Chapter 14
Pluricentric languages in contact and conflict: An overview

1. Introduction

This chapter looks at a number of selected European pluricentric languages (EPCL) and NVs where there are ongoing language conflicts. A common feature of these languages in relation to contact and conflict is the "(in)*visibility in the social sphere*" and "*the struggle to achieve social and political visibility*". The description starts with languages / lingoids, which might be PCLs but are invisible for different reasons like the lack of official recognition, spread across many countries, strong internal fragmentation etc. The description goes on to different types of conflict to those PCLs that have achieved an uncontested pluricentricity. Needless to say, there will also be some languages that have become invisible after the development of certain political processes have occurred.

2. Pluricentric languages or NVs that struggle(d) to become visible after political or social developments made or kept them invisible

2.1. Greek

Greek is a PCL as it is also the national language of Greece and the Greek part of the Republic of Cyprus. It is neither an endangered language nor is there an overt ongoing language conflict. There was however a massive internal conflict in Greece that resembled in many ways the one in Norway. It is justified to include it here as it showed all features of a conflict between a dominant and non-dominant variety for acknowledgement and social representation. And, there is Cyprus Greek that struggles for its codification and standardization.

Karyolemou (2012: 174) points out that Cypriot Greek is not only used as "*Innenstandard*" – (in diglossic terms the "low variety"). It is used in everyday conversation but also "in semi-formal and formal encounters" and it has been retained in the large diaspora community (esp. in Australia).

The idea that Greek could have several national varieties is, however, met with strong rejection by the elites and by general belief. Mackridge (2009: 6) gives the reason for this:

> "One of the most pervasive language ideologies in Greece is the belief that Greek is a single language from antiquity to the present".
> Cypriot Greek has not been codified so far,
> "as the dominant political ideology insisted instead on the need to consolidate the bounds of the Greek community of Cyprus with the rest

> of the Hellenic world in order to preserve the unity of the Hellenic ethnos. It thus became impossible for non-Greek Cypriots to identify with a local variety that defined a strong ethnic identification towards an exogenous community."[1]

The situation bears all the signs of "linguistic schizophrenia"[2] where the national variety is overwhelmingly used but deemed inferior whereas the dominant variety is little used but thought to be of superior quality.

The resistance to the development of a second NV of Greek is also linked to the rigid linguistic norms of Greek that have developed since the early 19th century following Greece's independence from the Ottoman Empire. The older, complex and more puristic *Katharevousa* variety was replaced in education and state administration in 1976 by the *Demotic* variety, which is closer to the everyday spoken language. This has led to a strong language shift.[3] The intelligentsia had created *Katharevousa* after the establishment of the Greek state in 1830.

The overall strategy was the elimination of all expressions originating from other languages but especially Turkish expressions that had come into Greek through the long adherence of Greece to the Ottoman Empire and the introduction of archaic features from classical Greek.[4] This led to diglossia and a remarkable gap in access to education for the (mostly illiterate) lower classes and favoured the educated upper classes, resulting in the "*Greek language question*". This issue had been debated since the founding of the state in 1830 and was resolved only by the introduction of Demotic in 1976. The replacement did not go unchallenged, as the large Greek diaspora (some 2 million speakers) and the Greek Orthodox Church in the diaspora continued to use Katharevousa.[5] Therefore, the Greek language question does not seem to have been completely settled even though some elements of Katharevousa have been integrated into Demotic and forming Modern Greek.

Modern Greek is the rare example where a once dominant variety of a language was replaced by a non-dominant one of the same language due to a social revolution following the abolition of the military regime that had ended democracy in 1967. The military regime of right-wing officers had banned the use of Demotic in education and administration and made Katharevousa the official language and enforced diglossia.[6] The link between the authoritarian government and Katharevousa became clearer than ever. The return to democracy in 1974 was accompanied by a switch to Demotic in 1976 - a more democratic form of language that achieved the inclusion of large sections of the population and ended the rule of the elitist Katharevousa variety.

2.2. Russian

Russian is a "new" PCL that came into existence after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. This resulted in a number of countries outside the Russian Federation where Russian has an official or quasi-official function. It is a co-official national language in Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, widely used and a de facto official language by usage in Moldova and Uzbekistan, acknowledged for inter-ethnic communication in Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. Before the Russian invasion in 2022, it was also an official regional language in the Eastern parts of Ukraine. Since the occupation by Russian forces Russian became the only official language in these regions. Russian is also a "national" language in the unrecognized territories of Transistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In addition, it is an unrecognized minority language in the Baltic countries Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.[7] The status and usage of Russian is uncontested in most post-Soviet countries. However, there are conflicts in the three Baltic states as well as in Ukraine.

