THE LANGUAGES OF EUROPE

Europe's nations and boundaries are a melting pot, but even more complex is the distribution of languages within those states. Languages though, are often regarded as a common treasure, which maintains a community united. Essentially because they create a bond –communication– amongst the members of a society, as well as bring to that society the responsibility for preserving that heritage –the language itself. Since the peak of the nationalisms in the XIX century, European countries made a great effort to agglomerate territories where the national language was spoken, producing a uniform education, religion, health service o legal service in that language, to integrate those territories.

However, in Europe as a whole, policies pursuing linguistic homogeneity are no longer a trend. The goal is nowadays to preserve the diversity and heritage, especially after the atrocious attempts of linguistic and politic unity addressed by Hitler or Napoleon.

Do you think human beings choose their own language or they are always politically induced to one?

Do you think a common language is a link big enough to create a nation?

Some regions in Europe, as Catalonia, Basque country or Brittany, have their own language. Do you think it is legitimate for them to become an independent country or not? Try to explain your answer.

The approximate present-day distribution of the Indo-European branches within their homelands of Europe and Asia:

Hellenic (Greek)
Indo-Iranian
Italic (Romance)
Celtic
Germanic
Armenian
Balto-Slavic (Baltic)
Balto-Slavic (Slavic)
Albanian
Non-Indo-European languages

Towards the end of ice age in Europe, around 10.000 B.C. the rise of temperatures in Europe boosted an increase of population, as well as some forms of agriculture. Language theorists believe that for several millennia lived in Europe some peoples like Etruscan, Iberian, Tartessian etc. speaking similar languages –all of them with a common root according to those theories. However, in 4.500 B.C. Europe receives a migratory flow, from an area situated near the Ural Mountains. These peoples maintained their languages for all these years, and those Uralic languages can still be found in some parts of Europe. Towards the year 3.500 B.C. another migratory flow arrives to Europe. This time, the flow comes from a territory located between the seas Caspian and Black. This population incorporated a language from which most of actual languages derived: Indo European.

500 years later, many different civilizations flourish in Europe, as a result of the lack of contact with each other, so that Indo European language starts to split in many different idioms. In the year 3.000 the

