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## THE OUTLINES OF SLOVENIAN LANGUAGE POLICY

The article examines the processes involved in the conception and adoption of language policy in Slovenia. It also points out some contradictory elements in contemporary developments in Slovenian language policy.

Zanimalo nas bo, katere poti nastajanja in sprejemanja jezikovne politike obstajajo v sodobnem slovenskem prostoru, izpostavili bomo nekaj protislovnih elementov sodobnega slovenskega jezikovnopoličnega dogajanja.

**Key words:** Slovenian, language policy, language planning, sociolinguistics, language programme

**Ključne besede:** slovenščina, jezikovna politika, jezikovno načrtovanje, sociolingvistika, jezikovni program

### 1 Introduction

This actualisation of the notion of language policy seems possible due to the special moment in history in Slovenia. The second half of the 1990s in Slovenia and the first four years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century were in terms of language policy most noticeably marked by the debate concerning the law on Slovenian,<sup>1</sup> and in terms of substantive issues by Slovenia's accession to the European Union and the concrete dilemmas this process brought about.<sup>2</sup> This stage of the process concluded on 1 May 2005 when Slovenia entered the EU. This also marked the ending of a period in which Slovenia developed and matured as a distinct independent country, and the dilemmas of principle and the expectations regarding the new political situation began their transformation into concrete developments along the line between integration and independence. Language policy developments have quieted down as well, but basing the predictions of future events on Slovenian and European legal sources, it can be assumed that language policy will again become increasingly topical.

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<sup>1</sup> Entitled »Public Use of the Slovenian Language Act« in its final version, adopted in July 2004; with different titles in previous versions. It first entered the parliamentary procedure in 2000 under the title »Use of Slovenian as the Official Language Act« (*Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia*, 27 October 2005, no. 92).

<sup>2</sup> For an argumentation and characterisation of Slovenian language policy before the mid-1990s cf. Pogorelec 1993, 1996, Vidovič Muha 1996, Toporišič 1991; for the dilemmas with regard to Slovenian language policy in connection with the accession to the European Union cf. Štrukelj 1998, Kalin Golob 2001, Stabej 2001a and 2003a, for a distinctly defensive position cf. Dular 2003.

## 2 Language and Population

Census data on the population of Slovenia by mother tongue and ethnic affiliation can be taken as the basis for the debate on the current language situation.<sup>3</sup> In 2002 there were supposedly 0.6 % fewer (87.7) inhabitants whose mother tongue was Slovenian than in 1991 (88.3).<sup>4</sup> The number of inhabitants increased, however, and the number of native speakers of Slovenian was 1,723,434 according to the 2002 Census, while there were supposedly 1,690,388 speakers in 1991, which means that the number actually increased by 33,046. All these numbers can only be explained in the context of the whole linguistic picture. The share of inhabitants with Serbo-Croatian as their mother tongue dropped significantly (from 4.2 % to 1.8 %, i.e. from 80,325 to 36,265), a 'new' Census language appeared, namely Bosnian, which was not present in the 1991 Census and was chosen by 1.6 % or 31,499 speakers in 2002. There was a slight increase in the shares of Croatian (from 2.6 % to 2.8 %) and Serbian (from 0.9 % to 1.6 %) languages. The share of the declaration 'unknown' increased as well (from 2.2 % to 2.7 %).

If these data are compared to the ethnic affiliation data, the following picture emerges:

1991 mother tongue	1991 ethnic affiliation	2002 mother tongue	2002 ethnic affiliation
Slovenian 1690388	Slovenian 1689657	1723434	1631363
Italian 3882	Italian 2959	3762	2258
Hungarian 8720	Hungarian 8000	7713	6243
Romany 2752	Romany 2259	3834	3246
Albanian 3903	Albanian 3534	7177	6186
Croatian 50699	Croatian 52876	54079	35642
Macedonian 4525	Macedonian 4371	4760	3972
Serbian 18123	Serbian 47401	31329	38964
Serbo-Croatian 80325		36265	
Bosnian	Bosniac	31499	21542
	Muslim 26577		10467

It needs to be added that the total share of those who did not declare their ethnic affiliation, did not want to answer, or belonged to the category 'unknown' was significantly higher in 2002 than in the 1991 Census.

In brief (being aware of the fact that statistical data need to be interpreted cautiously and that any conclusions may be precipitate), the thesis can be made on the basis of the above-mentioned data that the Slovenian language has been *denationalised* to some degree in the last 15 years. In 1991, the number of those who declared Slovenian to be their mother tongue nearly matched the number of those who declared their ethnic affiliation to be Slovene; according to the 2002 Census, there were almost 100,000 more of those who considered Slovenian their mother tongue than of those who de-

<sup>3</sup> Data taken from the website of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (<http://www.stat.si/index.asp>).

<sup>4</sup> To insure comparability of data, the Statistical Office recalculated the 1991 data according to the 2002 methodology.

clared themselves Slovenian by ethnic affiliation. All the interpretive cautiousness notwithstanding, it can probably nevertheless be concluded that these data present an image which speaks of the vitality of the Slovenian language, and indirectly also of its prestigious status in the Republic of Slovenia (Škiljan 2003, 127). The definition of mother tongue is of course somewhat problematic in itself,<sup>5</sup> and at the same time these data do not reveal the language repertoire (i.e. the knowledge of other languages) or language habits of inhabitants of the RS. The preservation of the present share of inhabitants with Slovenian as their mother tongue can surely be seen not only as a good sign for the Slovenian language situation, but probably also as one of the goals of language policy in Slovenia in the future. On the other hand, any further decrease in the share of other languages<sup>6</sup> – even if 'in favour' of Slovene – would be a warning to Slovenian language policy that it was not fulfilling its mission democratically and in accordance with EU guidelines.

