

Introduction to the Special Issue:

Political and Economic Obstacles of Minority Language Maintenance

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Over the past decades, problems related to linguistic minorities and their well-being, as well as to minority languages and their maintenance, have developed as an independent branch of minority studies. Studies of language in society and sociolinguistics, strategies of minority language survival and the empowerment of their speakers have produced a considerable output of case studies and theoretical writings (to mention some of the most notable writings: Fishman, 1991; Romaine, 1995; Crystal, 2000; Nettle and Romaine, 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Extra and Gorter, 2001; Hale and Hinton, 2001; Harrisson, 2007; Arzoz, 2008; Edwards, 2010; May, 2012).

In this multifaceted field of investigation, language use, language practices, language policies and language politics represent interrelated aspects of social and linguistic relations that cannot be meaningfully addressed from a point of view of one scientific discipline only. This is specially the case when one wants to understand processes of language loss and maintenance, or the revitalization and empowerment of a language community. Such processes are linguistic expressions of complex social settings, and reflect group and individual identities that in turn express changing systems of collective values, human networks, fashions and social practices.

The interrelationship between political and economic participation and rights to land and other resources with ethnic and linguistic maintenance – the theme uniting the articles of this volume – is also a very complex one and reflected in a variety of

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ways depending on the individual context. Often minority cultures and the languages that support them start to lose ground when traditional language communities are shaken, for instance by changes in livelihood practices and land use or by urbanization or other types of demographic changes. Urbanized minority representatives who do not practise traditional livelihoods or live in the traditional area of their group are typically much more likely to lose their language than those members of the same community who continue their traditional ways of life (c.f. e.g. Fishman, 2001: 21 who includes ‘cultural loss reinforces identity change, so that language becomes less important for the peoples’ in his list of factors contributing to minority language maintenance or loss).

Such developments are often also connected with changes in employment. This is not only reflected in the dispersal of traditional settlements and when abandoning traditional forms of livelihoods, but also in rising educational standards in circumstances where education is conducted solely in the majority languages (c.f. Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). During the educational process, as well as in relation to new forms of labour connected with services and creativity, languages increasingly turn from tools of communication into instruments of work (for instance, in highly esteemed professions such as teachers, lawyers or consultants in which the language functions both as a tool as well as the end product of the work process, c.f. Zamyatin, Pasanen and Saarikivi, 2012).

However, even among groups experiencing seemingly similar social shifts, a notable variation can be observed in the rate of language loss and maintenance. This depends on different types of group identities and values as well as the different ways in which language and linguistic knowledge are embedded in them. In the literature on minority language maintenance and ethnolinguistic vitality, a variety of factors affecting language loss or maintenance are regularly mentioned. For instance, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) stresses the size of the linguistic minority, language transmission, educational rights and labour-related issues (language vitality and endangerment). Edwards (2010) mentions demography, education, sociological factors, media, religion, politics/laws/government, the economic situation, linguistic factors (e.g. language competence and standardization), history, geography and psychological issues (attitudes).

It is obvious that it is extremely difficult to establish a comprehensive list of factors contributing to language shift and maintenance because languages exist in different settings and are used in very different communities and social networks. The only issue that can be considered with certainty to be vitally important for language maintenance is linguistic transmission to the next generation of speakers through one way or another.

In this context, the factors that affect language maintenance can be broadly divided into two categories: those which are straightforwardly determined by legal, economic or societal action (such as laws, administrative and educational practices, language standardization or media supply), and those which are predominantly related to questions of identity and practices (such as language attitudes, interethnic relations, language competence and prestige). The latter cannot be changed quickly by administrative measures, but reflect the history and values of historically emerged human groups as well as the forms of governance in a particular region.