first Celt peoples crystallize in east France, south Germany and extend towards the north of Spain and Great Britain. Around the year 2.500, another group on Indo European peoples settle in south Scandinavia and north Germany, creating a new brand of languages known as Germanic. The Baltic region is occupied by another Indo European branch, closely related to their proto-Slavic neighbours, evolving several languages that currently exist still there.
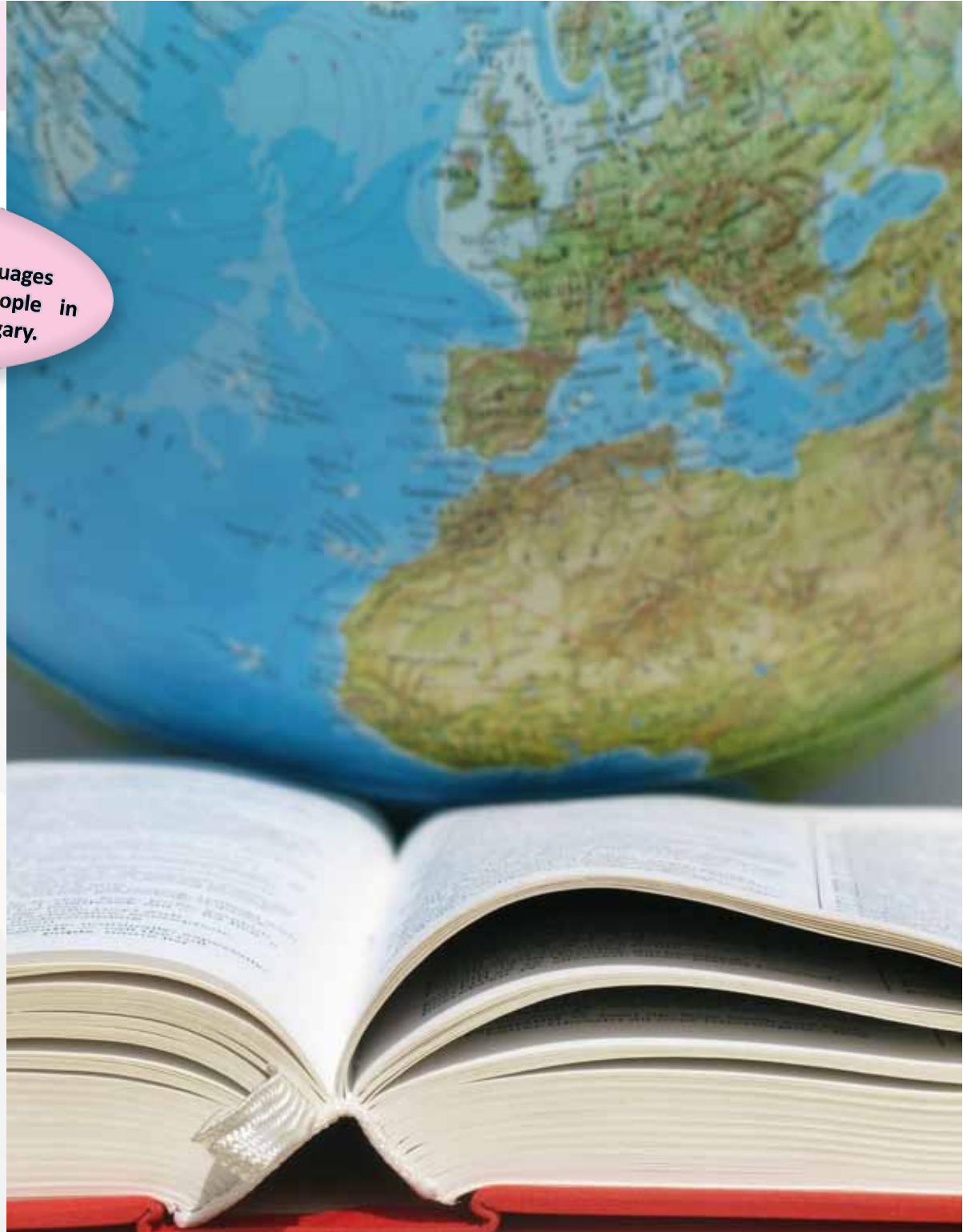
In the second Millennia B.C. some peoples consolidate in a region bigger than the actual Greece, with a common

Celtic language: Group of languages evolved from the Indo European family currently spoken by some people in North Western Europe.

Indo European: the family of languages spoken over the greater part of Europe and Asia as far as northern India.

The Uralic Languages

language as a mean of unity: Greek. They established a politic, philosophic, commercial and war supremacy, as well as brought to Europe the first scripture imported from Asia, and had an enormous impact on the rest of European civilizations. Nevertheless, in 200 B.C. Rome snatched the politic and cultural supremacy, and expanded Latin through western Europa; From Cadiz to London, and from Belgium to Greece, including south Germany, enclosing Celts to a few spots next to the Atlantic ocean. One of the most powerful grounds for Latin to overcome difficulties is that Catholic Church chose it as official language.

The last incursion with linguistic consequences occurred in Europe in the vicinity of the 9th century. A group of Uralic speakers occupied the region of Hungary, dividing the Slavic peoples in south and north, division that is currently in use. This group, brought in a language -Hungarian- from the Uralic family, therefore related to Finnish and Estonian.

Language and politics are concepts hard to be separated. There is a consensus though to determine that languages, contrarily to dialects have a grammar. Being amazingly high the number of dialects in Europe, this section will only focus on the official languages within the European continent.

Likewise, most of European citizen speaks an Indo European language:

- In south Europe, most of official languages derive from Latin. We encounter French, with 70 millions of speakers in France, Belgium and Switzerland, Italian (60 M), Spanish (45 M), Romanian (24 M) and Portuguese (10 M). Alternatively, Catalan (10 M) and Galician (2.5 M) have also the official language status, though are spoken in some areas of Spain.

