

Language minorities in Poland at the moment of accession to the EU

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Abstract

The proposed article focuses on minority languages in Poland in the context of its membership in the European Union. There are a few aspects to the issue of languages of ethnic minorities residing in Poland. They can be described in ethno- and sociolinguistic, historical and statistical respects. They can be characterized in terms of their legal situation. Finally, their present diffusion and presence in public life as well as conditions of development may be examined. Possible inconsistencies with international regulations concerning minority rights are identified.

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1. Introduction

In Poland, as well as in other European countries, what is being observed nowadays is a renaissance of regional cultures and attitudes favourable towards languages of ethnic minorities and regional communities. The Republic of Poland has been for a few years now a member of the Council of Europe and on the 1st of May 2004, together with several other Eastern and Central European states it became a member of the EU. The European Union's policy on languages recognises all languages as equal and both minority and regional languages are legally protected. After admission of Poland to the European Union, the Polish language has obtained the status of its official language. At the same time, the catalogue of minority and regional languages has significantly increased. It is a huge financial and legal burden, both for the whole Union and for its member-states. On the other hand Poland is legally bound to observe European standards of protection and promotion of minority and regional languages.

Poland, as well as most of the new member states, is a multiethnic and a multilingual country. Despite slender population of people who are ethnically non-Polish and do not speak Polish as their mother tongue (they are estimated at approximately 1.2 million people, which constitutes about 3 per cent of all inhabitants of the country), Poland has a considerable number of minority groups whose native language is other than the official language.

2. Linguistic situation of Poland

The languages which are used by the citizens of the Republic of Poland have a varying socio-linguistic status. There is among them the Kashubian language on the one hand, doubtlessly the most vivid regional language and mother tongue, and the Karaim or the Armenian language (Grabar - the language of Old Armenians) on the other hand – languages of ethnic and religious minorities existing in fact only in the written form and used by no more than just a few people. Separately from these should be considered dialects of the Polish language, those used commonly in particular regions, such as the Silesian dialect of Polish – mother tongue of Silesians, as well as of those declaring German nationality, or the Spis-Orava dialects, which are also mother tongue of Slovakian minority living in Polish Spis and Orava.

It should be pointed out that there are communities residing in distinct geographical regions, for example Silesians in Silesia, which demonstrate a weaker sense of ethnic, cultural and linguistic identity than either the minorities inhabiting territories which are not so clearly defined, for example Kashubs or Byelorussians (White Russians), or those living in the diaspora and not occupying a distinct territory, such as Ukrainians and Ruthenians after the post-war displacements.

In terms of the linguistic background in Poland, Polish is the official language of the country. However, Poland also has 16 indigenous minority languages (which means languages that are "traditionally used within a given territory of a State by nationals of that State who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the State's population and different from the official language of that State".¹ This approach, which excludes the language of immigrants, requires however considering the history of Poland from linguistic point of view). Within the territory of the Republic of Poland the following languages of ethnic minorities, grouped in three big linguistic categories, can be distinguished:²

1) *Regional languages*: languages used by particular indigenous ethnic groups, often closely related to the languages of the majority (which makes their linguistic status a debatable issue) or being dialects of official languages. They do not have the status of official languages. In this group four regional languages of the territory of Poland can be included: Kashubian, Silesian, Ruthenian/Lemkish, and Wilamowicean.³

2) *Minority languages*: languages of national groups whose state is beyond the territory of a given country and therefore possess their normalized standard varieties which are official languages of other countries. Seven languages represent this type in Poland: Byelorussian, Czech, German, Lithuanian, Russian, Slovak, and Ukrainian. In this group languages without the status of official state languages -not genetically related to the language of majority and used by indigenous groups inhabiting their ethnic territory on the territory of another state- are also included.

3) *Diaspora languages*: used by ethnic and national groups not possessing their own territory in Europe, living among majority groups for so long that they begin to resemble indigenous people. In Poland languages include: Gypsy (Romany dialects), Hebrew and Yiddish, Karaim, Armenian.

