLs:

### ***The EURAMIS database***

As highlighted above, the *European Advanced Multilingual Information System* (EURAMIS) is the translation memory build by the European Commission and serving all EU institutions. It is an enormous multilingual corpus built over the past 30 years, with millions of sentences translated into the different official languages. It is the basis for the current Machine Translation Engine used by the Commission.

**EURAMIS** has **only been accessible for the EU official languages**, even if some RMLs have long battled to be able to use it (and therefore feed the machine). It is worth mentioning the case of Catalan. The European Commission has a representation office in Barcelona – covering Catalonia and the Balearic Islands – with an in-house translator (DGT Field Officer) in charge of translating/drafting EU documents in(to) Catalan. It is the only EU Commission representation office in a territory with a regional language (and an official language in that particular region). Despite the amount of documentation translated on a daily basis, the in-house translator at the Barcelona office is not allowed to officially use EURAMIS in her daily activities. This has a perverse effect: the segments (texts) translated into Catalan are not incorporated into the EURAMIS translation memory and, therefore, the engine is not fed, even if it is technically feasible. It is a political issue rather than a technical one.

***IATE: the EU's inter-institutional terminology database***

IATE is the interactive terminology database containing more than 8 million terms of EU jargon. It is the largest terminology database in the world today and it is only available for the EU's 24 official languages. IATE was launched in 1999 and was opened to the public in 2007. The year 2018 represented another milestone for IATE with the launch of a new version, fully redesigned through new technologies. In 2020, its public version received 36.5 million queries.

Once again, the database is **only open to the 24 official languages**. At the insistence of the Catalan authorities, the Terminology Coordination Unit of the European Parliament (TERMCOORD) and the Catalan Center for Terminology (TERMCAT), reached an agreement to enrich the contents of IATE. TERMCAT will provide with new terminology in Catalan to feed the database. However, the Catalan terms are only available for the internal version of IATE and not the public one, which has two practical negative consequences:

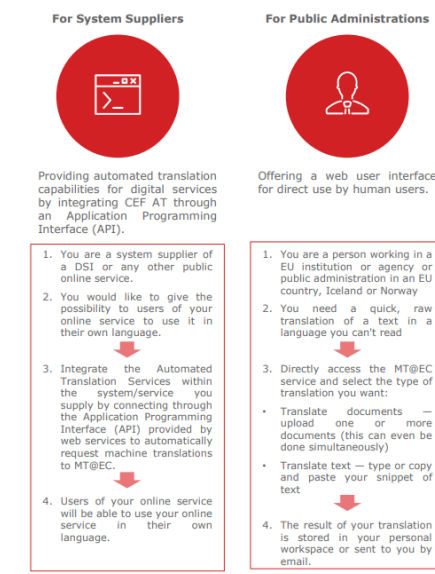
1. A practical consequence: users – from language professionals, academia, national experts, language policy advisors, etc. – cannot access the information in Catalan as it is only available internally (translators and terminologists within the institutions). It is quite a paradox that it is only available internally as translators and terminologists within the EU do not need Catalan terms in their daily activities.
2. A symbolic consequence: Catalan is not on the list of the IATE languages available online. The Catalan agreement, therefore, is only partial and rather symbolic in nature.

The rest of European RMLs do not have access to IATE in any of its forms, which, again, has a perverse effect: the EU jargon, which is increasingly used in everyday life, is not developed in any RML. Each regional language must set its own terminology centre at their own expense and without cooperation with EU institutions.

### *The CEF.AT Building blocks*

As highlighted above, the *Connecting Europe Facility Automated Translation Building Block* (CEF.AT) is a service offered by the European Commission to help European and state public administrations exchange information across language barriers in the EU. The ultimate purpose of CEF.AT is to make all Digital Service Infrastructures (DSIs) multilingual. It is offered as a service in two different ways: for system suppliers and for public administrations. Figure 4 below show how CEF:AT works:

**Figure 4:** Functioning of Building blocks



**This system is available in the 24 languages and open to two non-EU official languages: Icelandic and Norwegian. RMLs are excluded.**