Patterns of linguistic behaviour are learned in multiple social circumstances including home, family and relatives, schooling, employment, media and various other types of social networks. Also, the social base that supports a language and the networks in which a particular language is spoken can change relatively quickly. In some cases, a minority language may be transmitted not as a mother tongue, but as a language of particular social practices or social roles. Such a situation has been identified, for instance, in the case of the interrelationship between language maintenance and reindeer herding among the Sámi and Nenets, where traditional languages have sometimes only survived as the languages of the men working on the tundra (c.f. Aikio, 1988; Liarskaja, 2009: 34–35). Other minority languages may survive as languages that are learned in adolescence when new social roles are adopted. For instance, *Stadin slangi*, a pidgin-like Finnish-based working class vernacular spoken in Helsinki from the late nineteenth through the twentieth century, has been predominantly a language of the male population. It emerged in a bilingual Finnish–Swedish environment among youngsters and continued to exist as a language of particular social practices for more than one hundred years (c.f. Paunonen and Paunonen, 2000: 14–17). It has been suggested that the South Estonian varieties (see Saar and Koreinik, in this volume), in their present stage, display similar

characteristics and are learned – where this still happens – not at home, but predominantly in the networks of adolescence (c.f. Lõbu, 2002).

Standardization, as well as the emergence of new languages of education and administration, represents a special case of such a change in the social and communal base that supports a language. Several European state languages only turned from predominantly rural vernaculars to languages of “high society” during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In many countries such as Finland and Estonia this process also involved a partial language shift of higher social classes (in Finland, Swedish-speakers; in Estonia, German-speakers) to new languages. Instances of language revitalization that take place today among different minority communities involve similar processes in which a rural (and often stigmatized) vernacular begins to be used in new domains, turns into a language of the educated people and adopts new societal functions.

Paths to language maintenance

Efforts by minority activists to secure recognition as a group, and acceptance of their language use, land rights and control over resources in a specific territory, take place in complex frameworks affected by multiple factors. Claims for rights to practise traditional livelihoods and control land and resources, which are regularly aired by minority activists and minority representative bodies, are not always directly related to language survival, but very often these two aspects of ethnic survival struggle are perceived to be interrelated. For instance, the Finnish and Norwegian Sámi and several groups of Native Americans and Australian aboriginals have long been involved in conflicts and negotiation processes related to the use and control of land while simultaneously striving for language maintenance and/or revitalization. States are often willing to grant ethnic and linguistic minorities some form of cultural autonomy, but very often they do not permit them control over significant amounts of resources and deny them the creation of decentralized state structures which would allow local or regional decision-making on issues of great importance.

At the same time, in many cases where minorities do formally control some land areas – for example in multiple Native American reserves or many of the autonomous republics and districts of the Russian Federation – minority

representatives have not been successful in developing and maintaining their cultural traditions. It is in this context of land rights and territorial self-determination that we suggest reading the articles by Johnsen, Hlebowicz and Schüler.

Johnsen *et al.* discuss the situation among the Oneida nation, which has gained significant wealth through gambling industries and has developed a strong minority identity. Yet in spite of decade-long efforts the Oneida have been unable to transfer their economic success into language revitalization, not least because of continuing hostile and intimidating attitudes on the part of large swathes of society, a lack of a bilingual and multicultural tradition of identity creation and a shortage of successful methods for language instruction in a new linguistic situation with a heavy dominance of the majority language and very few fluent speakers of the native language remaining.

The communities of the Oneidas are scattered in different administrative regions and, not surprisingly, have multiple links with the surrounding English-speaking communities. The community members receive instruction predominantly in English and acculturate mostly to the English-speaking networks. Understanding of some of the cultural traditions can be transmitted through the tribal school but it does not produce fluent speakers of the Oneida language. A comparison between the Oneida in the US State of Wisconsin and in Canada also shows how different political systems affect a community in different ways and provide an interesting case study of a group that has lost its language in one cultural environment but has been somewhat successful in maintaining and revitalizing it in the other.

The Delaware, discussed by Bartosz Hlebowicz, represent an even more complex setting of forced linguistic choices. This Native American group has been living among the Cherokee nation, and has not only suffered from discrimination by the majority population, but also by another, stronger minority that has (limited) control over the territory in which the Delaware live. The last native speaker of Delaware died some years ago but the group has nevertheless been able to turn their language into a strong cultural symbol. Some cultural patterns and practices linked to the language were abandoned a long time ago, but extensive language documentation, the creation of teaching materials and other revitalization efforts have kept the Delaware language alive as a symbol of ethnic pride which is still not completely

forgotten. However, the use and transmission of the language depend on a few relatively fluent individuals and, generally, language competence is very low.