Regardless of the questionable nature of the notion of mother tongue, this declaration substantively mostly belongs, in terms of substance, to the private sphere. A democratic language policy must above all make the sphere of private communication possible, rather than directing it. It must predominantly direct the elements of public and official communication.

The processes of migration have changed their course since the attainment of independence – 'sleeping' immigration, which was a serious (and most often concealed) problem of language policy all the way to the end of the 1990s,<sup>7</sup> has mostly been integrated and linguistically stabilised.<sup>8</sup> A similar situation can be found in the population of refugees from the recent wars in Yugoslavia who after 1991 found refuge in Slovenia. On the other hand, a new type of both immigration and emigration has been on the increase, in a moderate form it seems. Statistical data also indirectly show that

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<sup>5</sup> Especially to multilingual members of minority communities, *mother tongue* can mean many things: the language first acquired, the language they attribute the highest value to, the language of the mother (versus, e.g. the language of the father in bilingual families) etc., all combined or individually. Modern research practice (Ban, Špelko 2005, Pavšič 2005) has shown, however, that also other language designations (e.g. first language, second language) are never understood unambiguously in polls – even within a relatively homogeneous community, let alone across different communities.

<sup>6</sup> This is especially true of the languages of the indigenous and non-indigenous minority communities.

<sup>7</sup> This concerns those immigrant citizens/residents of Slovenia who already resided in the Republic of Slovenia when it was part of Federal Yugoslavia before 1991. For most of them it can be estimated that after moving to Slovenia (mostly for economic and professional reasons) they did not systematically learn Slovenian and for the most part did not speak it even in public communication due to the specific understanding of the status of languages in Yugoslavia and the specific communicative habits of Slovenian speakers. After the attainment of independence, one of the conditions that had to be fulfilled to acquire Slovenian citizenship was (except for a short period of time) a proof of knowledge of Slovenian (Ferbe`ar, Piriš Svetina 2004). Leclerc 2000 (quoted in [Škiljan 2003]) interprets this as a markedly negative aspect of Slovenian language policy.

<sup>8</sup> The improvised designation of *stabilisation* means that the linguistic and communicative profile of this population has been fixed and enables it to function at least approximately normally. This does not of course mean that in individual cases members of this population do not encounter serious problems and difficulties. Here again the problem of the erased turns up.

Slovenia has become linguistically somewhat more diverse than it was before independence.<sup>9</sup>

### 3 Public Monolingualism and the Plurilingual Ability of Speakers

The fundamental task of language policy in Slovenia seems to be the search for the answer to the following challenge: how to establish and maintain the sensitive and constructive balance between the status of Slovene as a fully functional, public, official, national language, and the increasing plurilingualism of the Slovenian public and Slovenian speakers.<sup>10</sup> Slovene has to keep its position as the most functional and prestigious language in the language repertoire of individual speakers whose first language is Slovenian, and Slovenian has to be strengthened in the repertoire of speakers who reside for a longer period of time or often communicate within the Slovenian language community.<sup>11</sup>

There are several dimensions to the plurilingualism of the Slovenian (and European) public. The Council of Europe (especially its language division)<sup>12</sup> and the European Commission are working towards a broad plurilingualism. They strive for as many Europeans as possible to know as many languages as possible, to reach the highest level of language awareness possible, to be involved in the sphere of their own culture and language, and to be at least tolerant to (if not actively curious about) other cultures and languages.

The question to be posed is therefore the following: In what way will the new Slovenian plurilingualism (with the following elements: an earlier, more wide-spread and functional mastery of English as the global language; a possibly more varied mastery of other foreign languages; with a regained function and ideological unburdening at least a receptive ability for other South Slavic languages, etc.) shape the Slovenian public language sphere and to what extent will Slovenia be able to operate as a monolingual public sphere.

### 4 Operation of Slovenian Language Policy

The usual socio-linguistically posited dichotomy between a directive and a liberal language policy (Škiljan 2003, 84) is less applicable to the characterisation of a concrete language policy in a certain time and space since any actual language policy will

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<sup>9</sup> The 2002 Census registered the following languages as new mother tongues: Arabic, Bosnian, Montenegrin (the last two concern a new definition of language and not the language itself), Chinese, and Spanish. The number of declared speakers (although these are mostly negligible categories in terms of percentage) increased for English, Bulgarian, Danish, French, Greek, German, Dutch, Russian, Slovak, Turkish, and Ukrainian. The number decreased for the Czech, Polish, Romanian, Russian, Swedish, and Vlach languages. The data are taken from the website of the Statistical Office.

<sup>10</sup> Škiljan considers contradiction one of the fundamental characteristics of European integration, also in the context of language policy (2003, 77).

<sup>11</sup> For more on the dilemmas of plurilingualism in Slovenian circumstances see Stabej 2003b.

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural\\_Co-operation/education/Languages/Language\\_Policy/](http://www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural_Co-operation/education/Languages/Language_Policy/)



oscillate in its acts between the two extremes. Moreover, a liberal language policy in its extreme form is not a policy at all, but at best a public attitude toward the language or languages.