It should also be noted that the Hebrew language taught at Jewish school in Poland is recognized as the official language in the state of Israel and therefore it should be considered in the presented classification as a minority language.

Table 1. enumerates these languages, provides selected information on their linguistic relationships, indicates estimated population figures, as well as localises them territorially (compare with Fig 1., 2., 3.).

¹ Article 1, point a - *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*, Council of Europe, ETS n° 148, Strasbourg, 5. IX. 1992.

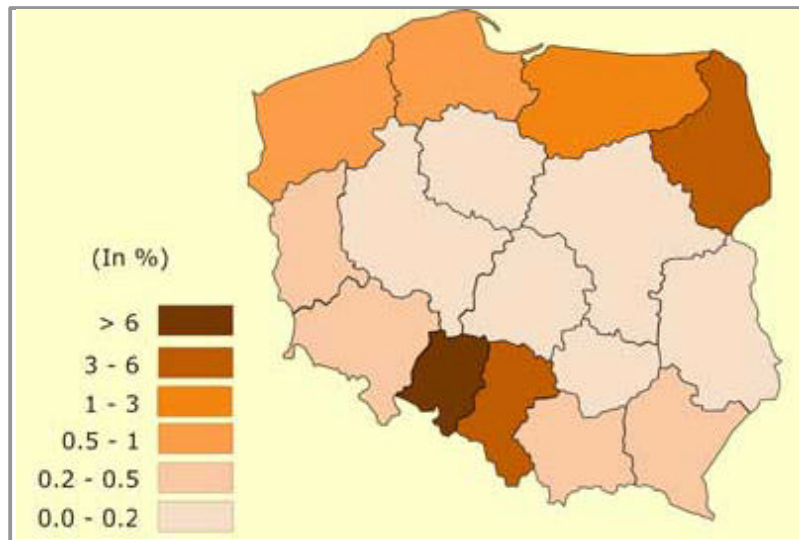
² Compare with *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* and GIORDANI, H. *Droits des minorités, droits linguistiques, Droits de l'Homme* [in:] *Les minorités en Europe. Droits linguistiques et droits de l'Homme*, Paris: Éditions Kimé, 1992, pp. 9-39.

³ Language of inhabitants of the town of Wilamowice (in southern Silesia) who are descendants of settlers from the 13th century. Its ethnolect, regarded by Germanists as a Middle High German dialect, is spoken now by several scores of persons of the oldest generation.

Figure 1. New administrative division of Poland into 16 provinces (January 1, 1999)



Figure 2. Non-polish nationality declared by citizens of Poland, 2002 (by provinces)



Source: Author's own map based on the 2002 census.

Table 1. Indigenous minority and regional languages in Poland

Minority and regional languages	Minority group	Language family	Estimation of population (in 1000)	Localisation
German	Germans	Germanic language	300-500	Opole province, Upper Silesia, Varmia-Masuria
Silesian	Silesians	Dialect of Polish	?	Upper Silesia, Opole province
Byelorussian (White Russian)	Byelorussians	East Slavonic language	200-300	Podlasian province
Kashubian	Kashubs	West Slavonic, regarded by some as a dialect of Polish	500	Pomerania
Ukrainian	Ukrainians	East Slavonic language	200-300	Lower Silesia, Varmia-Masuria, Western Pomerania,
Romany (Gypsy)	Gypsies	Central Indo-Aryan/Indo-Iranian/Indo-European	15-30	Little Poland, dispersed
Russian	Russians	East Slavonic	10-15	Varmia-Masuria, Podlasian province
Old believers language		Archaic Russian and polish dialect		
Lithuanian	Lithuanians	Baltic language	20-25	Podlasian province
Ruthenian (Lemkish)	Ruthenians (Lemkos)	East Slavonic, regarded by some as a dialect of Ukrainian	60-70	Under Carpathians
Czech	Czechs	West Slavonic	3	Silesia, Lodz povince
Slovak	Slovaks	West Slavonic	10-20	Little Poland (Spis & Orava regions)
Armenian (Grabar)	Armenians	Indo-European language	5-8	Cracow, Warsaw, Wroclaw, Gdansk
Yiddish	Jews	Jewish Germanic language	8-10	Dispersed – Warsaw, Cracow, Wroclaw
Hebrew		Semitic language		
Karaim	Karaims	Kipchak/ Common Turkic	0.2	Dispersed – Warsaw, Gdansk, Wroclaw
Tatar	Tatars	Kipchak/ Common Turkic	?	Podlasian province
Wilamowicean	Wilamowiceans	Middle High German dialect	0.1	Town of Wilamowice

Source: Author's own table based on the governmental estimations.