2.3. The situation of Russian in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania[8]

It is the situation of Russian in the three Baltic states, which is of particular interest as there is a large Russian speaking population there: Estonia (24.9%)[9], Latvia (37,2% speak Russian at home)[10], Lithuania (6,3% concentrated in 3 towns). Russian is not recognized in any of these states, and the Russian speaking population is deprived of most of its linguistic rights. The reason for this is the fear of being invaded by Russia again with the Russian-speaking population playing a supporting role. Citizenship in Estonia and Latvia is primarily based on the principle of *jus sanguinis* (at least one parent must have the citizenship of the country) and have knowledge of the Estonian, or Latvian language respectively. This has resulted in large groups of "stateless persons" without any right to vote or travel etc.[11] 6.1% (79,300 persons) of the population of Estonia[12] and (13.1%) (237,759 persons) in Latvia[13] are stateless residents. In Latvia, many children (14,331 in 2017) that were born after August 21, 1991 are also affected.[14] This is contrary to the European Charter of Fundamental Rights which in Art. 3.1 stipulates that no citizen of the EU may be discriminated against because of his/her language[15]. It is a remarkable deviation from the European rule of law, as it is a clear case of discrimination based on language. It must be said that the number of stateless persons has decreased in recent years but it is still very high. This has led to initiatives at the level of the European Parliament's committee of Petitions in 2016[16], but there seems to have been no immediate improvement in the situation. Contrary to this, is the situation in Lithuania, which has received praise from the UNHCR for having prevented

increased statelessness (based on language). As of 2016 there "were about 3,400 stateless persons living in Lithuania".

In Latvia the conflict over Russian and the other minority languages has reached a new stage as a new law of 2018 drastically reduces education in the minority languages (including Russian) from the school year 2019 onwards. The law "provides that for instruction in grades 1-6 ... at least 50 % of the curriculum [is] taught in Latvian and for grades 7-9 – at least 80 %."[17] The law is clearly directed against non-EU-languages and also limits the right to use EU official languages other than Latvian. It is a questionable measure that will most likely lead to extremism from the people affected by it. In the current political situation with Russia aggressing neighbouring countries (Ukraine, Georgia) the measures can be seen as a precaution, even if they are against the European spirit and the rule of law set by the Charter of European Minority and Regional Languages.

2.4. The situation of Russian in Ukraine

Large parts of Ukraine are overwhelmingly Russian-speaking with the Russian speaking population ranging from 59,3% in East Centre, 84,5% in the South to 92,3% in the East (Donetsk, Luhansk area)[18]. Russian in Ukraine has a long and conflict-ridden history; it was used to suppress the Ukrainian language during the Russian Empire in the late 19th century and at some phases of the Soviet Union. Ukrainian was portrayed as ungrammatical, a kind of distorted language with a low status. After independence in 1991, Ukrainian became the only national language. Despite criticism of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, a new law in 2012, permitted the introduction of Russian as a regional language where the population with a mother tongue other than Ukrainian was more than 10%. This was quickly introduced in seven regions by the end of 2013 and caused a lot of debate. This law was repealed in 2014 but not signed by the president at the time. In 2018, the Constitutional Court ruled that the 2012 law did not comply with the Ukrainian constitution. This was due to the events that happened during and after the Maidan uprising, which led to the overthrow of President Yanukovych in 2014, the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 in violation of international law and the subsequent Russian-backed war of secession in the Donbass and Luhansk regions along the Russian border in the east. Since then Ukraine and Russia have been in a state of war, which intensified after the invasion of Russian forces in early 2022. In 2017, Ukraine has also banned the importation of books from Russia, which had accounted for 60% of all books traded into Ukraine.

Ukrainian Russian has developed quite a number of specific features (Del Gaudio, 2012; Del Gaudio/Ivanova, 2015). Immediately after the annexation of

Crimea (Del Gaudio / Dorofeev, 2016), the process of reversing Ukrainian Russian into Russian Russian in Crimea began. This is very likely also to have happened in the other regions that have been occupied since 2014. Ukrainian Russian is the unfortunate case where a language war was exploited towards territorial expansion and turned into a real war. It serves as a warning and reminder that language issues are always political in nature and therefore have to be treated with caution.