The methodological distinction between an explicit and implicit language policy (LP) might prove more fruitful. The former kind of LP would thus mean institutionally manifest (specialised and authorised) agents of LP, with plainly stated programmatic starting-points and goals, and clear public activities. The latter form would mean exactly the opposite, institutionally non-manifest agents of LP whose actions are concealed and indirectly included in other forms of political and public-law activities, while their language policy activity is not openly defined in terms of its programme and goals.

The inexplicitness of LP has its advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, it undoubtedly enables a more flexible activity and a more efficient realisation of partial language policy goals, and thus most probably maintains a certain stability of the language situation.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, the inexplicitness of LP can be a source of several kinds of problems. The most serious one is perhaps that underlying most actions with a possible language policy effect are *default* opinions of the agents of LP about language, language situation, and its related values and goals. Default opinions can only be a bad generator of language policy. People with default opinions usually do not know much about the nature of linguistic phenomena and processes; they therefore cannot design or carry out constructive language policy acts,<sup>14</sup> and they especially cannot adapt to changes in the language situation.

Another problem of an inexplicit LP is that contradictory partial language policy acts can bring about conflicts in the language situation which are difficult to resolve. The warning needs to be repeated here that already at a theoretical level, let alone in a concrete situation, it is very difficult to distinguish between language policy acts and language planning acts. In our present debate, this difficulty can be resolved by conceiving the decision for a change in the language situation as a language policy act, and the determination of the ways of attaining the goal and of the steps of its realisation as a language planning act. Many a language policy act is of course nothing but an ideological statement.<sup>15</sup> Many acts which at first glance appear to pertain to language planning actually have a language policy and ideological significance in Slovenia – maintaining the symbolic link between the Slovenian nation and the Slovenian language as the only value of language policy.

<sup>13</sup> Mostly because contradictory language interests can thus be realised in society; this in turn renders a monolith and/or monopolistic language policy impossible.

<sup>14</sup> Such language policy usually uses the terms *language preservation*, *language cultivation*, *fostering of language* etc.

<sup>15</sup> An example: on 28 August 2004, Delo (p. 30) featured an advertisement in which a primary school in Ljubljana offered a position for a teacher of Slovenian and English. »Our new colleague is expected to have a professional and ethical attitude to pupils. In the teaching of both subjects we wish for a creative approach and the use of the most modern teaching methods, and for Slovenian also an education in language culture and the love of the Slovenian language and literature.« This expressed expectation of an education in language culture and love is impossible to verify objectively, which makes it a purely ideological statement which can only be »realised« if only those apply for the position who agree with this ideological stand and are probably also prepared to express it explicitly in front of the hiring committee.

Notwithstanding the above hypothetical definition of the contemporary tasks of Slovenian language policy, the question needs to be raised whether language policy can really be justly treated as something with a *task* or *tasks*, as every language policy situation is marked by contradictory and conflicting points of view. Perhaps the desire for a consensual, uniform language policy activity is not only vacuous utopian romanticism, difficult to realise, but possibly even harmful to the stability of language and public communication.

In the Slovenian public and political sphere, explicitly expressed contradictory attitudes to the status of the Slovene language are not so easy to find, i.e. they are very rare. It is more often the case that certain acts are directly or indirectly labelled as questionable, harmful or detrimental to Slovenian, its position and/or its image.

Explicitly expressed orientation of language policy can be seen in the current legal acts and documents. There is an array of concrete public mechanisms (e.g. tenders for the use of budgetary funding, announced by individual ministries in accordance with their programmes and authorities) which are only indirectly connected with language policy goals, i.e. these goals are of incidental significance only. Together with other institutional activities, such acts can be considered implicit language policy.

#### 4.1 Institutionalisation and Deinstitutionalisation

If it seemed in the 1990s that Slovenian language policy was gradually being established as a manifest institutional activity (Stabej 2000, 2001), recent times have shown Slovenian language policy being deinstitutionalised again. The language planning and language policy parliamentary group, set up in 1994,<sup>16</sup> was dissolved following the constitution of new parliament after the 2004 elections, i.e. despite the proposals to the contrary of the Culture, Education, Youth, Science, and Sport Committee, the President of the National Assembly Franc Cukjati did not extend its mandate with the argument that parliamentary regulations do not provide for its operation.<sup>17</sup> The Slovenian Language Office, established by a parliamentary decree in 2000, was reorganised in 2004 into the Slovenian Language Sector within the Ministry of Culture.<sup>18</sup> The Foreign Languages Council, founded in 1999 as an advisory body to the Minister of Education, has not met since 2003.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Pogorelec 1996, 59. Transcriptions of the group's meetings from 2001 to 2004 are available from the National Assembly website (<http://www.dz-rs.si/>).

<sup>17</sup> One of the last acts of the working group was to prepare the conference Language Planning Strategy in the Republic of Slovenia, which was held on 28 September 2004 on the premises of the Parliament. In the new parliament, the question of the working group was first considered at the first meeting of the Culture, Education, Youth, Science, and Sport Committee on 14 January 2005; on 18 January 2005, the president of the committee, Jože Tanko, announced the resolution of the committee for the group to continue its work to the President of the National Assembly, who on 20 January 2005, announced to the president of the committee his decision that the group could not continue with its work.