### *E-translation: the Commission's Machine Translation Service*

This new online machine translation service (2017) is being increasingly used to automatically translate Commission's website and services. It is offered in **the 24 official languages plus Norwegian, Icelandic, Turkish, Chinese, Japanese, Russian and Arabic**. The service is not available for RMLs. While drafting this report, the Commission launched a call to seek reliable

data in Ukrainian to train the Commission’s automated translation services and incorporated the Ukrainian language, as shown below:



The analysis shows that **RMLs have been completely neglected from all the Commission’s digital language tools.** None of the services of the European Commission is offered in any RMLs. Given that e-translation is increasingly becoming an integrated service of the Commission, also available for Europe’s SMEs, universities, public administrations, etc., it is creating an increasingly widening gap between languages – the 24 official languages plus a handful of other State languages – and RMLs. If RMLs are not incorporated, the **disparities between the official languages and RMLs different languages will be irreversible.**

It is a paradox to note that all *Horizon 2020*-funded projects point at the urgent need to incorporate lesser-resourced languages and minority languages into the digital domain to avoid language inequalities and highlight that LT have the potential to overcome the linguistic divide in the digital sphere. However, in its own LT policy, the Commission continues to widen language disparities by excluding RMLs in all its LT tools.

## **KEY FINDINGS**

1. Education and Language Technologies are the two policy areas where languages have been prioritised during the *Europe 2020*. Whereas EU programmes are open to all languages, the Commission's initiatives exclude RMLs.
2. In the field of **education**, RMLs are not included in any of the Commission's initiatives aimed at fostering linguistic diversity for mobility, cultural and economic purposes. Examples identified include the **Online Linguistic Support**, offered for the EU's 24 official languages plus other non-EU official languages such as Icelandic, Norwegian, Turkish, Macedonian or Serbian; **Europass**, offered in the 24 official languages plus other non-EU official languages such as Turkish, Macedonian, Norwegian and Icelandic; or the **Juvenes Translatores** contest, available only for the 24 official languages.
3. In the field of **Language Technologies**, the Commission's initiatives also exclude RMLs: **EURAMIS** (the Commission's translation memory available only in 24 official languages), **IATE** (the interactive terminology database available only in 24 official languages); the **Connecting Europe Facility Automated Translation Building Block** (CEF.AT), a service offered by the European Commission to help European and state public administrations exchange information across language barriers in the EU (available in the 24 official languages + Icelandic and Norwegian) or the **E-translation**, the Commission's machine translation service (available in the 24 official languages + Norwegian, Icelandic, Turkish, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Arabic and soon in Ukrainian).
4. It is quite a paradox to note that while all EU-funded LT projects conclude that it is of paramount importance to include RMLs to avoid digital extinction but, at the same time, the Commission excludes them from its own LT services, widening language disparities.
5. The exclusion of RMLs in the Commission's initiatives is creating a widening gap between the languages deemed useful, necessary and linked to progress and growth while others – regional and minority languages – are absent and considered irrelevant. This, in turn, creates an artificial hierarchy through which languages are ranked and perceived as more or less necessary. If RMLs are not incorporated in the new AI technologies, the extinction rate will accelerate and the damage to Europe's linguistic diversity will be irreversible.

## 5.4 Evaluation of results: effects and consequences of the EU's language policy vis-à-vis RMLs

The final phase of the policy process is aimed at evaluating the language policies developed and analysed in the previous phases through three different criteria: the **effectiveness** of language policies, their **practical effects** and the **consequences** for regional or minority languages.

As shown during the analysis of the three previous phases, languages have occupied a prominent position during the *Europe 2020* strategy in two domains primarily: education and technology. **In education**, languages have been mainly subordinated to the economic goals of growth, competitiveness and jobs. The analysis has shown a systematic reference in policy actions to the improve European's *foreign language skills* and *foreign language competences* in school, adopting a mere functional approach which places languages at the service of the economy.

To support policy action, a series of benchmarks, studies and indicators on foreign language skills have been systematically published over the decade. The benchmark framework has been equated with a skills-based approach in terms of the language skills requirements needed for functional communication. The notion of functional communication applied to languages is further reflected in the task-based character of the performance descriptors associated with benchmarks: each 'benchmark' describes 'a person's ability to use foreign languages to accomplish a set of tasks.