3. Hungarian – a language gradually gaining visibility as a PCL

Hungarian is a language that occurs in several of Hungary's neighbouring countries: Austria, Croatia, Romania, northern Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and western Ukraine. In all these countries, Hungarian only has the status of a minority language. In northern Romania and southern Slovakia, however, Hungarian can be considered a regional language with 1,4 million speakers living in a cohesive area of settlement in Romania and about 520,000 speakers in southern Slovakia. Hungarian is also dominant in parts of Vojvodina – the northern province of Serbia - with about 290.00 speakers[19]. Muhr (2012:33) defines Hungarian as "pluricentric but lacking the appropriate status". The demographic situation clearly justifies the recognition of Hungarian as a PCL, since the language forms a linguistic centre in each of these regions.[20] The recognition of Hungarian as a PCL started during the mid 1990s by the publications of Lanstyák (1995), and especially by Kenesei (2006), who to overcome the very centralistic view of the norms of Hungarian that had prevailed until then[21].

Hungarian still has to fight for its status in Slovakia and especially in Ukraine, where it has recently lost some of its rights due to new language laws. In Ukraine, a decree of 2008 stipulates that Hungarian school graduates have to take the university entrance exam in Ukrainian and not in their native language. Because of this, the percentage of participants in University entrance exams from Hungarian speaking schools that did not qualify rose from 30% in 2008 to 62% in 2015.[22] In 2017, a new language law restricted education in minority languages after the first four grades, ending a 150-years old tradition in Transcarpathia.[23] This is another negative outcome of the war in eastern Ukraine. The law was directed against the rights of Russian, but also led to the discrimination against other minority languages, which see their education in their native language impaired.

4. Gaelic / Irish, Ulster Scots and Irish English – Undoing the suppression and invisibility of Gaelic (Irish) and Ulster Scots in Ireland

Compared to other languages discussed in this section, the status of Irish in the Republic of Ireland (RIR) and Northern Ireland (NIR) is a success story. The language regained the status of a national language in the RIR in 1937 and has since has been a recognised minority language in NIR after centuries of oppression and marginalisation. This was only achieved after a long struggle for recognition, which began soon after the lost battle of Kingsdale in 1601 with the loss of most members of its nobility who fled to Spain, the incorporation into the British Empire and the loss of many speakers during the famine of 1845-49.

By the early 20th century, the language became associated with cultural and political nationalism, although only a minority could speak and use the language. The slogan of that time was "gan teanga, gan tīr" – "no language, no country"[24] and shows that the unity of nation and language was sought but not achieved, as the majority of the population could only speak English. After the Irish War of Independence and the independence of the southern part of Ireland from the British Empire as the Irish Republic (IR) in 1921, the Northern part with a large Protestant population was separated and remained a part of the United Kingdom as Northern Ireland (NIR). While the objective of the Irish language movement was realised in the IR, Irish speakers in NIR had a difficult time.

The Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) was hostile to the use of the language as it was a sign of identity for the Catholics in NIR. For the first 50 years, Irish was banned from radio and television in NIR, and the use in schools was prohibited. Between 1921 and 1998, the Irish language was made invisible in NIR and was not officially recognised until the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. The strength of anti-Irish language attitudes is illustrated by the following statement of a member of the Ulster Democratic Party in 1996, two years before the Good Friday Agreement: "We are Ulster Scots descended from a proud and fiercely independent people with a longer tradition than that promoted by nationalists. Their language is a dead language for a dead people."[25] Today, due to the Good Friday Agreement, Irish in Northern Ireland is a recognised minority language with 10% of the population using it actively but gaining more and more support even among Protestants. There is also a cross-border body known as *Foras na Gaeilge* that regulates the language. In addition to Irish, Irish English (also called Hiberno-English) with its marked features in pronunciation and lexicon is also a strong Irish identity marker. Ulster Irish English has more pronunciation similarities with Scottish English while Dublin English is the dominant variety of Irish English. The case of Irish and Irish English shows again the link between the secession of one country from another and the identity expressed through a

language that previously had been suppressed and marginalized.

5. A language manages to become visible and gain rights in a bilingual country that leads to the split of the nation along the language border and creates de facto monolingual independent states: The case of Dutch and French in Belgium

Belgium is not only the home of NVs from three PCLs (Dutch, French, and German) but also a multilingual country with a political and linguistic particularity: It has been divided into three monolingual territories that in many ways behave as if they were independent states, which has far reaching effects for the population and the administration of the state.