<sup>18</sup> The only publicly visible form of its operation is the yearly 'public tender for the funding of projects intended for the assertion, promotion, and development of the Slovenian language.' The public is not informed about the results of the tender, nor are the yearly reports of the sector's activities at its disposal.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.mszs.si/slo/ministrstvo/sveti/ministrski/jeziki.asp>



## 4.2 Explicit Acts

### 4.2.1 Resolution on the National Programme for Culture

The Resolution on the National Programme for Culture 2004–2007\* is one of the few documents beside the Public Use of Slovenian Act which are explicitly declaratory with regard to language policy.<sup>20</sup> Already in the foreword, this document puts forward the thesis that *»our cultural policy must pay special attention and constantly observe the fundamental element of our cultural identity, which at the same time presents the basis of our national identity, the Slovenian language«*.<sup>21</sup> The substantial reason for language concern is the estimate that the Slovenian language community is endangered and under pressure. The formulation of this threat may be slightly concealed (*the number of Slovenians in the neighbouring states is diminishing; smaller national languages face the danger of marginalization in the processes of globalization and integration*), but it is unmistakably present. Given the time when the resolution was approved, it is clear that it was tailored mostly to Slovenia's accession to the EU: *»The challenges of European integration processes demand from the Slovenian cultural policy a thorough and future-oriented strategy of development planning, which creates balance between preservation and development of Slovenian culture, especially through concern for Slovenian language and language culture and through openness to cultural diversity, which is the underlying idea of European integration, and the notion of culture as an indispensable factor of development and stimulation of individual creativity in the period of globalization and commercialization, which have impact also in the field of culture.«* What is emphasised is therefore the *concern for Slovenian language and language culture*, a more precise definition of which is attempted at in the continuation of the document. As the goal of this concern, the document states *»sustainable and increasing development of the Slovenian language in the public life of Slovenian society«*, for its implementation *»an active language policy«* is required, *»e.g. balanced care for cultural, political, economic, and communicational dimensions of language usage«*, which is to be *»made independently«*, *»in line with the existing practice«* in Slovenia and encouraging linguistic awareness is stressed as its principle instead of restrictive measures.<sup>22</sup> As an important task of LP the resolution

\* Translation by the Ministry of Culture: <http://www.kultura.gov.si/bin?bin.svc=obj&bin.id=20844> (translator's note).

<sup>20</sup> It was adopted by the National Assembly on 27 February 2004 and published in the *Official Gazette* on 25 March 2004. All of the formal legal documents cited are available at [www.dz-rs.si](http://www.dz-rs.si).

<sup>21</sup> It is interesting to note that the declaratory link-up of Slovenehood with the Slovenian language is complemented by a concealed formal link – although first-person diction is not rare in other national programme resolutions from various fields either, it is even more definitive and at the same time exclusive in the context of language matters; in other resolutions the reference of first-person pronouns can be *citizens*, while here it can only be *members of the Slovenian people*.

<sup>22</sup> *»We are thus entering the European Union as a state with its own language in all areas of public life, which has its norms, corpus and other bases, as well as articulated style. We will be able to develop our linguistic independence also in the new circumstances, since the European Union embraces the idea of a multilingual union and respects the development of linguistic diversity. Even though contacts between speakers of different languages often result in specific situations in terms of the selection and usage of*

mentions connecting *»different sources of language development and its agents«* and encouraging their activities. *»In the narrower field of culture the Ministry of Culture will support those programmes and projects which observe and support the development of language.«* The paragraph which was only added as an amendment during the actual adopting of the document by the Culture, Education, Youth, Science, and Sport Committee accentuated with particular explicitness the symbolic function of Slovenian (which happens to be expressed several times in the document, cf. above) with regard to its communicative role: *»The Slovenian language is not only an instrument of daily communication and expression of spiritual and artistic contents, but also a treasury of culture and one of the main national and state symbols, therefore it should be supported in every field, not only in schools, public communication, technological and work processes, and scientific terminology.«*

The measures to realise the programme are the following:

*» – coordination of the language policy; – adoption of the Act on Public Use of the Slovenian Language and its implementation; – increased accessibility of books in Slovenian language and promotion of Slovenian literature and literature in translation, with the aim to broaden and enhance the reading culture; – support of programmes and projects for independent assessment of functional literacy and elimination of the causes of functional illiteracy; – cooperation and integration in the field of science and education, e.g. in research programmes of standard Slovenian language, especially in the research of morphology and semantics of both standard Slovenian language and Slovenian technical terminologies; – promotion of the research of the sociocultural dimensions of the usage of Slovenian language in all fields of life; – help in the enhancement of knowledge on text-formation rules and on adequacy and semantic functionality of different expressions (proofreading, language tools, teaching of writing skills); – special focus on the usage of language in the media and the overall spread of audiovisual culture, which impacts the general culture of public communication; – promotion of performing arts in the Slovenian language, along with the promotion of Slovenian drama and translation of Slovenian plays; support of the theatre production and its transmission to different media; – measures in the field of librarianship which increase the accessibility of library materials and promote the reading culture; – the aim of these measures is to preserve and develop library funds, and also to ensure the modernisation of the materials through electronic publications in Slovenian and the digitalisation of literary heritage; – consideration of the particularities of the usage of Slovenian as a second language in constitutionally bilingual environments; promotion of awareness of Slovenian as a second/foreign language with all relevant bases.«*

The resolution includes an interesting mixture of traditional conceptions about fostering for the language and more modern language planning ideas. It is understandable that in this type of text formulations are highly general. Nevertheless they create the impression that the goals and means are not set clearly enough. The first

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*language, the language policy will address such cases **not with restrictive measures but by encouraging linguistic awareness** (underlined by the author).«*



two measures, coordinating language policy and adopting a law on the public use of Slovenian, as a matter of fact indicate the idea of the self-evident unity of the goals of Slovenian language policy. Many of the other measures mentioned are in fact goals in themselves. It is obvious, however, that the goals are mostly oriented toward the language itself, researching it and spreading texts written in it,<sup>23</sup> and less toward the speakers of the language, their language ability and their linguistic and communicative needs. Such were the goals of another language policy act, which is presented in the next chapter.