These examples from North America demonstrate how the interaction of factors relating to identity on the one hand and to the larger political and institutional frameworks on the other may result in very different and not always positive outcomes, even if the institutional structures in these cases are generally rather favourable. This is not an uncommon situation in other countries of the world either. For instance, in the Russian context, the fate of minority languages has largely depended on the interplay of different political levels of decision-making and the degree to which regional authorities have seen active ethnopolitics and language planning as their responsibility.

Some minorities in Russia, for example the Khanty and Mansi, reside in territories of enormous wealth. The autonomous district of Khanty and Mansi (523,000 km², population 1.4 million) currently produces over half of all Russian oil (approximately 7% of the global total). The region ranks second in gross national product (GNP) per capita in Russia, after Moscow. Yet the indigenous Khanty and Mansi who in principle are the titular people of the autonomous region, only account for around 2% of the regional population. As a result their ability to influence regional development is very limited, and they encounter serious problems in the transmission of their language and culture. UNESCO classifies the Northern and Eastern Khanty as ‘definitively endangered’, and Northern Mansi as ‘severely endangered’. Four other Ob-Ugrian languages once spoken in the region are already considered extinct (UNESCO Atlas) and approximately half of the representatives of the Khanty and Mansi groups do not report group language skills in censuses.

Konstantin Zamyatin explores the position of different languages in the educational system of the Russian Federation, reflecting several of the issues underlined above. His focus, however, is on the question of who controls the national autonomies, as well as the “free choice” of the language of education guaranteed by the constitution of the Russian Federation. In particular, his article investigates the role of the national autonomies *vis-à-vis* the central power as the executors of language policies and the role of educational policies as instruments for nation-building at different levels. Zamyatin demonstrates that in the present-day Russian context many minorities that lack educational opportunities in their autonomous

territories may, in fact, have such possibilities outside their “own” autonomies if they live among other minority populations that have been more successful in gaining control over their nominal areas. Thus, it is not the autonomy itself but its political organization that either succeeds or fails in modernizing the minority languages to the languages of school instruction, education and employment.

As in Russia, examples of political autonomy from many other parts of the world demonstrate that such arrangements may give rise to varying degrees of empowerment for ethnic and linguistic minorities. There are numerous examples where decentralization of a state along linguistic or ethnic lines has been implemented in an effort to guarantee the ethnic and linguistic rights of particular groups of the population on the one hand, while protecting the overall integrity of society on the other. Examples such as Catalonia or the German-speaking communities in Belgium or South Tyrol show that such decentralization may indeed be a way to ensure ethnolinguistic vitality. This has also led to economic empowerment in cases where local governments have been able to develop their local or regional economy and have taken decision-making on economic support for language and culture into their own hands. In countries such as Belgium or Switzerland the areal model covers the whole country, which is divided between various language communities, each of which supports its own cultural institutions. This is in contrast to countries such as Finland or Ireland which have aimed to create bilingual societies that would function at the state level irrespective of the region.

The example of the Sámi in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia shows how different policies, economic backgrounds and levels of political autonomy and administrative decentralization shape the ground for different levels of ethnolinguistic vitality, and how such developments are not only connected with the governmental structure, democracy or the human rights situation of the country. Norway, Finland and Sweden all belong to a similar type of European democracy, yet the grade of language and cultural maintenance among the Sámi differs significantly. In Norway, where the biggest Sámi population resides, a significant revitalization of parts of the Sámi community has occurred. A new type of a modern Sámi identity has emerged that places special emphasis on language, reindeer herding and land rights as symbols of Sáminess. This is reflected in the fact that, in the core reindeer herding area, the Northern Sámi language is now spoken more openly and is more likely to be

transmitted to children than some decades ago (Rasmussen, 2005). However, many Sámi communities, especially those on the sea shore that have practised livelihoods similar to Norwegians, have been left largely outside of this process (c.f. Saarikivi, 2011: 86–87). Yet an administrative solution that would have given the Sámi nominal control over the northernmost part of Norway was impossible to reach, and instead a joint local land council model was chosen in which the Norwegian- and Finnish (Kven)-speaking residents of the area could have their say in questions related to land and resource use.

