

RECODE

Workshop ‘Linguistic Diversity and the Changing Dynamics of Political Integration’

Helsinki, 6 – 7 May 2011

Scientific Summary

Linguistic identities and language use are indicators of sweeping socio-political and socio-cultural transformations. In modern times, language attained a central role in the formation of nation-states. The links established between the dynamics of political integration and the idea of the national language turned out to be remarkably strong in the European context. In general terms, the consolidation of nation-states was detrimental for linguistic diversity and involved high costs for members of non-dominant language groups, who we nowadays call minorities.

When we look at the key issues of language politics in contemporary Western societies, we detect a situation in which the legacies of the old persist and at the same time interact with the challenges of the new. To speak of the ‘legacies of the old’ means, in the first place, to address the enduring linguistic grievances connected with the making of the modern system of nation-states. The ‘challenges of the new’ involve the issue of how to deal with immigrant minorities and their languages. This question has gained additional weight due to the increased relevance of the transnational dimension in the life of migrant communities, a dimension that makes for more persistent ties between sending and receiving societies. At the same time, the new politics of language are substantially marked by the emergence of integrated networks of global communication, which operate in English. In Europe, more specifically, the formation of a communicative space beyond national borders begs the question of the role of English as European lingua franca. After a long period in which political integration and striving for linguistic homogeneity could be considered almost interchangeable institutional objectives, the scenery of language politics seems to be in motion again, and we are experiencing a striking re-politicization of language issues all over Europe and North America.

Taking the programme framework of complex diversity as its point of departure, the workshop will be devoted to discussing both the legacies of the old and the challenges of the new in the field of language politics and policies. Special attention will be paid to analyzing the interaction of the old and the new. In this respect, contrasting Europe and Canada will lead to revealing insights. In comparison with many European cases, the homogenizing character of the Canadian state, historically built on the basis of an agreement between two distinct linguistic communities, has been less accentuated. Over the last few decades, however, Europe has apparently been moving in a ‘Canadian’ direction. Even if they have in general been reluctant to officially adopt a ‘multicultural’ approach, European democracies have undergone significant changes with regard to how the relationship between political and linguistic identities is institutionally framed and ultimately opened up to multilingual options.

The workshop is structured along three major thematic lines. Under line 1 – *Linguistic diversity, nation-building and nationalism* – the focus is on the intricate relationship between political integration and diversity in institutional settings marked by multilingualism and varying degrees of language conflict. An important strand of social and political theory holds that a shared political culture has to rely on a shared linguistic medium, i.e. on one common language. From this standpoint, the lack of such a medium leads to political segmentation and inhibits the formation of a democratic public sphere. In a nutshell, democratic theory has tended to assume that democracy is democracy in one language. Against this template, there is surprisingly little systematic reflection

on paths to nation-building and democratization that seem to indicate that political integration and multilingualism can be compatible. Such compatibility may have been paralleled by lower or higher levels of conflict. In any case, assessing the examples of multilingual democracies such as Canada, Finland and Switzerland should provide us with valuable evidence for better grasping the complexity of the issues at stake in the new politics of language.

This complexity will be more fully fledged out under line 2: *Language, transnational integration, and Europeanization*. The contributions to line 2 will discuss the linguistic foundations of a diversity-sensitive transnational politics. As a polity supposed to transcend the rigid logic of nation-state construction, the European Union stands for ‘unity in diversity’. It has been argued that the reciprocal recognition of the equality of the state languages on which the institutional dynamic of Europeanization has thus far been based has had positive spill over effects even for languages of communities who do not have a state of their own. Yet one can also hold that the European politics of recognition are plagued with major contradictions when it comes to connecting the protection of linguistic diversity with securing conditions for linguistic equality (conceived of as equal dignity of linguistic identities and attachments). Moreover, it remains unclear how the triumph of English as a European lingua franca, firmly embraced by some observers as a crucial requisite for constructing a European public sphere, might work in favour of securing that the emerging Euro-polity keeps a multilingual profile, let alone how it could contribute to promoting linguistic diversity.

Finally, line 3 – *Language and the politics of immigration* – will pay tribute to the increasing importance the linguistic dimension has attained in the approach Western democracies adopt vis-à-vis ‘new’ minorities. Even in those liberal democracies that are officially multilingual, societal institutions operate in a limited (typically not more than two to three) number of languages; they were not developed for a reality in which the population speaks over hundred different languages. Migration poses new challenges to the linguistic status quo in Western Europe and Canada, and many states find it hard to adopt their traditional language policies to the new situation. The extended scope of linguistic pluralism has led in many cases to language policies which make competence in the national language(s) into a precondition for integration and educational attainment. Language is often seen not simply as a precondition for participating successfully in societal institutions of the host society but even as a major factor in the migrant integration process. This thematic section will explore the implications of migration for language and integration policies. The main idea is to examine how the dominant discourses regarding national and national minority languages get challenged and re-examined in different fields such as the politics of societal integration, education and citizenship.

The workshop will be preceded by a launching panel in the afternoon of 5 May 2011. This panel is not directly connected to the workshop, but rather meant to offer a general introduction to RECODE from different thematic angles. The panel will consist of four papers, three of which will be given by Steering Committee members. The fourth panel presentation will be by a member of the Spanish RECODE team.