#### 4.2.2 Overview of Language Policy in Education

In February 2003, the Minister of Education appointed an expert group to prepare the project *Language Education Policy Profile in the Republic of Slovenia* in cooperation with the Council of Europe.<sup>24</sup> The project was roughly designed to go through the following stages: First the working group, appointed according to the methodologically open recommendations and guidelines of the Council of Europe, prepared a draft of the Country Report and sent it to the expert group appointed by the Council of Europe.<sup>25</sup> During a one-week working visit (from 18 to 24 January 2004), the latter visited a number of educational institutions in Slovenia and held meetings with those executing and attending educational programmes. After their visits they prepared the report in September 2004. On the basis of both reports (taking into adequate consideration the remarks and recommendations of the Council of Europe experts), the Slovenian experts were supposed to prepare, in cooperation with the authorities, and the Council of Europe was supposed to publish, the final document *Language Education Policy Profile in the Republic of Slovenia*. Both intermediate documents were published as working papers (Council of Europe Expert Report in September 2004, and Draft Country Report in November 2004).<sup>26</sup> On 30 November 2004 a presentation of the two reports was organised in Ljubljana with a public debate to which representatives of all the institutions visited by the experts were invited as well as other members of the interested public. Even though the final document was not (has not yet been?) prepared and published, the project did produce some interesting results. First of all, there was a noticeable difference in the interpretation of some facts in the field of language education – among the members of the national group, but even

<sup>23</sup> Underlying this orientation is most probably the deeply rooted belief that such acts in themselves have a positive impact on the language situation, which is not necessarily true.

<sup>24</sup> In the same year, Albina Nečak Lük (2003) published a booklet in English with an overview of the data and an interpretation of language education policy in Slovenia (with a brief outline of the general language policy and its history).

<sup>25</sup> The following members were appointed to the Slovene expert group: Lucija Čok, Mateja Gajgar, Zdravka Godunc, Meta Grosman, Albina Nečak Lük, Herta Orešič, Katja Pavlič Škerjanc, Branka Petek, and Marko Stabej. The Country Report coordinator was Herta Orešič, and the coordinator for the cooperation with the Council of Europe was Zdravka Godunc. The members of the Council of Europe expert group were Joseph Shiels, Head of the Language Policy Division, Chief Reporter Jean-Claude Beacco, and Gábor Boldizsár, Alan Dobson, and Georges Lüdi as members.

<sup>26</sup> Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, Office for Development of Education.

more so among the Council of Europe experts. In the light of ensuring the plurilingual communicative ability of the population of the European countries, an explicit goal of both the Council of Europe and the European Commission, most proposals were naturally oriented toward further improvements in the efficiency of the Slovene education system offer in this field. More precisely, the recommendations were directed towards increasing the offer of the neighbouring languages, a more general offer and earlier learning of a second foreign language in primary school, expanding language teaching in all tracks of secondary vocational and professional education, and an effort – very generally formulated – for language education in all faculties. The experts paid significant attention to the permanent education and further training of teachers for a plurilingual and pluricultural education. The more specific remarks regarding language planning were mostly oriented toward a greater harmonisation of Slovenian language-education practices (including testing) with the Council of Europe's language documents, especially the so-called Common European Framework of Reference<sup>27</sup> and the European Language Portfolio.<sup>28</sup> The experts had no specific comments regarding the role of Slovenian in education itself, except for stating that it would be useful to »*harmonise the aims and curricula of foreign languages and the national language /.../, especially with regard to functional literacy*«. This is perhaps the domain where the discrepancy between the Country Report and the report by the Council of Europe experts is the most evident: it seems that the latter understand, a priori, the role of the national language in Slovenian education as stable and efficient enough, and that here their only matter of concern is for such a role of the national language not to thwart the growth of the plurilingual repertoire and the communicative ability of the Slovenian population. What can therefore be observed in the Council of Europe expert group report, even more than the understanding of the specificity of the Slovenian language situation and the proposals to overcome the discrepancy between some of its elements, is the distinctly fashionable European political tendency towards the necessary assurance of plurilingualism, i.e. within the language repertoire of individual speakers and not in the sense of creating multilingual public communication. But in any real language situation it is difficult to leave aside the public and spatial aspects of communication; in the Slovenian and similar situations, this is even more difficult due to historical reasons. That is why, despite its richness, diversity, and efficiency, the offer of foreign languages (ranging from global and widespread to neighbouring and less widespread) cannot in itself positively shape the language situation unless it is also substantiated by and harmonised with the learning and teaching of the national language and other official languages in certain bilingual areas.<sup>29</sup> An efficient foreign language offer which is not harmonised can even fundamentally destabilise the language situation. Clearly, the question again arises what it means for language

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<sup>27</sup> *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Slovenian translation not yet available.