- In north Europe, take precedence languages from the Germanic family. The most spoken is German (90 M), official in Germany, Austria, Luxembourg and Switzerland, followed by English (60 M) in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland, Dutch (22.5 M), Swedish (9 M), Danish (6 M), Norwegian (5 M) and Icelandic (260.000).

> **Official Language:** The language or one of the languages that is accepted by a country's government is taught in schools and used in the courts of law, etc.
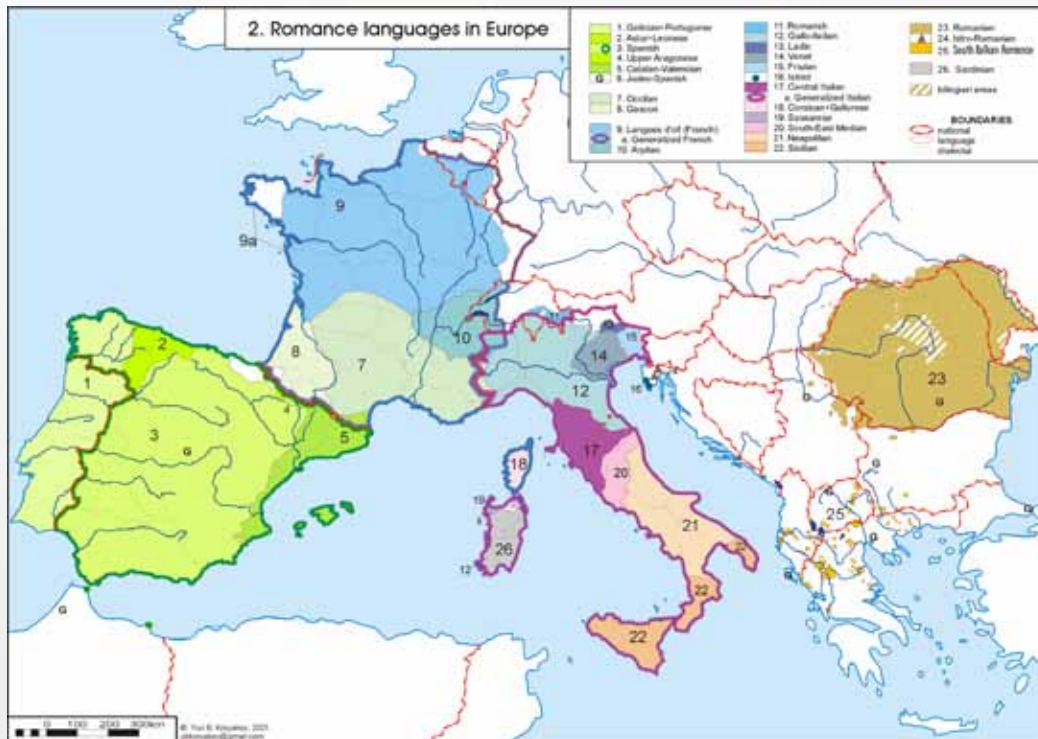
- Slavic languages' distribution is very complex. They are usually divided in three groups. The southern group is often written with Latin scripture. Linguistic and religious particularities have been the subject of many conflicts in this area, where only 20 years ago almost every country formed part of Yugoslavia. The most spoken is Serbian (12 M), then Croatian (7 M), Bosnian (4 M), Slovenian (2.2 M) and Montenegrin (600.000). There are two languages written with Cyrillic script: Macedonian (3 M) and Bulgarian (15 M). The western group is always written with Latin alphabet. Polish (40 M) is the most spoken, followed by Czech (12 M) and Slovak (4 M).

The eastern branch is the most important in terms of users, and is always written in Cyrillic. The most spoken is Russian (160 M), followed by Ukrainian (40 M), and Belarusian (8 M).

- Celt languages remainder are scarce and isolated. We encounter Welsh (600.000), Gaelic Irish (500.000) and Gaelic from Scotland (60.000). Breton (500.000) has also official status in Brittany -France.

- The Baltic family consists of Lithuanian (4 M) and Latvian (1.5 M), and is remotely related to the Slavic group.