3. Historical background

Minorities have always constituted an important element of Poland's ethnolinguistic landscape. It has to be mentioned, that from 1385 to 1795, the lands of Lithuania, Byelorussia, most of the present Ukraine and Poland were a part of one state organism based on free state union (the so called Republic of many nations) rather than on territorial conquests. During that time religious tolerance favoured the influx of "infidels". Hence the presence of Czechs –descendants of Husits , Russians– Old believers, Jews and German Protestants. Minority communities constituted more than one third of the Polish population even after regaining independence in 1918. About 30 % of its population of 36 million people were representatives of ethnic minorities during the interwar period (1918-1939). The population of Poland consisted of 14 % of Ukrainians and Russians, 8.5 % of Jews, 3.1 % of Byelorussians, 2.3 % of Germans, and 3.1 % of other minorities according to a census from 1931 (Kersten, 1989, p. 443).

After the Second World War the Allies signed treaties that made Poland fall back on its "ethnic borders", which meant the loss of most of its eastern territory. In consequence, minorities shrank to about 5 % of the entire population, basically as a result of the extermination of Jews, territorial changes and postwar displacements –migrations. In the Polish People's Republic the government used a policy against the language and the culture of minorities that was very typical of the whole of Eastern Europe policy. It was one element of a very restrictive and discriminatory Stalinist practice. The political thaw after 1956 made it possible for minority groups (mostly in their socio-cultural societies) to cultivate some elements of ethnic and language identity in a strictly limited way, controlled by the organs of security. The government favored first of all the cultivation of folklore (Majewicz, 1995).

The year 1989 brought changes in the status and in the situation of ethnic minorities in Poland. Communist propaganda had claimed that the Polish state was a homogenous country in terms of the national structure. Representatives of other nationalities, inhabitants of Polish territories for several generations, were perceived in terms of ethnic relics. The problems of minorities in Poland were invisible till 1989 (Lodzinski, 1998).

It was not possible to raise ethnic issues in research on a large scale because membership of a nationality was not included in census questions. Reliable and complete data was provided only in censuses, conducted once per 10 years. Since 1921 only 9 censuses have been carried out in Poland. During the inter-war period data on the nationality and the religion of citizens was collected in two censuses (1921 and 1931). In the 1931 census, nationality was deduced on the basis of religion and native language. In the postwar years the nationality issue was included for the first time only in the last census in 2002, where questions about nationality and language used at home were included.

4. Demographic aspects

According to the public census from May, 2002, Poland has 38.2 million inhabitants. The overall composition of the Republic of Poland is highly homogeneous, since those of Polish ethnicity constitute nearly the total of its population (96.7%) and minorities are relatively small and dispersed. Non Polish national identity is declared by 444.6 thousands (1.2 %) Polish citizens. Moreover 2.0 % citizens did not declare any national identity.

At the same time the results of the census point to numerous ethnic communities which still live in Poland (see table 2).

Table 2. Population by declared minority language and nationality in Poland according to the 2002 census.