<sup>28</sup> [www.coe.int/portfolio](http://www.coe.int/portfolio)

<sup>29</sup> In this case this is true no matter who considers the national language their first language/mother tongue and who does not.



offer to be harmonised,<sup>30</sup> and the answer to this question cannot be both satisfying and short at the same time. Participants in education can by no means have a feeling that their language education is a battle for the dominance of an individual language.<sup>31</sup> The Council of Europe experts were aware of this as well when they hinted at harmonisation, but did not go into the ways of realising it.

#### 4. 2. 3 Language Policy Programmes

Language policy programmes cannot in fact be separated from language planning programmes. So far certain fundamentals of the Slovenian language policy programme have been discussed, and even though it is clear that the present paper cannot be the place to analyse these problems in detail, two such programmes by foreign authors will be presented in brief in the light of the national language policy programme envisaged as necessary by the law on Slovenian in public use.<sup>32</sup>

De Beaugrande (1998) suggested for the Slovenian circumstances a language programme with six points, which is summed up here in its brief form. In his opinion, the following steps would be necessary:<sup>33</sup>

1. a close integration of policy-making and implementation; more expertise in both fields (government-supported cooperation between policy-makers, language experts, language teachers, mass media personnel, users of specialised terminology, etc.);
2. assembling of a representative corpus of current language usage;
3. a large-scale programme for native language education; setting the goals and methods of their realisation;
4. implementing policies for large-scale, rapid access to the major Western languages;

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. the similar dilemma in the Resolution on the National Programme of Culture 2004-2007 mentioned above.

<sup>31</sup> Even statements that seem to be tolerant and all-inclusive can be a source of conflicting understanding of language. The second general aim of Slovenian as a school subject in the first three-year period of primary school can be taken as an example: »*Pupils are aware that the Slovenian language is the national language in the Republic of Slovenia; in this way their national and patriotic awareness is shaped, as well as respect of and tolerance toward other nations.*« This aim appears to be very difficult to implement pedagogically – how is, for example, an eight-year-old to imagine that in his country the Slovenian language is somehow superior to other languages and at the same time begin to respect other nations and become tolerant toward them?

<sup>32</sup> The act contains an explicit stipulation of this kind in article 4: »The Republic of Slovenia ensures the status of Slovenian with an active language policy, which includes the concern for the assurance of the legal basis of its use, for permanent scholarly research-based observation of linguistic life and for the broadening of language capacity, and the concern for language development and culture.« Article 4 stands in close correlation with articles 28 and 35 of the same act, which speak of the obligation of the National Assembly to approve within two years from the adoption of the law, at the proposal of the Government of RS, the national language policy programme, where the measures will be defined to carry out the tasks from the above-mentioned article 4 in the following five-year period and where the necessary means and the manner of providing them will be secured. The question remains, however, how the government will succeed in assuring a suitable programme without an authorised institutional body for language policy.

<sup>33</sup> For the evaluation of Beaugrande's steps and the condition of Slovenian language situation see Stabej 2001b.

5. intensive teacher training programmes should coordinate training between the Slovene language and the major foreign languages;
6. introduction of new teaching methodologies adapted to the context of contemporary Slovenia and its needs.

Škiljan (2003: 87) points out three components of LP in European integration processes:

1. choice of strategy when one's own communicative and symbolic sphere enters the wider communicative and symbolic sphere of united Europe and the question of balance between the aspiration for one's own language identity and the communicative (but also symbolic) needs imposed by the common European market;
2. regulation of the relations between majority and minority language and ethnic groups within the country in such a way as to correspond on the one hand to the aims of one's own politics and traditions they are based on, and on the other hand, to meet the standards directly and indirectly promoted by the European Union;
3. language education of citizens and their communicative ability to participate efficiently in the common European labour market.

He stresses the following ideas in the Slovenian situation (133):

- 1) The membership in the European Union will not endanger communicatively nor symbolically the ethnic identity of the Slovenian language community or its vitality.
- 2) The status of Slovenian as the national and official language and as the basic means of public communication does not need tighter legal regulation; some deregulation and less legislation in this field would facilitate the development of language multifunctionality.
- 3) The status of Slovenian as an official language of the European Union will not change significantly its status in Europe; a greater effect would be exerted by its presence as one of the 'rotating' languages on the restricted list of working languages in the Union's institutions.
- 4) Slovenian would have to be promoted in the Union among experts of different specialities as an idiom providing primary communicative access to the South Slavic sphere.
- 5) A greater presence of other languages (particularly English) is to be expected in specific (rather limited) fields of public communication in Slovenia; for Slovenian to remain competitive in these fields as well, the design of the corpus should focus more on the development of multifunctionality than on setting explicit norms.
- 6) The present high level of protection of language rights of 'indigenous' minorities could be – without any harm for Slovenian – extended to 'non-indigenous' minorities as well.
- 7) In the field of language education, the already present model – which offers the greatest number of languages possible at as young an age as possible and which promotes trilingualism or quadrilingualism in the youngest population possible – should be further developed.



