

EBLUL intervention

EBLUL - The European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages

UN Forum for Minorities

Intervention Point V

Mechanism providing for the political participation of minorities

The European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages

Political autonomy for the national minority as European best practice

There are several examples from across Europe which illustrate how political autonomy for the national minority operates in their best interests and has become a European model of best practice.

Substantive political autonomy, whereby the national minority has control of its education and schooling system and is able to provide immersion education in the national minority language, for example, has been proven to offer the best national minority protection.

Examples are the substantive level of autonomy for German-speaking Sud Tirol, the special status of Swedish speaking Finns, and the constitutional arrangements for German speaking community in the federal state of Belgium. All of these political arrangements allow for the national minority to thrive to the extent that in Europe national minorities and their languages are seen as an economic asset in regional development as well as being countries or regions that are naturally bi- and multi-lingual, speaking the regional or minority language and the state language, also seen as European best practice for the development of multilingualism

However, there are also examples of worst practice. These are found in states that are over centralised and usually backed with the outdated ideology of 'one language, one state' and who have acted to eradicate the cultural and linguistic diversity in the areas that they have annexed or conquered over history. European examples are Greece, France, and now Slovakia which, with its new amended language law will see, commencing in January, people fined for speaking the autochthonous national minority language. Meanwhile, France and Greece do not recognize minorities and continue with policies that are having the effect of eradicating European languages such as Breton and Corsican.

EBLUL recommends that States look and seek to implement best practice using political autonomy for their national minorities. Not only does it help the national minority thrive, research indicates that the national minority with their language and culture becomes a positive economic and social capital asset.