Beyond these Indo European languages, there exist four languages in Europe.
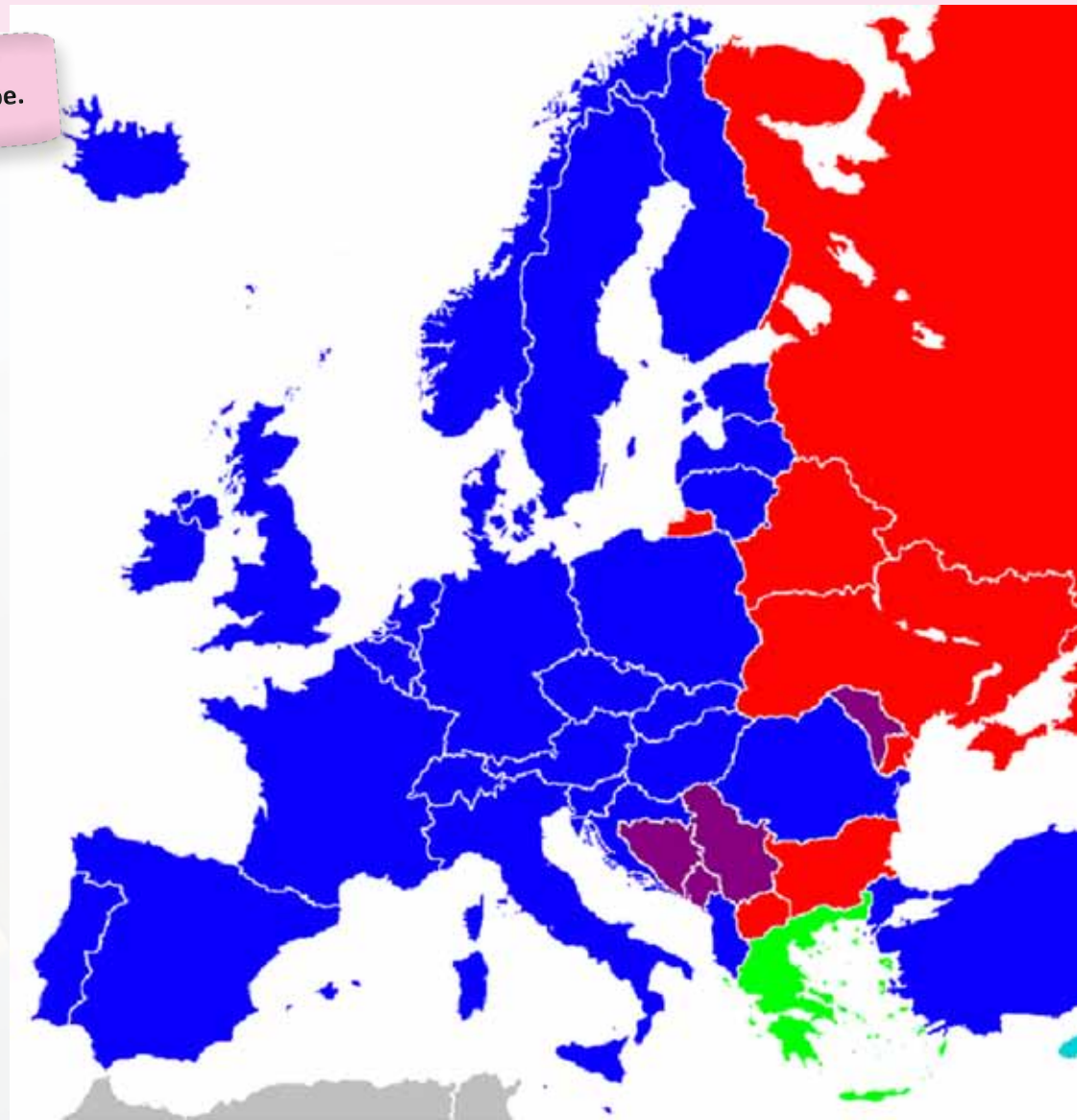

2. Romance languages in Europe

Three of them belong to the Uralic branch: Finnish (5 M), Estonian (1.1 M) and Magyar (15 M). Magyar is quite different to the rest of Uralic languages, as is the product of a migration occurred around 4.000 years later. Finally the fourth language is Basque (700.000). It is believed to be one among those previous languages existing in Europe, prior to the Indo European migrations. Accordingly has no similarities with any other language in the world, and its scripture is only extended since XVII century.