The reason for this is found in Belgian history. Belgium was founded in 1830 after a revolution against the rule of the Dutch protestant King William I started in the so-called "Southern Provinces", where mainly Dutch and French speaking Roman Catholics lived and where unemployment was high. The history of Belgium is closely linked to the "Dutch language Question" – the gradual upgrading of Flemish (Belgium Dutch), which tried to become more and more visible in the public sphere. Between 1830-1873, Belgium was exclusively a French-speaking country, Dutch had no recognition at all. During the period of 1873-1898, several laws established Dutch as official language in the institutions, and public documents such as "bonds, coins, and banknotes were made bilingual"[26]. The language law of 1893 finally declared that Dutch and French official texts had the same force in law."[27] 1930 saw the next step by replacing the personality principle through the territoriality principle. It was introduced as the French-speaking Wallons "were vehemently opposed to a system of generalized bilingualism at large"[28], and so territorial monolingualism seemed to be the only solution. The law also created a dual administration, one French-speaking and one Dutch-speaking, to avoid bilingualism. In 1963 a "linguistic frontier" was created, dividing the country into three monolingual entities (French, Dutch and German) and Brussels as the only mixed one.

The effect of this measure was a complete monolingual separation of all state institutions, including all political parties, which also split "with no political party left to represent the whole country"[29]. There are now two different educations systems, monolingualism in the media and little personal bilingualism (20% in the French and 59% in the Dutch region). The split also affected bilingual universities and their libraries such as the Catholic University of Leuven in 1968, which was split into French and Dutch speaking parts. One incredible results effect was the splitting of the university library by using the strange criterion that every second book of the catalogue went to either universities.

Language struggles are still going on around Brussels. For multilingual nations, Belgium is a negative example and a warning as this territorial separation along a linguistic border has since led to bitter political struggles and language fights ever since. Positive counter-examples to this are Switzerland where the principle of "linguistic peace" is cherished, and the well-designed solution of a trilingual South Tyrol in Italy.

6. Struggles over language names and the status of the languages after a nation split into several new nations creating new national languages with an unsettled status either as PCL or NV:

There are four cases that fall into this category: The establishment of *Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian and Montenegrin*, the establishment of *Albanian* as a PCL, the decade old establishment of *Macedonian* by splitting from *Bulgarian* and the question whether *Moldovan* (Romanian) is a language in its own right or a NV of Romanian. The four cases have of this category have in common the dispute as to whether the lingoids are languages or NVs of another language. [30]

6.1. The split of Serbo-Croatian into Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian and Montenegrin as national languages in Ex-Yugoslavian nations - Two competing approaches

The first and most far-reaching case is the one that led to the split of Serbo-Croatian (SBCR) into four languages. After the dissolution of Yugoslavia (Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) in 1991/92 into six states (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia) one of its official languages – SBCR also split, at first into three languages – *Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian* – and after the independence of Montenegro from Serbia – into *Montenegrin* as well. The establishment of the four languages is laid down in the constitutions of the four nations and one of the results of the Balkan wars that accompanied the dissolution of Yugoslavia. This has caused a much-discussed language problem[31] that had already plagued Yugoslavia, as SBCR was the official language of four republics of Yugoslavia (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia Montenegro and Serbia) and of Yugoslavia in external communication. Despite the official constitution of the four languages, however, the existence of four languages is currently strongly denied and it is claimed that they are not "languages" but "just" national varieties of a single language.[32] This position is also found in the English version of Wikipedia and similarly in the German version of Wikipedia.[33]

> "Serbo-Croatian, (previously also called Serbo-Croat, Serbo-Croat-Bosnian (SCB), Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian (BCS) or Bosnian-Croatian-Montenegrin-Serbian (BCMS)), is a South Slavic language and the primary language of Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and

Montenegro. *It is a pluricentric language with four mutually intelligible standard varieties.*"[34]

The (anonymous) authors of Wikipedia base their statements on publications on Bugarski (2000), Hinrichs (1997), Buncic (2008), Kordič (2006, 2008, 2010) and Gröschel (2001, 2003, 2009), among others. It is interesting to see that most authors supporting the idea that SBCR still exists and is a PCL with four national varieties are/were working at German universities. Many of these authors (often explicitly) point to the model of the pluricentricity of German[35] when denying a political process that took place 25 years ago in the Balkans. From the point of the sociology of science, this is quite remarkable, as these members of the Slavic scientific community are all living and working in a dominant nation and seem to transfer their dominant views on pluricentricity to other languages, refusing them the right to constitute themselves as independent linguistic and social entities.[36]

The activities of this group of authors is strongly opposed by national regulators (esp. in Croatia) who try to enforce the endonormativity of the their language by either reactivating archaic items of vocabulary or neologisms and specific features of orthography (as in Bosnian).