Minority and regional languages	Population by declared language (in 1000)	Stated language (in %)	Minority group	Population by stated nationality (in 1000)	Stated nationality (in %)
German	196.8	33.0	Germans	147.1	23.7
Silesian	56.4	9.5	Silesians	172.2	27.8
Byelorussian	40.2	6.7	Byelorussians	47.6	7.7
Kashubian	52.6	8.8	Kashubs	5.0	0.8
Ukrainian	21.1	3.5	Ukrainians	27.2	4.4
Romany	15.7	2.6	Gypsies	12.7	2.1
Russian	12.1	2.0	Russians	3.2	0.5
Lithuanian	5.7	1.0	Lithuanians	5.6	0.9
Ruthenian	5.6	0.9	Ruthenians	5.8	0.9
Czech	1.2	0.2	Czechs	0.4	0.1
Slovak	0.8	0.1	Slovaks	1.7	0.3
Armenian	0.3	0.1	Armenians	0.3	0.04
Hebrew & Yiddish	0.2	0.03	Jews	1.0	0.2
Karaim	0	0	Karaims	0.04	0.01
Tatar	0	0	Tatars	0.5	0.1
Non-defined	187.6	31.5	Non-defined	31.5	30.6
Total	596.3	100.0	Total	621.0	100.0

Source: Author's own table based on the 2002 census.

Among ethnic groups Silesians and Germans are the largest minorities –172.6 thousand of Polish citizens declare Silesian national identity and 147.1 thousand, German. The third and the fourth linguistic minorities are, respectively, Byelorussians, 47.6 thousand, and Ukrainians, 27.2 thousand. The Gypsies appear in fifth position with 12.7 thousand. They are followed by the historical minorities which number from 5 to 10 thousand people: Ruthenians/Lemkos- 5.8 thousand, Lithuanians – 5.6 thousand, and Kashbus – 5.1 thousand. Next there are minor communities like Russians – 3.2 thousand, Slovaks (1.7 thousand), Jews (1.1 thousand), Tartars (0.5 thousand), Czechs (0.4 thousand), Armenians (0.3 thousand) and in last place the Karaims (0.05 thousand). It should be remarked that in 2002, a significant portion of the total population declared themselves as Silesian. It was the first time in the history of Poland that Silesian, Lemkos and Kashubs were accounted as national identities, although the Polish legislation on minority rights does not consider them as such.

It should be also noted that the results of the 2002 census are very recent and they still need to be completely evaluated; in fact, as in the case of previous estimations, representatives of ethnic minorities presume that the figures for their groups are underestimated. This is due to the fact that, given their exclusion in the communist period, the minority groups prefer not to state their real ethnicity. The main historical minorities – Byelorussians (White Russians), Ukrainians, Ruthenians, Germans, Gypsies, Slovaks, Russians – are gradually decreasing and being assimilated.

Ethnic diversity meant the presence of the diverse *speech communities* (Gumperz, 1968). However, the increasing assimilation of indigenous ethnic groups into the Polish identity may be due to the similarity of their languages, and therefore the number of people who use minority language in every-day life is different from the number of particular groups. The minority language that emerged as definitely the most often used, is German –used by 196.8 thousand of people with Polish citizenship.

It's worth stating that significantly more people declare using the German language than having German nationality. The knowledge of the ethnic situation in Silesia leads us to assume that some members of the German national minority who have inhabited the Silesia region for numerous generations might define their nationality as Silesian. Nevertheless the next most often mentioned language was Silesian –56.4 thousand, followed by the second regional language –Kashubian –52.6 thousand of people. A relatively substantial number of users to have also Byelorussian –42.2 thousand, and Ukrainian -21.1 thousand.

From the territorial point of view, Polish citizens with non-Polish identity are concentrated mainly in three provinces (Figure 2): Silesia – 182.9 thousand (41.1 %), Opole province – 130.4 thousand (29.3 %) and Podlasie – 54.3 thousand (12.2 %). The majority of ethnic groups are concentrated in one or no more than two provinces (Figure 3). Byelorussians are compactly settled in Podlasian province – 96.6 per cent, as well as Lithuanians – 90.3 per cent. Like Byelorussian and Lithuanians, Russians and Tatars live in Polasian province and in the capital of Poland (Warsaw), but Russian – Old believers community inhabited Varmia-Masuria region. Kashubs are settled in Pomerania – 96.7 per cent and Slovaks in the southern part of Little Poland province – 91.1 %. Germans inhabit mainly the Opole province (70.1 %) and Upper Silesia (20.1%); however in the case of Silesians the situation is reversed because 85.8 per cent of people who declared Silesian identity reside in the Silesia province and the rest of the population (14 %) is concentrated in the Opole province. Ukrainians and Lemkos belong to the most dispersed minority, for historical and political reasons and yet these groups are also localized in some regional clusters: Lemkos inhabit Lower Silasia (over 50 % of the population), followed by Little Poland (27 %) and Lubush province (13.4%). Ukrainians, on the other hand, reside firstly in Varmia-Mazuria (43.7 %), then more than 10 per cent in Pomerania and Lower Carpathia province. The Gypsy population, on the other hand, are dispersed throughout the entire Republic of Poland; they are present in almost every province.