In Finland, the legislation provides for a “Sámi native region”, where there are guarantees on use of Sámi languages in the educational process and administration, as well as on the safeguard of cultural rights. At the same time a new type of language-centred activism emerged among the Inari Sámi, a traditional inland fisher–hunter population that could not share all the values and especially the heavily land-rights centred objectives of the reindeer herding Sámi (with whom there have also been tensions, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century). In addition, a conflict over indigenous identity emerged when the descendants of the Fennicized Sámi began to claim “Lapp” identity (from the exonym of the Sámi, Finnish *lappalainen*). Finally, Sweden – a country with long and stable democratic traditions – has shown considerably less readiness to grant rights to the Sámi. This is also reflected in the fact that it was only in 2010 that the first law was passed that defined the areas in which Sámi languages were granted the status of official minority languages.

In a broader European context, one would be inclined to think that those models of minority protection that entirely lack the principle of areal autonomy have often been less successful in guaranteeing language maintenance among minority peoples. The Irish language community is an example of a linguistic group with the full support of an organized state exercising control over land use, resources and educational process that nevertheless has not been able to maintain or revitalize its language in a substantial manner. In bilingual Finland, the population rose from 3 million in 1912 to 5.4 million in 2012, with a simultaneous decline in the Swedish-speaking population from approximately 350,000 to 280,000. At the same time no similar decline can be observed in the monolingual Swedish-speaking autonomous region of the Åland Islands where population growth has also increased the amount of

Swedish-speakers. This demonstrates that the Fennicization of the Swedish-speaking population has mainly taken place in bi- and multilingual urban environments and among the working class (Tandefelt, 1994: 270–271). One can note that the Fennicization of the Swedish-speaking Finns has occurred nearly as fast as the Russification of several Finno-Ugrian groups in Russia (c.f. Lallukka, 2001), despite the fact that for the most part the latter have not had the opportunity to receive school instruction in their languages, and that the use of the Finno-Ugrian regional minority languages of Russia in administration and media is much more limited than the use of Swedish in Finland.

One can note that, among Swedish-speaking Finns, those social classes which work predominantly in professions where language skills are considered an instrument of work, and which therefore benefit from the bilingual societal structures of Finland, have not given up their language, while the urban working class for whom the language has primarily been a medium of daily communication (and not of employment) has lost it. A similar language shift has not occurred in the predominantly monolingual rural communities which continue to be Swedish-speaking.

The case of Swedish-speaking Finns demonstrates that even a relatively generous and well-organized bilingual administrative and educational system may not necessarily prevent the decline of a minority language. In this context it is interesting to note that there are also examples of linguistic minorities that have very limited control of land or resources, as well as very weak structures of education and administration in their own languages, but which nevertheless have not disappeared – and have even gained strength. Examples such as the Jews or Tatars in many European countries and Russia demonstrate that it is possible for minorities to preserve their ethnic integrity and language for centuries, in spite of their status as minority nationals within various state formations, without significant political control over major economic resources. In many cases this happened despite explicit attempts to crush minority identities. The Turkish Kurds or the Chechens in Russia might be examples of such linguistic minorities.

The relationship between territorially-bound perceptions of minorities and alternative approaches is also the focus of discussion for Hornsby and Agarín. The authors scrutinize different forms that societal group formation can take in

centralizing and decentralizing societies, by analysing specific cases of minority languages in Wales and Brittany, and in the Baltic States of Latvia and Estonia. While in the 1990s and 2000s the latter underwent a process which shifted power from the Russian-speaking population to the Estonian- and Latvian-speaking populations, Britain and France had very different experiences of political decentralization and the empowerment of minority language-speakers. Based on a critical evaluation of the current common perceptions of nation-states, the authors argue that contemporary cross-border migration and communications, as well as the changing nature of traditional minority languages, requires a new political paradigm for language policy and language planning that would not be based on the idea of homogenous citizenship reflected in the use of a single language. This should also lead to new research agendas which take into account both traditional, nation-state dominated, linguistic regulations, and current developments towards an increasingly borderless Europe in times of globalization.

On the other hand, articles by Koreinik and Saar, as well as Lazdiņa and Marten, outline the perspectives for minority language-speakers, emphasizing the limits of political autonomy. Koreinik and Saar discuss how majority society perceptions of the South Estonian varieties of Võru and Setu have created separate self-identification dynamics within these groups which have led to varying patterns of identity and cultural practices. The Setu group of the South Estonian speakers – who, in contrast to the (historically) dominating Lutheran denomination in Estonia, are overwhelmingly of Orthodox faith – are more inclined to consider their vernacular as an independent language and their group as an independent nation than the Võru group who are traditionally Lutheran and lean towards Estonian identity. However, this is not automatically reflected in their linguistic identities. Many Võru speakers consider their language an independent language or sub-language, and having some knowledge of it is considered a vital part of regional identity.