Snježana Kordič (2006, 2010) is the most influential author of those propagating the SBCR continuity model. She has published several papers on the matter and in 2010 the much-received book *Jezik i nacionalizam* (Language and nationalism). In her book and in an interview in 2018[37], the main arguments put forward by her for the continued existence of SBCR is the "mutual intelligibility" of the four languages and the fact that in all four cases there is the same underlying regional variety "Štokavian" that had been codified in the 19th century. Kordić is also the main author of the "Deklaracija o zajedničkom jeziku" (The Declaration on the common language), which was published online in 2017[38] and invites peoples of Ex-Yugoslav countries to sign and support it. As of March 2025, over 9,000 people have signed it[39], mostly people working in academic or economic professions. The first line of the declaration says:

"Asked whether a common language is used in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia and Serbia - the answer is yes (confirmed)."[40] The declaration states that "Using four names for standard variants - Bosnian, Montenegrin, Croatian and Serbian - does not mean that they are four different languages" and that the common language (which in the declaration is not given a name[41]) is of "polycentric type" (pluricentric type) like "German, English, Arabic, French...".

This, it is maintained, "does not call into question the individual right to

express affiliation to different nations, regions or states" and the right of "...each state, nation, ethnic-national or regional community to freely and independently codify its own common language variant".

This is quite inconsistent as at the same time it is lamented that "[i]nsisting on a small number of existing differences and the violent separation of four standard variants leads to a number of negative social, cultural and political phenomena". If there is a separate codification, it will of course lead to a (linguistic) separation of the four languages. In addition, there is no indication how the old power relation could be overcome, as Serbia always held a predominant position in former Yugoslavia – a factor that contributed substantially to the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

Moreover, mutual intelligibility is by no means a sufficient and valid argument against the constitution of a "language". *Danish, Swedish and Norwegian* are mutually intelligible but nobody would say that they are not "languages" as this was decided by the state institutions. The same is the case with Luxembourgish, which is intelligible with the German Moselfrankonian dialects it derives from – after the German occupation during WWII.

Kordič reiterated her positions in the above-mentioned interview by adding that "The language policy in the Balkans resembles the one of the third Reich". This is a gross overstatement and factually wrong, as the Nazi language policy was purist too but mainly aimed at the eradication of Slavic languages (which is of course not the case here).

The case of SBCR shows the importance and validity of the definition of the term "language": A language is a lingoid that has been attributed a status by a political or social entity. The governing bodies of the four nations have done this. Even if there is mutual intelligibility, this will not undo the memories and atrocities of the Balkan wars that accompanied the disintegration of Yugoslavia. "Languages" are constituted by social/and or political processes in the first place which are the socio-semiotic expression of a turn away from the former connectedness.

This is emphasised by the following anecdote: When I once provocatively asked a young student from Bosnia who had participated in my course on Austrian German and the pluricentricity of languages why Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian should not be considered as national varieties of SBCR, she simply replied: "We don't want to be together with them!" I think that sums it up. I can only agree with Kafadar (2009:103), who states that *linguistically* speaking, the three (four) independent languages do not exist:

> But since all nations in this linguistic area construct their identity largely through and within the language ... and this construction of

> national identity is strongly supported by current politics ... three languages (Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian) officially exist in this monolingual area.[42]

Except Serbia, all post-Yugoslav nations are still struggling to consolidate their identity. The constitution of a national language is an important means to achieving this. Purist and often arbitrary linguistic measures and an aggressive language policy are undoubtedly leading to unpleasant and divisive social effects that are rightly criticised as "nationalistic" and not lead to a better understanding between nations and people.[43] The depth of the divide can be seen in the fact that most linguists from the formerly dominant nation of Serbia still regard SBCR as *one* language with *four* varieties while most linguists of the formerly non-dominant variety Croatian are convinced that a single SBCR language never existed. Ultimately, the divergences can only be resolved in the end by co-operation, but not by arguing the existence of languages and linguistic differences with unfounded arguments based on the absence of linguistic differences.

6.2. The secession of Kosovo from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia: Albanian in Kosovo, Albania, and Northern Macedonia – New territories do not necessarily create a new PCL in the minds of the elites

Another outcome of the dissolution of Yugoslavia was the secession of the province of Kosovo in 2008 from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which was a split from Serbia and Montenegro (both countries were not yet separated at the time). The secession of the territory with an overwhelmingly Albanian-speaking population was preceded by the Kosovo war in 1998/1999, in which the Kosovar side was supported by NATO. This created a second nation, in which Albanian was established as the national language, turning Albanian into a PCL. This came caused some problems, as Albanian identity is clearly based on the unity of nation and language and any talk of pluricentricity is considered as a "de-standardization" (Jusufi, 2018:136):

> "...Albanian, although a pluricentric language in reality, is treated and protected as a monocentric language for ideological reasons being based on a concept of the Herderian language nation and not on a concept of state nation."