The smaller minorities like Armenians, Karaims and Jews live in the large cities: Warsaw, Cracow, Wroclaw, Gdansk.

If declarations on language use are to be considered, the most numerous group of bilingual people is concentrated in the Silesian and Opole provinces. An interesting situation of

diglossia⁴ occurs in Pomerania, where every user of Kashub is bilingual in home relationships. Another situation however is in the Podlasian region where users of Byelorussian and Lithuanian are more monolingual than bilingual (in home relationships).

Figure 3. Indigenous ethnic minority in the provinces of Poland



Source: Author's own map based on the 2002 census and on the other researches.

Flags and emblems that represent respective minorities mark their presence in administrative provinces. The size of symbol characterizes approximate numbers and importance of minorities in their regions.

5. Language-related legislation

The Constitution of the Republic of Poland was adopted on April 2, 1997, and entered into force on October 1, 1997. Article 27 addressed the question of the state's official language: "Polish shall be the official language in the Republic of Poland. This provision shall not infringe upon national minority rights resulting from ratified international agreements". Article 35 of the Constitution guarantees all "Polish citizens belonging to national or ethnic minorities the freedom to maintain and develop their own language, to maintain customs and traditions, and to develop their own culture" (paragraph 1), and particularly recognises the right "to establish educational, cultural and religious institutions designed to protect their identity", as well as "to participate in the resolution of matters connected with their cultural identity" (paragraph 2).

⁴ In the meaning of J. A. Fishman (1985).

Besides the Constitution, several secondary acts encourage basic protection of national and ethnic minorities by means of national legislation: The issue of teaching minority languages is regulated by the 7th September of 1991 Educational System Act, which obliges public schools to provide facilities for pupils to maintain their sense of national, ethnic, linguistic and religious identity and above all to provide language instruction. This instruction may take place in "separate groups, departments, schools", "groups, departments, schools with optional instruction in language, history and culture", "in inter-school groups of instruction". The decree of the Ministry of National Education dated the 3rd of December 2002 stipulates the minimum number of pupils needed when creating classes (at least 7 for primary school and at least 14 for secondary school), and the number of hours of lessons (3 per week).

Basically, using foreign languages in the courts while testifying or during interrogation of witnesses is possible, as well as communication between the defendant and the court. A precondition though is lack of knowledge of the Polish language and not being a member of a national or ethnic minority.⁵

As regards multilateral agreements or international treaties, the Republic of Poland is a signatory of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and of the European Charter of Regional or Minority Languages, although only the first has been ratified.

The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities was signed by Poland on the 1st of February of 1995. It was ratified on the 20th of December of 2000, after a long debate and numerous obstacles all too readily perceived by the parties of the right wing. Fundamental and beneficial changes in the policy on minorities as well as in the legal system had been brought about already in the first half of the 90s. Currently the Polish legal system, both on the national level and on the level of international commitments, establishes protection of people belonging to ethnic and national minorities, generally equivalent to the regulations put forward by the Convention. There are, however, rules included in the Convention which are not reflected in the Polish law. The most important are:

- prohibition of actions aiming at assimilating national minorities (art. 5.2)
- using the language of a minority in private and in public (art. 10.1)
- using the language of a minority in dealings with public authorities (art. 10.2)
- right to put up private inscriptions in the language of a minority (art. 11.2)
- educational rights which concern spreading knowledge about minority cultures, training teachers for schools of national minorities, access to textbooks in the language of national minorities (art. 12.2).