The indo european branches of the language tree

Main alphabets used in Europe

Main alphabets used in Europe:
Latin alphabet
Cyrillic script
Greek alphabet
Greek and latin script
Slavic and latin script

LANGUES ET PARLERS RÉGIONAUX

Posterior to the French revolution in 1789, French language is established in France as the unique official language, and hence how speaking French becomes necessary for every citizen to participate in democracy, and ultimately be free. This fact had an enormous impact in Europe during the following hundred years. For instance, halfway through the nineteenth century, we acknowledge the change of criteria in nationalism. Prior to this date, culture, traditions, local customs, intellectual production and

Minority language: It is a language spoken by a minority group within a country, where there is an official language.

a national language formed a nation. However, from now on it is only the language what matters. That is observed in Germany and Italy, where nations are formed based only upon linguistic affinity. Consequently, it is in France where it first starts the politic imposition of a language. It was a slow but constant mechanism, accomplished by the French monarchy previously to the revolution. There were several languages, evolved from Latin, although Langue d'Oc in south France and Langue d'Oil in the north were the most extended. At the beginning of the process, the government establishes a language as a vehicle to undertake any legal procedures; so it becomes compulsory to speak fluently a language in order to buy a house, inherit any goods, begin a business, or get married. Later on, appears the prestige speech. This means philosophy, medical speech, literature, economic and politic speeches are produced in that language and it appears to be necessary to learn it so that we can follow and participate of those cultural instruments. At last, it is created a system of education, where a scheme

Linguistic nationalism: Use of linguistics to support nationalistic ideologies.

Proselytise: The act of attempting to convert people to an opinion.

of legal diplomas is created; diplomas that are mandatory to practice within the territory. Summarizing, the government promotes that language creating -perhaps involuntarily- a marginal corner for the rest of languages with non-official status.

When a language is official and has an important number of speakers, there is attached to it a great industry of products such as books, newspaper, TV programs, cinema and radio. Nowadays we know the economic viability of those products depends obviously in their quality, but even more on the number of speaker or potential customers. For this reason, and for to protect his industry from the huge industries in U.S.A. and United Kingdom, some countries as France, Spain or Italy applied a protectionist policy, where films are subsidiary of founds to proselytises the national culture and language, and to keep that media industry from shrinking and ultimately disappearing.

"Language has not always been the principal criterion by which nations are identified. Up to the nineteenth century the national consciousness of most European peoples was base don a number of factors among which religious belief, feudal tradition, social class, ethnic stock and cultural heritage, including language, hada ll been predominant at one time or another. After 1840, however, there occurred what appears now to have been a sudden shift in the emphasis of nationalist ideologies: language, for good or ill, became the decisive factor and the symbol of nationalism".
Meic Stephen, *Linguistic minorities in Western Europe.*

There was a remarkable attempt of linguistic unity, in the recent history of Europe that deserves to be noticed. It was a romantic endeavour accomplished at the beginning of the 20th century: E s p e r a n t o, a language created by Zemenhof for all the peoples in the world with a simple grammar and politically neutral, which ended up having success among the anti-fascists, and so became unpopular after the war.

After all those failures of the last centuries, the initial European agreement was only based on the economic integration, rather than the hypothetical linguistic homogeneity. Therefore the first EU agreement in 1957 is based upon three linguistic principles:
- No discrimination.
- Free movement of people and goods, requiring an important investment in education so that those citizens can communicate with each other.
- Subsidies to the media industry, in order to protect it.

The Union inside is very complex, as a product of those principles. The agreement of no discrimination implies every language with official status in a EU country will be official for the Union. As more countries join the Union, more official languages are incorporated to the bureaucratic apparel, and therefore every document produced in the Union must be published in each of the 23 current official languages. Besides, the UE communicates with every country in their official language, and so it has an enormous demand of translators, which includes a high economic dependence.