The situation of Albanian monocentrists became even more complicated by the fact that in 2019 Albanian became a co-official national language in North Macedonia with about 24% of the population belonging to this language group. Since then, the Albanian language area has officially spread over three sovereign nations. Jusufi (2018:140) reports that many representatives among

the academic circles dealing with the Albanian language both in Kosovo and Albania argue almost aggressively against the idea that Albanian is a PCL by using terms such as "... standard phobia, dilettantes, anti-standard anarchists, ... localist fanaticism, politically militant academism and pseudolinguists." This shows that the question of a "common Albanian language" is highly controversial and emotionally loaded. Muco (2018: 154) also points out that the linguistic facts refute the obstinate refusal to recognise the pluricentricity of Albanian. In particular, Kosovo Albanian being in contact with Serbian for more than 80 years has developed "lexical differences, new idiomatic expressions and semantic differences as some words have taken on different meanings."

This is most probably also the case with Macedonian Albanian, for which no comprehensive studies are currently available. Albanian is a PCL in which the traditional linguistic and cultural elites have not yet come to terms with the new situation. It is a case of a PCL on stage (3) (Muhr, 2012 and chapter 9 of this book) where the acceptance of pluricentricity has not yet been consolidated. As the examples of other PCLs show, it will take decades before the dispute is resolved.

7. The establishment of the Macedonian language by splitting off from Bulgarian and the refusal by the Bulgarian Academy of Science to acknowledge this

The case of Macedonian and Bulgarian is treated here, as it shows many similarities with the Greek and Serbo-Croatian case. It is an older and somehow a "forgotten" language-conflict that is only known to a few specialists dealing with that area. However, it is still of interest as some of the parties involved still unwilling to make concessions after more than 40 years. The conflict has been going on under the title "The Macedonian Question" ever since 1870-72, when an independent Bulgarian orthodox church was established. "It is from this period that first statements appear maintaining that Macedonian was a language different from both Serbian and Bulgarian."[44]

The Macedonian literature and literary language developed gradually in Yugoslavia and Serbia in the 20th century between 1913-1944.[45] Macedonia (renamed North Macedonia in 2019) is a territory with a very turbulent history. Following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the two Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913, the territories of present-day Macedonia were divided between Greece (Aegean-Macedonia, 50 percent), Bulgaria (Pirin-Macedonia, 13 percent) and Serbia (Vardar-Macedonia, 37 percent). In the areas that had fallen to Serbia, strong Serbianisation was attempted via the introduction of Serbian schools, but this failed. Bulgaria annexed Macedonia from 1941-1944, but

apparently behaved as if it was an occupying power, alienating Slavic Macedonians.[46] The Bulgarian administration was soon seen as a foreign and standard Bulgarian was associated with the occupying forces.

It August 1944, Tito's partisans in Macedonia, organised in the Anti-Fascist Assembly for the People's Liberation of Macedonia (ASNOM), declared the Macedonian language the official language after getting the green light from the COMITERN. Finally, in 1945 the new Macedonian standard (orthography and basic morphology) was accepted by the Macedonian Ministry of Education with the codification following in subsequent years.[47] The new standard spread quickly as it was closer to the spoken language. Macedonian and Bulgarian are still comprehensible among each other but generally considered different languages (and would have to be considered such according the definitions set up in the previous chapters of this book.) It is another example of the ineffectiveness of basing the definition of the term "language" on the criteria of linguistic similarity and comprehensibility. Despite these facts, the Bulgarian academy of sciences still insists (BAN 1978: 21ff) that Macedonian is a variety of Bulgarian and not a language of its own. Petrov (1985) speaks of "a standard literary norm ("*bălgarski knižoven ezik*") and two regional written language norms, a Macedonian one ("*pismeno-regionalna norma na bălgarski ezik v R Makedonija*") and a Banat Bulgarian one ("*banatska pismena norma na bălgarski ezik*")".[48] Bulgaria is also blocking the ascension to the EU, which it got green light in March 2020. The web site POLITICO reported on August 13, 2021 the following:

> "Despite having agreed to the talks, Bulgaria has sent a memorandum to the other 26 countries insisting that EU documents need to acknowledge that "the official language used in today's Republic of North Macedonia can be only considered as a written regional norm of the Bulgarian language."

It is an unprecedented case of a neighbouring country being denied the right to its own language, thus blocking its progress in the negotiations with the EU. Here too, a recurring pattern emerges, which consists of the refusal of cultural elites to accept the constitution of a language separate from their own, just as it is the case with SBCR. The case of Macedonian shows, that any splitting of languages – be it into a national variety or a language of its own - generally meets with resistance from the dominant language community, as this means a loss of power and influence. Once again, the split was caused by the alienation through occupation and suppression and the long-time entrenchment of these events in the collective memory.