These issues are regulated in the Parliament's projected Law on National and Ethnic Minorities, which is now on the agenda in Parliament.

There is currently work being carried out on the Polish legal regulations concerning linguistic liberties of national minorities. The law contains for example the right to register a name and a surname according to the spelling conventions of one's mother tongue and suggestions concerning the issue of putting names of towns and streets in the foreign language as well as inscriptions on public offices.

Unfortunately for several years Parliament seems unable to make up its mind to pass the law. This perception of minority problems as a party political tool as a result of bilateral state policy, has been all too characteristic of many bodies dealing more or less competently with the minority issues.

One of the two most important European documents concerning the protection of (national or linguistic) minorities, is the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. The European Charter was signed by the Republic of Poland on May 12, 2003, but still has not been ratified, since, on the basis of the present Polish legal regulations, the Republic of Poland is not able to comply to the full extent with the obligations resulting from making the Charter legally binding.

Finally, Poland has also signed bilateral treaties with the neighbouring states (the Federal Republic of Germany, the former Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, the Ukraine, Republic of

⁵ Art. 5 of General Judgement System 27th July 2001.

Belarus, Republic of Lithuania) which further guarantee the protection of the rights of national minorities.

6. Use of languages in other public spheres

Legal regulations have only partial influence on policy towards ethnic minorities. The practice of public life and the amount of financial resources is decisive here. In Poland, political actions directed at minorities are performed by the government administration and concern mainly the cultures. One of the tools of Polish cultural policy towards these circles is support for the teaching of minority languages, support for the press published in these languages (a rule has been adopted that every minority should have the financing of one newspaper guaranteed) and cultural events. An important element of the state's policy is guaranteed access to the public radio and television,⁶ which is aimed at strengthening these communities. There is however no linguistic or cultural policy at a provincial level.

6.1 Use of languages in education

The following minorities have schools providing lessons "of" and "in" their mother tongues: Germans, Jews, Lithuanians, Russians, Slovaks, and Ukrainians. Belarussian, Lemkish and Kashubian are taught in state schools as an additional language. The lack of schooling in Romany schools is complicated by the problem of the lower achievement level of Gypsy Children, connected with the nature of social functioning of this community.

The current development of the educational system shows signs of sufficient protection existing there, however in the face of meagre financing and allocation of teachers this education cannot satisfy all needs.

6.2 Languages in the media

The following minority languages are used in state-subsidized periodicals (in brackets the number of periodicals is given): German (9), Belarussian (6), Ukrainian (6), Kashubian (5), Ruthenian (4), Lithuanian (2), Romany (2), Yiddish and Hebrew (2), Slovak (1), and Czech (1).

Public regional stations broadcast programs in native languages (in brackets the number of programmes is given) for Belarussians (from Bialystok - 4), Ukrainian (from Bialystok, Koszalin, Rzeszów, Olsztyn - 4), Germans (from Opole and Katowice - 3), Kashubian (from Gdansk and Koszalin - 2) and finally Lithuanians (Bialystok -1).

The public regional TV regularly shows programmes for Germans (from Opole, Katowice, Bialystok - 3), Belarussians (from Bialystok - 2), Ukrainian (from Bialystok and one country-wide service from Warsaw - 2), Kashubs (Gdansk - 1), Lithuanians (Bialystok - 1) and Russians and Gypsies (both from Bialystok - 1).

6. Conditions of existence of minority and regional languages

Regional and minority languages in the territory of Poland differ according to their level of development, which is determined by numerous linguistic and extra-linguistic factors. To the first group of factors belong in the first place the numerical force and organisational state of the minority itself. The first is low in the case of Tartar, Karaim, Wilamowicean, the Jews and Old Believers. Tartar and Wilamowicean are nearly extinct in Poland because of the assimilation process in these groups. Yiddish and Hebrew are disappearing in our country because of the continually diminishing number of their users. The Old Believers' dialect will probably last, considering the well-known attachment of this group to their religious traditions.