By transferring the economic rhetoric into the language policy sphere, the EU has followed a pattern of *entextualization*, that is, it has inserted a market-oriented narrative into the metadiscursive sphere of languages, indicating the preferred ways of "reading" these policies, a strategic practice often aimed at the acceptance of a certain metadiscourse by a community. In so doing, languages, especially hegemonic languages, have gradually become commodities, which have now become an essential skill from a market perspective, equalized to other type of skills needed in the labour market such as numeracy, digital or ICT skills.

This has had **practical effects** for RMLs: from a discursive point of view, they are symbolically recognised – under the umbrella term of linguistic diversity – as a core element of Europe's

values and identity but they are only associated to the notions of identity and sentimental value, but not useful to the economy. We have therefore observed two opposing approaches to languages: a **sentimental dimension** under the name of linguistic diversity and associated with the notions of culture, identity, respect, intercultural dialogue and EU values but without concrete policy initiatives (symbolic multilingualism) and the **utilitarian dimension**, which has been clearly prioritised and focuses entirely on the functional importance of language skills and the economic value of languages for the economy, growth, and jobs. The first dimension –the sentimental one– would be applied to the EU’s regional or minority languages whereas the utilitarian dimension would be applied to (foreign) language learning.

The consequences of this symbolic-pragmatic dichotomy have also been practical: RMLs have been excluded from the main Commission’s initiatives related to languages. This report has highlighted some of the most prominent examples:

- The *Online Linguistic Support*, the online platform launched by the European Commission in 2014 designed to “help Erasmus+ participants improve their knowledge of the language in which they will work, study or volunteer abroad” offers tests for the 24 official languages plus other non-EU official languages such as Icelandic, Norwegian, Turkish, Macedonian or Serbian.
- *Europass* – a European Commission initiative aimed at helping young people create CVs, cover letters and to find jobs and courses in the EU – offers information in the 24 official languages plus other non-EU official languages such as Turkish, Macedonian, Norwegian and Icelandic.
- *Juvenes Traslatores*, a language competition in schools among European youngsters to reward the best translators in the EU and foster intercultural dialogue – only available for the EU’s 24 official languages.

The practical consequences of excluding RMLs from these initiatives are concrete: the message conveyed is that RMLs are not worth learning when traveling as they are not available in the OLS platform, RMLs are not needed to find a job as *Europass* is not available in any RMLs (but it is available in non-EU official languages), and RMLs are not worth being translated as the *Juvenes Traslatores* contest does not allow them to participate. By doing so, the Commission conveys the message that RMLs are not useful in practical terms.

**Technology and the digital sphere** have been the other domain in which languages have occupied a pivotal role. All studies and resolutions, as noted in the European Parliament Resolution *Language equality in the digital age* (2018), have found a striking imbalance in terms of digital language technologies available for the European languages. Only a few languages, such as English, French and Spanish, are well supported in the digital domain, while more than 20 official languages and especially regional and minority languages are considered to be in danger of digital extinction.

The Commission launched a call in 2021 for developing a strategic research, innovation and implementation agenda and a roadmap for achieving full digital language equality in Europe by 2030 to “unleash the full potential of language technologies and ensure that users of digital technologies are not disadvantaged in the digital sphere because of the language they use”<sup>48</sup>. Despite the wide recognition on the need to avoid language digital extinction, RMLs have been excluded from the Commission’s digital tools, namely EURAMIS (the EU’s translation memory), IATE (terminology database), the CEF.AT Building blocks (automatic translation, also available for Icelandic and Norwegian) and e-translation (the Commission’s machine translation service, available in the 24 EU official languages plus Norwegian, Icelandic, Turkish, Chinese, Japanese, Russian and Arabic, and Ukrainian in the process).

The **practical consequences** for RMLs are concrete: they are not able to participate in the digitalization of an increasing number of services and products that are offered digitally – from Administration services to health care or chat box, to name only a few, widening the gap between those languages for which digital services and products will be available and those that will become digitally extinct.