8. "Moldovian Romanian" or simply "Moldovian" – The fight for the right to name their own language – dominant and elitist views versus non-dominant and particularist

Moldova is one of the smaller successor states of the Soviet Union. It became independent in 1991. Since then, the country has been preoccupied in a kind of language question of its own that concerns the name of the national language.[49] In the 1991 "*Declaration of Independence*" of 1991 the official language was named "Romanian". Three years later, the newly passed Constitution of the Republic of Moldova states in Art. 13(1) "The State language of the Republic of Moldova is the Moldovan language based on the Latin alphabet"[50]. The Academy of Sciences rejected this decision the same year on the grounds that the (standard) language is the same as in *Romania*. In a referendum of 2004, 87% of the electorate voted for the term *Moldovan*. This was overthrown by the Constitutional court again in 2013, which ruled in 2017 that the Declaration of independence was superior to the constitution and the name of the national language in the constitution should be amended and switched to *Romanian*.[51] There is no indication that this has achieved enough parliamentary support. Art. 13(1) of the official version of the constitution on the webpage of the Moldovan president still states that *Moldovan* is the state language.[52]

What might seem nothing more than a petty quarrel over a name is much more than that if one considers the proponents of the two sides. There is on the one hand the Socialist Party (pro Russian) which defends the name *Moldovian*, and on the other hand the Liberal parties (pro European) who support *Romanian*. Moreover, the dominant nation Romania (it pursues a very rigid and centralist language policy) is also of the opinion that the correct name is *Romanian* and not *Moldovian*.[53] This opinion is prevalent in the cultural elites and could be seen as a case of linguistic cringe, as this group fears for the loss of its symbolic capital. The government and the state institutions do not seem to have undertaken any language planning and status planning measures since independence which leaves the population uniformed about which features are genuinely Moldovan and which Romanian. The negative effects and confusions arising from it are best illustrated by a discussion thread on Wikimedia about the failed attempt to install a Moldovan version of Wikipedia[54] and a street interview conducted by a journalist asking for different expressions on a market in the capital Chisinau.[55]

> What do you sell, "castravetsy" [cucumber in Romanian] or "pepeni" [melon in Romanian, cucumber in Moldovan]? *Fruit-seller:* It depends how they ask. People from the countryside ask for "pepeni," but

usually they ask for "castravetsy." When you say "castravetsy," how do people react? *Fruit-seller:* Those who don't know the word are surprised. What do people usually call melons? *Fruit-seller:* Castravetsy. In fact, "castravetsy" is correct. But what do the Romanians call "pepeni?" *Fruit-seller:* Watermelons.

The struggle over the name of the Moldovan national language is a paradigmatic example for what happens when a non-dominant variety of a PCL (a) wants to have a name of its own for its NV or (b) even wants to declare it to be a language. It is evident that neither the representatives of the dominant variety nor the elites of a small country want to have a language name of its own for the NDV, being afraid that this would result in linguistically different language and after some time cutting them off from a larger language market. Michael Clyne (1992: 460) already remarked that NVs are disadvantaged if they do not have their own language name. As the Moldovan example shows, it is not enough just to have a language name – there must be codification and language planning in order to rise the language community's awareness and self-confidence about its native linguistic features and thus promote language loyalty.

9. Summary

The overview has shown a large range of ongoing or resolved conflicts in European PCLs and their NVs. It turns out that the main cause for conflicts is the split of nations into new political entities. The “one-nation-one language-concept” has prevailed for a long time and hinders the development of national varieties and the acceptance of pluricentricity. There are quite a number of European countries where languages are denied their rights and kept invisible. The language conflicts described can be seen as a model for similar conflicts in other regions of the world. As language conflicts are potential political conflicts or derive from them, many conflicts have been mitigated through the introduction of the European Charter of Minority and Regional Languages, but many issues still remain open.

Footnotes:

1
2 Karyolemou (2012: 174)
3 Muhr (2012)
4 See Mackridge (2009): Language and Identity in Greece, 1766-1976.
5 Mackridge (1985).
6 Ibrahim/Karatsolis (2013)
7 Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_language_question], acc. 05.03.2025]
8 For a detailed overview about the status and number of speakers in the post-soviet countries, see Del Gaudio (2012).
9 See Katona (2019) for the specific situation of Russian in Estonia.
10 Estonian Statistics Database [http://pub.stat.ee/px-web.2001/Dialog/Saveshow.asp acc. 07.03.2019]
OSCE: Minority education attacked in Latvia. https://www.osce.org/odihr/394916? acc. 07.03.2019]