In the case of less numerous minorities a factor decisive for the development or absence is whether there exists a state which may act as a support for the minority and assist in the maintenance and development of the language. Minorities having such a background are Germans in the first place, who receive substantial support, and Lithuanians, Slovaks, Ukrainians. Exceptional is the situation of the Byelorussians (White Russians), whose state shows scant interest in the development of the Byelorussian language. Therefore Polish Byelorussians must take care of their linguistic interests themselves, as do the Lemkos, who

⁶ Public Broadcasting and Television Act, 29th December 1992.

do not have their own country. The latter must furthermore overcome the resistance of Ukrainians towards their emancipation.

Of similar importance for the maintenance and development of a language can be the Church. For a long time it has promoted cultivation of the Ukrainian, Lithuanian and Lemkish languages. A model example is the situation of the Old Believers dialect, the Karaim language and the language of Polish Armenians and Tartars. However neither Byelorussian nor German has found church support –in the first case the language is as a result endangered, and in the second the situation has changed only recently. For a longer period of time Slovaks had problems using their mother tongue in church.

The second group of factors are socio-linguistic conditions. First should be considered the situation of nationalities, which – while having a particular national identity – may not use their mother tongue in everyday communication (Polish Germans and Slovaks), because they have lost the ability to use it. They have either for a long time or always used dialects of other languages in everyday life (for instance Silesian or Spis-Oravian dialects). Therefore they learn it. Another, more frequent situation is when members of a minority learn a given language in its standard variant and use its dialect in everyday communication (Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Byelorussians). The third is a situation when a dialect which has been used hitherto is gaining or has gained the status of standard language (Lemkos) or remains the primary language of a group without taking the form of a codified language (Romany). It depends though on the inherent qualities of a given language, namely the third condition.

There is then the case of the Romany language, which consists of widely divergent idioms, whose speakers live in small communities scattered amongst larger groups. Romany has only just started to exist in Poland in the written form and is therefore far from codification and plays exclusively the role of a language of everyday communication (however it is not itself threatened in its functioning). On the other hand the first possibilities of codification come into being only when a language becomes a written language and begins to serve as a platform of communication for various separate groups of a given community (introducing mass media on a larger scale). Even preliminary codification furthers the introduction a language in schools (which increases the number of its users and promotes survival) –for example what the Lemkos have been fighting for.

Only full development of a language (in respect of development of all levels of vocabulary) can bring in its unlimited usage in scientific, economic and administrative institutions. Those Polish minorities whose languages are official languages of neighbouring countries can use in an unlimited way its forms created elsewhere, although they may be deprived of proper opportunities to contribute to this development. The situation is worse for those minorities which do not have their own state (Lemkos) or whose states take little interest in the national language (Byelorussians).

Perhaps as a compensation Byelorussian and Lemkish minorities in Poland are more active in the field of literature.

8. Conclusions

Poland, as well as other countries in Central-Eastern Europe, is a different country than it was 15 years ago. After the restoration of democracy in 1989 new opportunities for groups constituting national, ethnic, linguistic, confessional (religious) and regional minorities appeared. Most of them had not only been deprived of any protection or assistance from the state, but also often overtly persecuted (cf. Majewicz & Wichierkiewicz 1990). Along with the enlargement, the East European Union is enriched with over 40 new minority languages (16 of them are present on the territory of Poland). The enlargement of the EU on May, 1 2004 can be seen as a new challenge and a new chance for these linguistic minorities.

Since the European Union is based on democracy and the ideology of cultural and linguistic diversity, all acceding countries must meet a certain EU standard of non-discrimination. This commitment is good, but it is not known whether protection of all of new minorities will be possible. On the other hand, Poland like some other new EU countries is already way ahead of some of the western nation states in terms of minority protection and linguistic rights. However the existence of certain legal standards is not sufficient. It needs to be emphasized here that linguistic rights of minorities are guaranteed in a somewhat different way in each

country. Similarly, no uniform linguistic policy may be identified in the European Union. Therefore, models for conducting ethnic and linguistic policy for the old and the new states of the Union are necessary.

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