## 5 Language between Its Symbolic and Communicative Roles

According to Škiljan (2003: 86), the most important determinant of every language policy is the dominant ideology in society. Despite the lack of proper qualifications for any debate about the dominant ideology in Slovenia, the following thesis can nonetheless be advanced: at the level of linguistic, cultural and political identity, the dominant ideology in Slovenia continues to be the national one, but at the level of economic, financial and many other spheres, the ideology of the national is to a great extent melting, being replaced by others. Within the framework of this process, the language is subject to additional pressures – an even more powerful symbolic, identifying role than before is attributed to the dominant language in society, which at least in Slovenia Slovene is, as it is (again) becoming the *only* element distinguishing 'us' from the 'others' unambiguously and on a large scale. In this distinguishing role, language is more efficient than other typically identifying phenomena, since it carries, beside the symbolic dimension, a straightforwardly functional, i.e. communicative, dimension. We do not wear our national costumes, dance our national dances, sing our folk songs, read our national literature, eat our national dishes every day. The language, however, is indeed with us every day in all the different communicative activities. But this same language which is so strongly understood by the community as the distinctive symbolic element of its unity is consequently highly vulnerable and can be easily paralysed in its functional, i.e. communicative, dimension.

It is usually the case (within European national language situations) that an individual only accepts the direct link between the symbolic and communicative functions in *one* language in their language repertoire (or two at the most if coming from a bilingual family environment), while any other acquired languages are of communicative nature only. But a very real possibility exists that under changed circumstances different, multi-layered symbolic-communicative links occur in individuals. If in certain situations a language is no longer sufficient for an individual *communicatively* (due to a variety of possible reasons), it can easily happen that for this individual such a language will also lose its *generally valid* symbolic role. The symbolism is thus allocated and dispersed to all of the languages in the individual's language repertoire. In its extreme, this type of individual language identity probably also implies a change in the individual's identity and its shift away from the national.

Slovenian must therefore remain the dominant public language in the territory of the Republic of Slovenia if it is to further develop its corpus and if the number of its speakers is to be maintained or increased. The public dominance of Slovenian must at least in principle conform to the communicative and symbolic needs and the democratic (legal) obligations of society and its individuals. The discrimination of other languages in Slovenia cannot render public communication inaccessible to speakers (here the key role is played by efficient planning not only of the corpus of the Slovenian language, but most of all of the language capacity for Slovenian).<sup>34</sup> At the same

<sup>34</sup> The language capacity for Slovenian as a second/foreign language poses a special problem here, cf. Zemljarič 2000, Stabej 2003, Nataša Pirih (ed.) 2004.

time, the dominant role of Slovenian in Slovenian public communication must not stop its speakers from efficient global communication in other languages (especially in English as the global language), for which they of course need adequate language ability and channels of communication. If this were to happen, the community would close down on itself and most probably become not only economically but also civilisationally uncompetitive.<sup>35</sup>

The contradiction between the two requests often only clearly shows in everyday practice. What is more, the actual relations of cause and effect are sometimes even contrary to what is expected. Higher education can be taken as an example. Internationalisation seems to be absolutely indispensable to growth in quality and competitiveness of Slovenian higher education. Many see this process as being thwarted precisely by Slovenian as the prescribed obligatory language of the educational process since it supposedly represents an insurmountable obstacle to a greater extent of both teacher and student mobility.<sup>36</sup> To those seeing it this way, the judgment of Solomon usually appears to be to abolish the *obligatory* use of Slovenian and liberalise the language side of higher education. But de facto this most probably means a significant increase in the use of English as the language of instruction.

All of these dilemmas were easily noticeable during the debate about the changes of the Slovenian Higher Education Act, especially in the discussions at the parliamentary meeting of the Culture, Education, Youth, Science, and Sport Committee on 11 May 2004. Until then, the legal wording of article 8 provided for a lesser number of exceptions regarding the obligatory use of Slovenian as the university language of instruction. With the suggested changes, the submitters wanted to increase the possibilities for the use of foreign language; as a kind of compensation, they adopted the proposal of the working group for language planning and language policy for the law to obligate institutions of higher education to actively participate in the forming of technical Slovenian and to expressly enable foreign participants in the higher education process to learn Slovenian in an organised way. In the new version of the law, adopted on 15 July 2004, the wording of article 8 is as follows:

*»The language of instruction is Slovenian. An institution of higher education can carry out study programmes or their parts in a foreign language under the conditions defined in the statute. If an institution provides public service, the following can be carried out in a foreign language: – study programmes of foreign languages; – parts of study programmes if visiting higher-education teachers from abroad participate in their execution or if a larger number of foreign students are enrolled; – study programmes if these programmes are also carried out at the institution of higher education in the Slovenian language. – Institutions of higher education concern themselves*

<sup>35</sup> M. Grosman (2003) discusses the language knowledge with which to function in Europe and the intercultural dimension of language teaching.

<sup>36</sup> Sometimes this is a real and sometimes an imagined obstacle. Knowledge of a language is something that can be attained – and, for instance, within Erasmus exchange programmes there is quite some room to efficiently learn the language of the host country. But the idea that Slovenian is there for Slovenians only is so strongly rooted in the Slovenian mindset (Stabej 2005) that many will *a priori* renounce the possibility of students learning Slovenian (in a functionally restricted sense, of course) or will not even think of it.

*with the development of Slovenian as a technical and scientific language. – Foreigners and Slovenian nationals without Slovenian citizenship are provided with the opportunity to learn Slovenian. – The manner of fostering for the development and learning of Slovenian is determined in greater detail by the minister with jurisdiction over higher education.*«

At the moment of this writing (November 2005), the ministry has not yet determined the more detailed manner of fostering, mentioned in the last paragraph. This is a rather typical illustration of the fact that without additional interventions by language planning bodies, explicit acts of language policy often remain unrealised.