[11]
[12] For an overview see Gromilova (2015).
Human Rights Watch, January 16, 2017 [https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/01/17/its-time-end-child-
[13] statelessness-estonia, acc. 07.03.2025]
European network on Statelessness: Statelessness among children in Latvia: current situation, challenges and possible solutions. [https://www.statelessness.eu/blog/statelessness-among-children-latvia-current-
[14] situation-challenges-and-possible-solutions, acc. 07.03.2025].
[15] ibid.
Article 21, 1 [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:12012P/TXT&from=DE acc.
[16] 05.03.2019]
European network on Statelessness: The fight for voting rights of stateless persons in Estonia and Latvia;
[17] [https://www.statelessness.eu/blog/fight-voting-rights-stateless-persons-estonia-and-latvia, acc. 07.03.2025]
[18] ibid. Fn 36.
[19] Del Gaudio (2013:357).
[20] Data from Huber (2016)
[21] See Vančo et. al. (eds.) (2019): Hungarian as a pluricentric language.
[22] See Huber / Molnár (2015).
[23] Kontra (2019).
[24] Skutnabb-Kangas (2019:71) quoted after Kontra (2019).
[25] O'Reilly (2001:79)
[26] Quoted after Póilin (1997: 31)
[27] Willemyns (2013: 165).
[28] ibid.
[29] Willemyns (2013: 166).
[30] Willemyns (2013: 168).
See the papers of Stojanov (2019) and Kapovic (2019) for a detailed description of the matter from different
[31] point of views.
[32] See Hodges (2016) for a comprehensive overview.
[33] Stojanov (2019) and Kapovic (2019).
Serbokroatisch … ist eine plurizentrische südslawische Sprache. [Serbo-Croatian… is a pluricentric South-
[34] Slavic language.] [acc. 12.03.2025].
[35] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serbo-Croatian [acc. 12.03.2025]
[36] e.g. Bunčić (2008).
There seems to be a deep-rooted underlying idea/fear of a split of a language, which has to be fended off as it is felt as a severe loss of power. The arguments put forward by this group of German slavicists repeat many arguments that are very much similar to the ones that were/are put forward against the existence of
[37] Austrian German as a NV of German, whose existence is also conceived as a loss of power.
[38] https://www.kosmo.at/die-sprachpolitik-am-balkan-aehnelt-jener-des-dritten-reiches/2/ [acc. 15.03.2025]
[39] http://jezicinacionalizmi.com/deklaracija/ [acc. 10.03.2025]
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/u/1/d/1XVGV5Z306SeDFzpdpUHhfeK-
[40] voAFdaakS48LqXfGozA/pubhtml [acc. 20.03.2025]
"Na pitanje da li se u Bosni i Hercegovini, Crnoj Gori, Hrvatskoj i Srbiji upotrebljava zajednički jezik – odgovor
[41] je potvrdan."
[42] In an interview in 2018 (Fn. 62) the author suggested the term „naš jezik" („our language").
„Da alle Nationen auf diesem Sprachgebiet aber ihre Identität zum größten Teil durch und in der Sprache konstruieren … und diese Konstruktion der nationalen Identität durch die aktuelle Politik sehr stark unterstützt … existieren offiziell drei Sprachen (Bosnisch, Kroatisch und Serbisch) auf diesem einsprachigen
[43] Gebiet.". [Note: Montenegrin had not yet been established at this time, when the paper was published.]
See the paper of Stojanov (2019) who has been threatened with being sacked by his department of the University of Zagreb because of his presentation at the 6th conference of the WGNDV, where he referred to
[44] the concept of pluricentricity of Croatian.
[45] Pulevski 1875:48-49 after Friedman (2000:75).
[46] Friedmann (2000:194)
[47] Miller 1975:123-125.
[48] Quoted after Sánchez Prieto (2013:240).
[49] Ibid. (2013: 241).
[50] See Edelmann (2024) for a detailed account of the history of the Moldovian language issue.
[51] http://www.presedinte.md/titlul1 [acc. 18.03.2025]
Moldova's Top Court Endorses Proposal To Switch Official Language To 'Romanian' In Constitution:
[52] https://www.rferl.org/a/moldova-romanian-constitutional-court-moldovan/28826605.html [acc. 18.03.2025]
[53] http://www.presedinte.md/titlul1 [acc. 18.03.2025]
See the exchange in 2008 between the then Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin and the Romanian Foreign Minister Adrian Cioroianu at the international security conference in Munich:
[54] https://www.rferl.org/a/1079514.html [acc. 18.03.2025]
https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Proposals_for_closing_projects/Closure_of_Moldovan_Wikipedia [acc.
[55] 19.03.2025]
https://www.rferl.org/a/1079514.html acc. 19.03.2025]