Similarly, Lazdiņa and Marten consider the lack of political decentralization in Latvia, and the absence of regional autonomy for the Latgalian language in Eastern Latvia. Speakers of Latgalian are suspected of being disloyal to the Latvian state and are thus caught between two stools in their struggle for recognition of their distinct regional identity within Latvian identity. In addition, the lack of decentralized structures has also led to economic policies which have left most speakers of

Latgalian in an economically peripheral situation. It is only in recent years that these state policies have begun to be challenged through increased activism by the community. Lazdiņa and Marten thereby relate economic aspects to ethnolinguistic vitality. Economic factors are particularly relevant in the context of state funding schemes, while the economic well-being of a region as a whole might also influence the situation.

As has frequently been pointed out, policies based on ideologies that have been labelled capitalist or neoliberal are often detrimental to ethnolinguistic survival (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Phillipson, 2003); minorities are often simply not prepared for the struggle in the framework of “survival of the fittest”. Therefore, minority protection schemes are of fundamental importance. As Vogt and Kreck (2009) show for the Sorbs in Germany, effective funding schemes are just one aspect of language maintenance. It is of fundamental value that the economic situation of a country as a whole allows for generous financial policies on minority issues, notably in cases where minorities live in remote regions, such as Gaelic-speakers in the Scottish Highlands or examples from South Estonia and Latgale. It is clear that decentralized structures of economic policies and public spending may influence economic well-being, and that economic resources are of fundamental importance to the development of a prosperous minority community.

The overarching theme of this special issue is thus the relationship between economic resources and political structures on the one hand, and participation of minority language communities on the other. This connection is related to ethnic and/or linguistic mobilization by minority communities which typically involves claims for economic participation and land, among other resources, despite examples of groups that control such commodities but which are unable to maintain or revitalize their languages. The articles in this collection address different societal processes affecting the recognition, use and transmission of languages through human networks and different types of administrative structures.

In this context, the articles in this volume investigate several overlapping questions that will be of interest to scholars of social and political sciences, as well as to sociolinguists and anthropologists working with and on minority language communities. The authors investigate how control over land, among other resources, is a prerequisite for sustaining linguistic communities. To what degree does access to

non-linguistic resources support multilingualism and how does it help to foster linguistic identities and to enhance language use within and outside the community? Given the differences in the vitality of language communities, what factors can explain differences? Our articles deal explicitly with the role played by the legislation and policies of nation-building, and with practices of language use and linguistic identities of communities in this process. Are different ethnic identities being mobilized in dealings with the authorities, while attempting to obtain recognition, oppose standardization and assimilate into societal processes? Can cooperation among linguistic minorities and communities of alternative identities be more successful in achieving recognition by the power structures? And finally, what is the role played by the right for land and resources in staking minority communities' rights to education as a tool to ensure the survival of linguistic communities?

This special issue of the *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* (JEMIE) brings together some of the participants of the symposium Political and Economic Resources and Obstacles of Minority Language Maintenance organized by the Language Survival Network 'POGA' at Tallinn University, Estonia, in December 2010. More than 20 scholars representing linguistics, anthropology, social sciences and law participated in the symposium, to present papers and discuss questions related to minority language loss, maintenance and revitalization. The six case studies contained in this special issue look at different minorities and regions in the European Union, Russia and the US. The linguistic communities discussed are the Russian-, Võru/Seto- and Latgalian-speaking minorities of Estonia and Latvia; the Welsh- and Breton-speaking communities of the Celtic language; the Russian Finno-Ugrian people with regional autonomies; and the native American groups of the Delaware/Cherokee and the Oneida. The reader will find articles relating to interdisciplinary research approaches in and on minority languages and minority language communities.