The analysis has also shown that the lack of specific funding for RMLs continues to be detrimental for RMLs. Since the Court Ruling of 1998, no specific budget line has been earmarked for RMLs and all languages, regardless of majority or minority status, compete on equal footing in what has been known as *mainstreaming*. As pointed by Gazzola, et.al (2016). “mainstreaming is a double-edged sword. If part of a policy approach animated by a sincere commitment to the long-term prospects of RMLs, it can herald significant advances in their situation. But mainstreaming can also hide ulterior motives, coming only just a little short of a

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<sup>48</sup> Work programme PPPA-LANGEQ-2021



first-class funeral for RML protection and promotion. Safeguards are therefore essential; they may include, for example, explicit and specific mentions of support to RMLs in the general objectives of relevant programmes. It is striking how often much more frequently-asked questions of gender equality are mentioned among overall policy goals in various substantive policies, for example in areas such as education and health; by the same token, a greater visibility of the cause of RML protection and promotion would be amply justified” (2016:56).

The analysis has shown that there have been no specific safeguards for RMLs in the objectives of the relevant EU programmes. Only in 2022 were we able to find one specific call for Europe’s most vulnerable languages (*Safeguarding Endangered Languages in Europe*, under the Horizon Framework Programme).<sup>49</sup> The **effects** of the lack of concrete safeguards for RMLs has been summarised in table table 12 above: funding for RMLs over the *Europe 2020* strategy has been irrisory, without any explicit policy regarding the promotion of protection of Europe’s most vulnerable languages.

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<sup>49</sup> Research and innovation on cultural heritage and CCIs - 2022 (HORIZON-CL2-2022-HERITAGE-01)

## *Concluding remarks*

This report has evaluated the EU's language policy vis-à-vis regional and minority languages over the *Europe 2020* decade. The evaluation comes after the different international and European voices on the increasing level of endangerment of RMLs in Europe and worldwide as well as the numerous EP resolutions claiming for more EU action to protect and promote RMLs. Particularly relevant has been the EP *Resolution on Endangered European Languages and Linguistic Diversity* (2013) – the Alfonsi Resolution – which openly claimed that Europe's endangered languages “do not receive enough specific attention within the Commission's multilingualism policy” and acknowledged that funding for these languages has been diminishing over the years – “a situation that must not be allowed to continue into the next multiannual financial framework (2014 2020)”. This report has precisely looked into these aspects highlighted by the Alfonsi Resolution.

The analysis has been developed through **public policy analysis**, and more specifically, through the **public policy cycle**. It has included four specific phases:

1. **Agenda setting**, which has analysed the role given to RMLs in the *Europe 2020* strategy
2. **Policy formulation**, which has looked into the different policies formulated to promote languages in the EU and, more specifically, the place of RMLs within the policies formulated
3. The **policy implementation** has analysed the way policies formulated have materialised into concrete policies
4. The **evaluation** of results has looked at effects and consequences of the current EU support to RMLs.

The analysis of phase one – **Agenda setting** – has shown that the *Europe 2020* decade has prioritised **languages from an economic perspective and neglected RMLs**. Languages appear explicitly mentioned in **three** of its seven flagship initiatives: a) *Youth on the move*, which links languages to mobility and youth employment across Europe; b) the *Digital Agenda for Europe*, which speaks of the need to develop a new generation of web-based applications, including for multilingual content and services and c) *the Agenda for New Skills and Jobs*, where languages are considered a strategic element for economic growth and jobs.

The analysis has shown that **RMLs are not mentioned in the European Commission's agenda in any of the three priorities for the *Europe 2020* decade**. They are only present in political speeches and in EU rhetoric on linguistic diversity but absent when it comes to setting the agenda for the *Europe 2020* decade.

The decade has also witnessed the consolidation of two dimensions when it comes to languages: a *utilitarian dimension* and a *sentimental dimension*. The utilitarian dimension has been completely prioritised as if has focused on the purely functional importance of language skills and the economic value of languages for the economy, growth, and jobs. The sentimental dimension refers to the symbolic value of linguistic diversity as a cornerstone of the EU project, which is perceived as principle of EU governance but does not come with a strategic programmatic frame. The term *multilingualism* is usually used to refer to the utilitarian dimension of languages whereas *linguistic diversity* often appears to refer to the principles and values of the EU when it comes to languages.