The retreat of Slovenian from higher education would on the other hand mean a retreat from a very representative domain of public use. Indirectly it could cause a decrease in the use (or at least efficient use) of Slovenian in other public domains as well. A retreat in use would most likely also have definite corpus language dimensions, not only at the level of terminology but also at the level of argumentative structures, text patterns etc. And more: the accessibility of higher education would be made – for some time at least – substantially more difficult for speakers of Slovenian, as future students would already have to master English to a much higher degree than today to enter Slovenian undergraduate education. Consequently this would also mean a long-term adjustment of secondary school curricula (different goals and presumably also increased extent of English language learning), which would moreover trigger changes in the primary school curriculum, etc. In other words, to access higher education Slovenians would *first* have to learn another language thoroughly – which in Slovenian historical memory means a severe regression.

On the other hand, it is also true that already today a lack of receptive capacity in English represents a major practical deficiency in undergraduate study and that not mastering English productively most probably leaves a considerable part of the contemporary active university teaching and research population in Slovenia paralysed in terms of their careers.<sup>37</sup>

## 6 Conclusion

As it seems, it is the status of the language that takes priority with regard to language policy. This does not, however, exclusively (or mainly) concern the formal legal

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<sup>37</sup> This can only be speculated since no reliable data are available. It is clear that the Slovenian scientific and university community has almost always had at its disposal active competence also (or principally) in another language. There was a time when this was Latin, then German for a long time (when the Slovenian language was not yet a language of science, then parallelly with it); within Slavic studies and in the Slavic world the dominant language actively mastered by the vast majority of scientists was Russian; within the framework of Yugoslavia it was Serbo-Croatian; it was actually only for a short while in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that it seemed that productive knowledge of Slovenian would suffice and that it would be possible to assure the conveyance of the best works of Slovenian scholarly production to foreign audiences through *translations*. But this vague idea has virtually disappeared in modern conditions where most of the time there is no money or time to translate. It has certainly been clear for a long time, however, that society cannot afford to translate all the relevant scientific literature into Slovenian, but only the fundamental works.

definition of the status of the Slovenian language. Such a definition does not bring about a real effect in the language community without a good plan for the realisation and implementation of this status.<sup>38</sup> A good plan must aim at assuring opportunities to use the language, assuring the language ability of the speaker, and a language repertoire in line with their needs. Without opportunities for its use, neither the material side of the language nor the language ability of its speakers will develop, let alone the deeper socio- and psychological dimensions and bonds within the language community. Similarly the community cannot live without efficient and accessible public communication – and the primary role of public communication is not to ensure the status of the language, but to make it possible for people to participate in societal processes.

Within this framework it becomes absolutely manifest that Slovenian language policy and language planning cannot treat only the status and corpus of Slovenian in the Republic of Slovenia, but must likewise systematically concern themselves with its inhabitants' first languages, foreign languages, and also with Slovenian language communities outside Slovenia and the community of speakers who speak or are only learning Slovenian as a second/foreign language. All of these are specific and complex chapters of Slovenian language policy, united by the fact that they are still rather peripheral to the Slovenian language policy thought – although without them the existence of the core story will not be possible for much longer.

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<sup>38</sup> No study of the consequences and effects of the Slovenian in Public Use Act is available as yet: anecdotal cases do show, however, that some legal stipulations are only enforced with grave difficulty – because they interfere with the wishes/needs of the members of the Slovenian language community that the norm concerns (e.g. obligatory names of firms in the Slovenian language, obligatory use of Slovenian in the media etc). It was already repeatedly pointed out (Uršič, Jan (ed.) 2000, Stabej 2000) during the procedures of drafting and adopting the law that adopting a legal norm in opposition to the ideas of the majority of members of the language community was nonsensical in the long run.





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#### POVZETEK

Slovenska jezikovna politika je bila v preteklih petnajstih letih zaznamovana predvsem z osamosvojitvijo Republike Slovenije l. 1991 in z njeno priključitvijo Evropski Uniji l. 2004. V ospredju jezikovnopoličnih prizadevanj je bila skrb za ohranjanje in utrjevanje statusa slovenščine kot edinega uradnega jezika po celotni državi in kot absolutno dominantnega javnega jezika. Redkejša je bila tista jezikovnopolična misel, ki si je prizadevala za bolj operativno načrtovalno dejavnost v smislu razumevanja celotne jezikovne situacije, z upoštevanjem predvsem potreb govorcev in s ciljem zagotoviti jim odprte poti do javnega sporazumevanja, pri čemer pa ne bi upoštevala samo slovenščine, temveč tudi druge jezike. Po maju 2004 nekateri znaki kažejo, da se v prejšnjem desetletju institucionalizirana jezikovna politika spet deinstitutionalizira ter da je jezikovna politika spet bolj implicitne kot eksplicitne narave. Zakon o javni rabi slovenščine, sprejet l. 2004, predvideva aktivno jezikovno politiko, zato razprava pregleda dve eksplicitni jezikovnopolični dejanji iz l. 2004, Resolucijo o nacionalnem programu za kulturo in Prereze politike jezikovnega izobraževanja v Sloveniji, dva predloga jezikovnih programov za slovensko situacijo, Beaugrandovega iz l. 1998 in Škiljanovega iz l. 2003. Ključ nadaljnje jezikovnopolične dejavnosti v Sloveniji leži najbrž v smiselnem ravnotežju med simbolnimi vlogami slovenščine in drugih jezikov, sporazumevalno zmožnostjo govorcev in odprtostjo javnega sporazumevalnega prostora.