Nevertheless, the Union is a pioneer multilingual organism, despite the huge dependence on translations it has, and the static bureaucratic model it represents as a consequence. This scenario is very difficult to invert now. If the EU decided to reduce the number of official languages, it would provoke so many conflicts of interests, that nobody would actually consider it even as a suggestion anymore.

In order to promote languages in the Union, two main programs have been launched:
- Socrates. Contains the Erasmus program, to provide universities with exchange programs and funds to support it, as well as the Comenius to promote the co-operation and mobility between primary and secondary schools.
- Leonardo. To promote mobility among professionals, in order to build up working experience, and exchange knowledge.

In addition, teaching languages is promoted in the Union through the council of Europe, with the aim of improving the ability of those citizens to communicate abroad of he EU, so that they can interact, work and move freely across Europe.

There is also a ''European Bureau for lessen-used languages'' located in Dublin, to preserve and promote the use of those languages within Europe. It has an information office in Brussels, as well as a delegation in most of the EU countries.
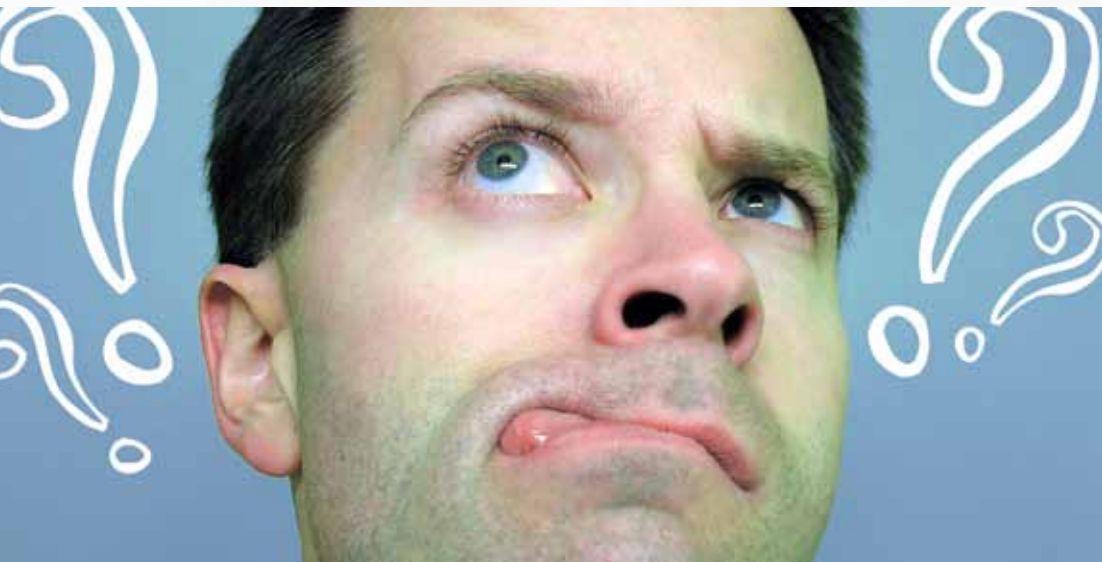
Esperanto: It is the most widely spoken language constructed by L.L. Zamenhof, as an attempt to create an easy-to-learn language, politically neutral that transcends nationality.

Council of Europe: It is an international organization created to promote co-operation between the countries of all Europe in the areas of legal standards, human rights or democratic development.

Working language: Is a language with legal status in a supranational estate, company or organization.

European Parliament

What have I learnt?

Can you make a chronological axis explaining the main facts in European languages in time? Draw a line and use the year 4.500 B.C. as a starting point, and the year 2.013 as the end of your axis.

What can I do?

What would be the advantages and disadvantages of having a single language in Europe? Try to find three positive points, and three negative points for both scenarios: Many languages in Europe, and one language for all in Europe. Then explain your opinion or conclusion.

How does that affect me?

What are the basic principles for a human group to become a nation?
In groups of 4-5, try to find the few principles needed for a human group to become a nation with legitimacy: as Denmark, England or Russia. Then expose your ideas and debate with the rest of the groups in the class.

Extension

Browse this European website. What is the Comenius program for? How can that program have an impact on European society?
http://www.oapee.es/oapee/inicio/pap/comenius.html