Through constant initiatives such as resolutions and Parliamentary Questions, the European Parliament has noted the alarming rate at which RMLs are disappearing and repeatedly requested the Commission and the Council to take more action in the field of RMLs over the *2020* decade. The Commission justifies the fact that RMLs are not included in the EU agenda on the grounds that it has no competences on languages and that it is the sole responsibility of its Member States.

We have observed through the analysis, however, that Member States and the Commission have cooperated in the field of language learning through the *Open Method of Coordination*, the EU instrument used to identify “good policy practice from among the grand reservoir of diverse policy approaches in the European arena and propose common actions”. Within the OMC, different working groups have been consolidated over the *2020* decade to cooperate at EU level in the field of foreign language learning. However, no working group has been proposed to promote RMLs at EU level, which exemplifies the lack of political will to include RMLs in the EU's policy agenda.

From a civil society perspective, the *Europe 2020* decade has witnessed that is probably the most ambitious, **far-reaching attempt to influence the EU agenda on RML issues**: the *Minority SafePack*, an initiative that includes a series of concrete policy recommendations on

RMLs addressed to the European Commission within the framework of the European Citizens' Initiative. Over the decade, the initiative has faced political and legal opposition: the Commission has refused to take additional measures to promote RMLs, an argument that has been supported by the Court of Justice of the EU. Unsatisfied with the political and legal decision, FUEN has recently submitted an appeal (2023) to revisit the Commission's decision. What was a political proposal from the civil society to place RMLs on the EU's agenda has turned into a long and thorny political and legal battle which, at the time of finalising this report, remains open.

The analysis of phase two – **language policy formulation** – has shown that **Education and Languages technologies** have been – and currently are – the two policy areas where languages have been prioritised during the *Europe 2020* decade. The European Commission has undertaken a series of statistics, benchmarks, indicators and guidelines on language competences such as the *European Survey on Language Competences* (2012) or the *Eurobarometer on Europeans and their Languages* (2012), which have compiled data on language competences for the first time at EU level. These benchmarks and statistics have generated the need to adopt an EU policy framework aimed at solving the lack of language competences by Europeans: The *Council Recommendation of 22 May 2019 on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages*.

The new dominant frame on languages has completely neglected RMLs. No benchmarks, statistics or indicators have been promoted at EU level to monitor the current state of affairs of RMLs, to measure their level of endangerment or to make specific proposals or recommendations.

There is also a **lack on data on specific funding** for RMLs, which does not allow us to offer a detailed, fully-fledged analysis of the number of RMLs projects funded by the EU. The absence of easily accessible figures only allows us to provide approximate figures. The figures analysed in this report show that funding for RMLs continues to be irrisory.

The lack of EU support to RMLs does not match the increasing demands by part of the EU population on stronger action at EU level. Other than the *Minority SafePack Initiative*, EU citizens participating at the Conference on the Future of Europe (2022) have demanded additional protection for RMLs. To these requests we must add the numerous civil society and

governmental organisations such as FUEN, NPLD and ELEN requesting more actions at EU level. This shows that while the civil society demands a stronger EU involvement in RMLs, the Commission refuses to take additional measures to promote them and widens the gap between the society and the EU institutions.

The third phase analysed – the **actual language policies executed** – has provided an in-depth analysis of the EU policies and initiatives on languages and has brought to the surface the absence of RMLs in the Commissions' initiatives. In the field of education, examples include the *Online Linguistic Support*, the language learning platform offered for the EU's 24 official languages plus other non-EU official languages such as Icelandic, Norwegian, Turkish, Macedonian or Serbian; the *Europass*, offered in the 24 official languages plus other non-EU official languages such as Turkish, Macedonian, Norwegian and Icelandic; or the *Juvenes Translatores* contest, available only for the 24 official languages.