The POGA – Language Survival Network

The organizer of the Tallinn symposium, the POGA network, is a loose interdisciplinary and international network of scholars interested in questions related to endangerment, vitality and revitalization of minority languages in Russia and the EU. The aims of the network are to connect Russian and Western scholars and

activists, to facilitate the exchange of ideas between these two regions and their academic traditions, and to highlight similarities and differences between them. Participants in these network meetings represent academic institutions, government agencies and other organizations from Europe and beyond, and have backgrounds as linguists, anthropologists, lawyers and political scientists. The network has no organized structure, rules for membership or organized leadership. The activities have been funded by grants from different sources, among them Volkswagen Stiftung (Germany), Kone Foundation (Finland), and the Joint Committee for Nordic Research Councils for the Humanities and the Social Sciences (NOS-HS). These grants have been administered through the Department of Finnish, Finno-Ugrian and Scandinavian Studies (up to 2009 the Department of Finno-Ugrian languages and cultures) at the University of Helsinki.

Since 2007 POGA has held eight events. These included four symposia, three mini-symposia and one panel discussion. In the meetings, questions related to various aspects of language endangerment and revitalization were discussed, in light of the academic presentations delivered. The four symposia took place in linguistically diverse areas and addressed various aspects of language survival: *Language and Cultural Rights of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples in Europe: Comparing Russian Federation and European Union*, which was held in Lujavr [Russian Lovozero], Murmansk oblast, Russia, August 2007; *Equally Diverse? Comparing Linguistic and Cultural Minorities in the Russian Federation and the European Union* in Inari, Finland, January 2009; *Rights of Linguistic Minorities: Empowerment of European and Russian Speech Communities by Means of a Nordic Model?* in Mariehamn, Åland Islands, Finland, January 2010; and finally *Political and Economic Resources and Obstacles of Minority Language Maintenance*, in Tallinn, Estonia, December 2010. The Tallinn symposium focused on a comparison between minority language situations in different regions of the world, notably Russia, the EU and North America with an emphasis on traditional autochthonous minority languages. For the first time in the scientific activities of the POGA network, papers were presented that related to the indigenous peoples of the US.

POGA symposia have typically been small and informal, often with fewer than 20 participants. It has not been their aim to generate a publication from every meeting, but several publications related to minority language empowerment have

been prepared within the context of the network. The volume, *Equally Diverse. Comparing the Ethnic and Linguistic Minorities of the EU and the Russian Federation* (eds. Reetta Toivanen, Janne Saarikivi, Michael Riessler and Heiko F. Marten) is a selection of case studies on minority languages from Russia which aims to spread knowledge of Russian minorities among an English-speaking audience and to contrast these cases with cases from Western Europe. *Kak i začem soxranjat' jazyki narodov Rossii? (Why and how to protect the minority languages of Russia?)* by Annika Pasanen, Janne Saarikivi and Konstantin Zamyatin) is a popular scientific monograph on issues related to language extinction and revitalization, which includes practical advice for minority activists who want to protect their linguistic heritage, revitalize their languages and empower their ethnic groups. Both of these volumes are due to be published in 2012, with more information available on the network webpage, at <http://saami.uni-freiburg.de/poga/en/index.htm>.

In addition to these publications network activities also paved the way for the research project, *Empowerment and Revitalization Trends among the Linguistic Minorities in the European Union and the Russian Federation*, funded by the Academy of Finland, which is currently ongoing at the Department of Finnish, Finno-Ugrian and Scandinavian Studies at the University of Helsinki (headed by Janne Saarikivi). The main goal of the project is to clarify why some linguistic minorities succeed in revitalizing their languages and cultures, while others – which operate in seemingly similar social circumstances – lose their languages and culturally assimilate to majority populations. Within this general framework, six individual research projects will be carried out that focus on Russian and European minority language communities (among them Udmurts and Komi, the indigenous people of the Tajmyr peninsula, Hungarians in Romania, Inari Sámi and the South Sámi).

This special issue of JEMIE is the third volume to derive from the academic network developed under POGA. The articles evidence the multi-dimensionality of the empowerment of minorities and the challenges for securing ethnolinguistic vitality in Europe, and provide ample space for comparing European experiences to cases of Native Americans in the US. While favourable political structures and economic well-being are clearly important factors, the case studies presented here show that similar circumstances may nevertheless result in very different outcomes. It is this interplay of general factors and the uniqueness of each individual situation that makes linguistic

and cultural maintenance of minorities so challenging. The editors and the authors of the articles in this special issue of the *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* welcome you to this debate.

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