ELEN, the Digital Language Diversity Project, the European Language Grid, and digital development for lesser-used languages

META FORUM 2019, Brussels
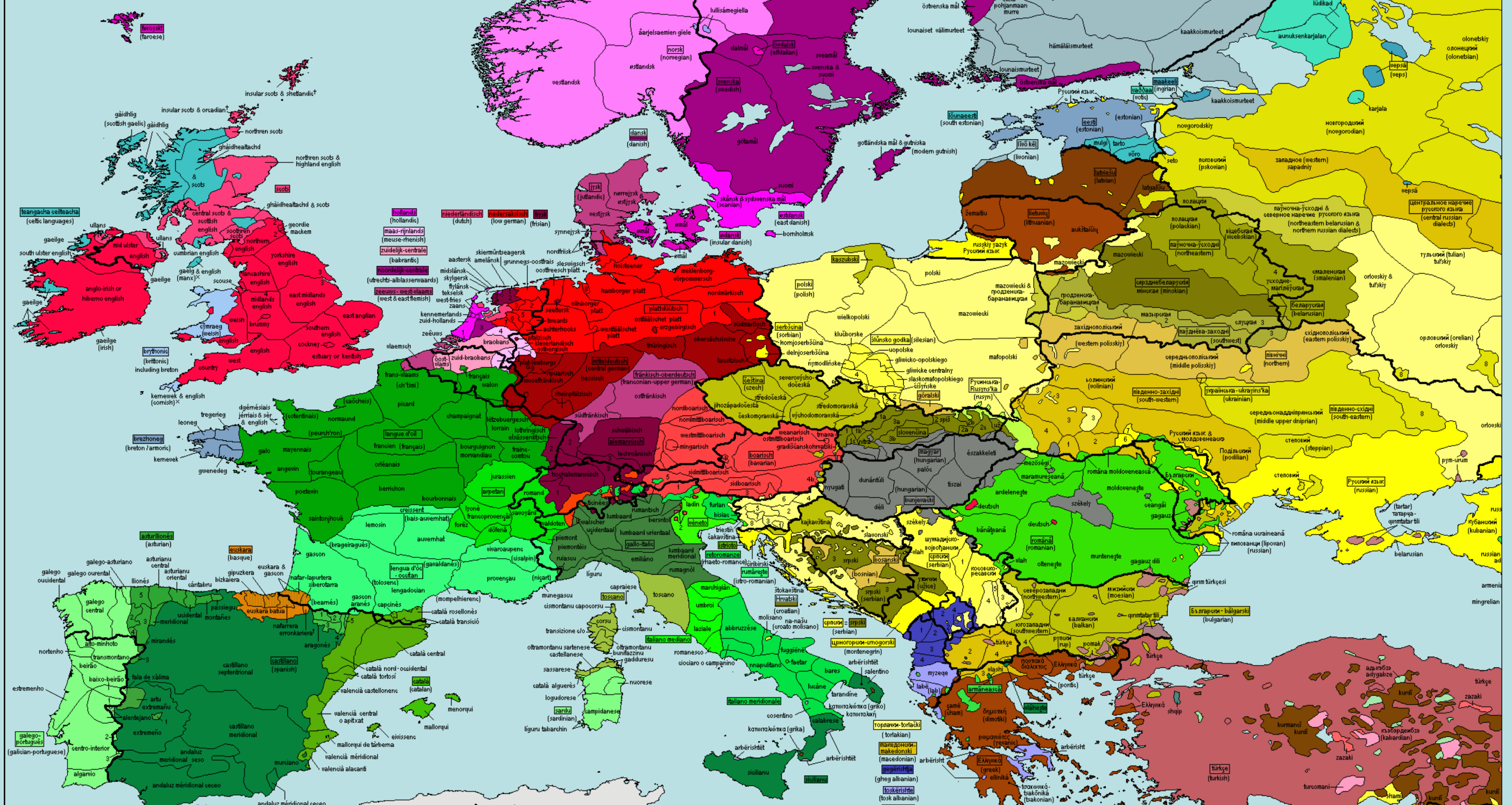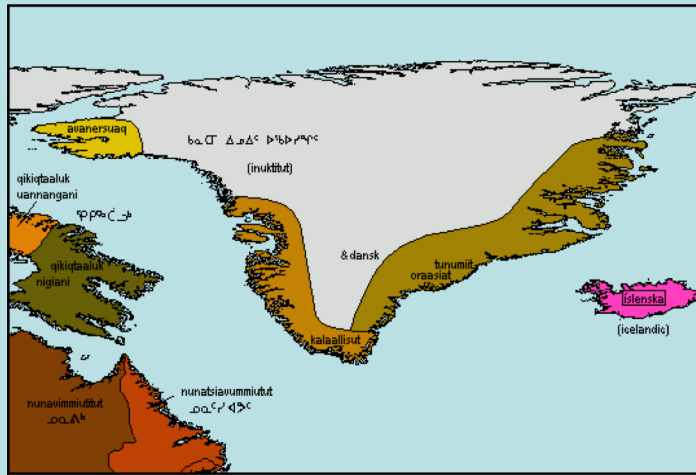
Dr. Davyth Hicks

ELEN Secretary-General

Overview

- **European Language Equality Network (ELEN)**
- **The Digital Language Diversity Project (DLDP).**
- **DLDP Survival Kit and Roadmap recommendations.**
- **The "Digital Timebomb".**
- **Digital exclusion and human rights.**
- **EU and ELG support for European digital language diversity.**

Priorité est donnée aux dialectes et aux langues minoritaires autochtones.