As for Language Technologies, none of the products and services offered by the Commission are available for RMLs while most of them are for a number of non-EU official languages. Examples include the *Connecting Europe Facility Automated Translation Building Block* (CEF.AT), a service offered by the European Commission to help European and state public administrations exchange information across language barriers in the EU (available in the 24 official languages + Icelandic and Norwegian) or the *E-translation*, the Commission's machine translation service (available in the 24 official languages + Norwegian, Icelandic, Turkish, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Arabic and soon in Ukrainian) available for public administrations, universities and companies. It is quite a paradox to note that all the EU-funded LT projects executed conclude that if RMLs (and under-resourced languages) must be included in the new technologies and AI products to avoid their digital extinction while the Commission excludes them from its own LT services.

The exclusion of RMLs in the different Commission's initiatives is creating a widening gap between the languages deemed useful and linked to progress and growth and those perceived as irrelevant and not useful. This, in turn, creates an artificial hierarchy through which languages are ranked and perceived as more or less necessary. The Commission continues to widen language disparities by excluding RMLs in all its LT tools.

It is somewhat surprising to note that, despite the exclusion of RMLs from its own policy initiatives and the repetitive statements on the lack of policy competences on RMLs, the Commission recently launched a specific line of action in 2022 on *Safeguarding Endangered Languages in Europe*, under the Horizon Europe Framework Programme, aimed at enhancing cooperation at the European level between key actors and stakeholders within endangered languages communities. This is the most tangible evidence that that it is perfectly plausible, even within the current EU policy framework, to develop specific actions aimed at supporting RMLs. It is a matter of political will.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

**Recommendation 1: Continue the line of action initiated in 2022 on *Safeguarding Endangered Languages in Europe***, aimed at enhancing cooperation at European level between key actors and stakeholders within endangered language communities. This initiative shows that it is perfectly possible to develop concrete policy proposals aimed at promoting RMLs. All data available show the alarming rate at which regional or minority languages are disappearing worldwide. In the EU, 40 to 50 million people speak one of its 60-80 RMLs, most of which are at serious risk. The EU motto *United in Diversity* should come with a programmatic and concrete frame that must go beyond rhetoric.

**Recommendation 2: Include RMLs in all the Commission's initiatives aimed at promoting languages.** Many of the current initiatives such as the Online Linguistic Support, Europass, e-translation, *Juvenes Traslatores*, etc. are available not only for the EU's 24 official languages but also for other non-EU languages such as Turkish, Icelandic, Norwegian, etc. The current situation discriminates RMLs, as they are not allowed to participate in these initiatives. This decision has serious consequences for RMLs, as they are perceived as non-useful and unnecessary by citizens, given that they are not allowed to participate.

Evidence The current EU legal framework has a

**Recommendation 3: Establish a set of EU-wide studies, benchmarks, statistics and guidelines to monitor the current situation of RMLs in Europe.** The 2020 decade has witnessed the proliferation of studies, reports, statistics and polls related to language competences by Europeans. This information has been useful to recommend policy actions in the field of foreign language learning. However, none of these initiatives have focused on RML. At present, we are unable to have an EU-wide perspective on the current level of endangerment of the EU's RMLs.

**Recommendation 4: Earmarked funding for RMLs.** The information available on funding shows that it continues to be extremely low. The mainstreaming approach to funding shows that small language communities have to compete on equal footing with big ones, which widens

the disparities between the big and the small. This report recommends establishing different types of safeguards such as, for example, specific mentions of support to RMLs in the different EU programmes (*Horizon, Erasmus+, Interreg*, etc). This is perfectly possible within the current EU legal framework and would allow for more participation, transparency and visibility of RMLs in the various EU programmes.

**Recommendation 5: The reiterative requests for more action from the civil society (CoFoE, Minority SafePack Initiative) must be heard and transformed into concrete policy actions.** The gap between European citizens – which have demanded more EU support to RMLs – and the EU institutions is widening. The lack of action might reinforce the feeling that the EU is far, distant and disconnected from people’s lives. Accessibility and closeness to citizens through a more open approach to multilingualism would greatly benefit the EU’s legitimacy.



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