Priority is given to dialects and indigenous minority languages.

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INDO-EUROPEAN
ITALIC
GERMANIC
CELTIC
SLAVIC
ALBANIAN
GREEK
BASQUE
MALTESE
ESKIMO-ALEUT
URALIC
BALTIC
EUSKARA
TURKIC

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OVERVIEW

- There are around 60 regional or minority languages in Europe (CoE ECRML figure).

- Around **50 million people**, **10%,** in the European Union speak a minoritised language.

- Regional/national, minoritised, endangered languages (RMLs) are spoken in all European countries, except for Iceland.

ELEN

- Set up in 2012 replacing EBLUL.
- ELEN members represent **45 languages with 164 member organisations in 23 European states.**
- ELEN members comprise most of Europe's civil society RML language organisations.
- ELEN provides a direct connection between grass-roots organisations and the European and international institutions.

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ELEN's work comprises two main pillars:

1) Advocacy work for the protection and promotion of RMLs with a particular focus on linguistic rights.

2) **Project work** where ELEN works with partners on EU funded language projects that act to promote European RMLs.

Digital Language Diversity Project (DLDP)

- 3 year project funded by Erasmus Plus.
- Partners: Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche (Italy), Univ. of Mainz (Germany), Elhuyar (Basque Country), Karelian Language Society (Finland), and ELEN.
- Objective to empower RML speakers to increase RML digital provision.

Digital Language Diversity Project(DLDP)

- DLDP surveyed 4 languages to find out digital requirements of speakers.

- Breton, Sardinian, Basque, Karelian.

- Survey found differing results for each language.

the Digital Language Diversity Project

1st survey into digital needs of European minority language speakers

Outputs

- Digital Language Survival Kit
- Training Programme
- DLDP Roadmap
- Website: wp.dldp.eu

DLDP Roadmap Recommendations

In order to establish a sustainable policy for safeguarding and promoting European and global linguistic diversity, policies for digital development have to be embraced. With so much of our lives happening on the internet and with digital devices, securing the digital domain will be vital for speakers of lesser-used languages

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DLDP Main Recommendations

1) The extension of the Digital Language Diversity Project (DLDP) to assess all European RMLs and make recommendations for their digital development, as called for in Jill Evans' Report.

2) European legislation that acts to ensure that lesser-used languages (RMLs), including smaller state languages, have the digital provision required to function fully in the digital era.

3) Current language legislation and international treaties protecting regional or minority languages (e.g. the Council of Europe's Charter for Regional or Minority Languages) have protocols added so as to ensure the digital provision of public sector services in RMLs.

4) Large-scale, long-term research and development and innovation funding programme at European and State level, in order to develop innovative technologies and services > European Language Grid.

5) Recommends the creation of a European language technology platform with representatives from all European languages that enables the sharing of language technology-related resources. > European Language Grid?

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A digital timebomb for RMLs?

If we are to ensure European digital language diversity for future generations we need substantive European level policies and legislation that acts to protect that diversity.

If not, RML speakers are facing a digital time-bomb considering that current trajectories of digital development signal that they will be excluded from using their own language in an increasingly digitized society.

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The Digital Timebomb: Issues for RMLs

- Exclusion from healthcare
- Exclusion from education
- Exclusion from public and private sector provision
- Alienation of youth from their own languages
- Affects freedom of expression and access to media
- Lack of digital provision may accelerate language endangerment in an already critical situation.

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European Commission - DG Connect

- 'Digital language divide is a new form of discrimination.'

- Lack of development risks 'digital extinction.'

- Developing technology to ensure language equality.

- Agrees EP Report must be implemented.

- European Language Resource Coordination (ELRC), *but why only EU 24 languages?*

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Language Equality in the Digital Age Report, ELEN Recommendations

Given the huge cross-party support for the Report, ELEN is calling on the EU to:

- Implement the Report in full and work with ELEN to increase digital provision for lesser-used languages so as to bridge the digital divide.

- Digital development must be bottom-up decision-making, steered by the language communities themselves, and be based on their requirements.

- The EU is now able to live up to its slogan of 'Unity in Diversity' and core value of the respect for linguistic diversity.

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- While the EU cannot intervene in Member-State language policy, with digital development the EU is able to seize the opportunity to support RMLs, and bridge the digital divide by supporting the development of digital provision for these languages.

- Propose that the EU and/or the ELG works with ELEN to extend the DLDP project, as called for in the EP report, to cover all European lesser-used languages.

- Propose that EU and European Language Grid work with ELEN/RML speakers to implement the DLDP and Jill Evans' Report recommendations.

Meur ras bras!
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