



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Executive Board

Hundred and ninety-seventh session

197 EX/34

PARIS, 15 September 2015
Original: English

Item 34 of the provisional agenda

WORLD DAY OF ROMANI LANGUAGE

SUMMARY

This item has been included in the provisional agenda of the 197th session of the Executive Board at the request of the Republic of Croatia.

The corresponding explanatory note is attached.

Action expected of the Executive Board: Proposed decision in paragraph 17.

EXPLANATORY NOTE

1. The Romani language – “*Romani čhib*” – must be preserved because this is an ancient language, with all the linguistic features of modern language that is in danger of extinction. This problem was recognized by the Roma people from all around the world as they gathered at the first World Congress of Roma people held in London in 1971. During this congress “*Romani čhib*” was declared as the official language of all Roma people in the world. Roma people do not have their own State, but they are citizens of almost all countries in the world. Therefore, by deciding to proclaim the World Day of Romani language, UNESCO emphasizes the need of preservation and further development of the language mentioned.
2. The Romani language – “*Romani čhib*” – belongs to the Indian branch of languages. Analysis has shown that it is closely connected to the languages spoken in northern India and Pakistan. This is also important for determining the geographical origins of the Roma people, especially because words which are borrowed from other languages allow the tracking of their migrations. By taking words from other languages Romani language has suffered many changes. Most of the Roma people speak one of its many variants.
3. The Romani language has about 33,000 words and it represents a good basis for its modernization and final standardization. There are 17 dialects but speakers of different dialects can understand each other. There has been a substantial work to create a standard idiom, but still a lot of work has to be done. The Romani language has never been fully constructed even at the level of dialects. Today, the dialects of the Romani language are very different and they are becoming more and more different, because they are embracing words from the languages of the people with whom the Roma population is living with. Many of the Roma people today do not speak the Romani language or the new dialects. Since language is the most important system of communication, identity, socializing and cultural integration, it is of utmost importance for Roma people to return to their language and cultural tradition if they wish to preserve their identity.
4. Over 10 years ago in Croatia, world experts in the Romani language in the field of linguistics, literature, journalism and other related fields, came together to work on the standardization and codification of the Romani language. Since 2009, they continue to meet every year in Zagreb, at the International symposium on Romani language to celebrate the World day of Romani language (5 November). This was an initiative of the *Romani NGO Association for Education of Roma People in the Republic of Croatia “Kali Sara”*. On the same date, the first International Symposium on Romani language was held in Zagreb, with the participation of Romani-language researchers, linguists, university professors, writers and journalists from a number of countries. The Charter and the Declaration were adopted during the World day of Romani language and signed by all participants. Representatives from the International Romani Union (IRU) were also present at the event.
5. In 2008, the first Romani – Croatian and Croatian – Romani Dictionary was published by Veljko Kajtazi. The editors were: *Association for education of Roma people in the Republic of Croatia “Kali Sara”* and the Department of Oriental Studies at the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Zagreb.
6. The tradition to hold the international symposium during the World day of Romani language is still present today. The topics that have been treated so far at the symposium are the standardization and codification of the Romani language (2009), the use of Romani language in IT (2010), the place of Romani language within the family (2011), the introduction of the Romani language in the institutions (2012) and polycentric standardization of Romani language (2013). The papers presented proved wide usage of Romani language in Europe and in other continents.
7. In 2012, the Croatian Parliament, further to the proposal by MP Veljko Kajtazi, unanimously brought a decision to officially declare 5 November as World Day of the Romani Language. The Croatian Parliament then called upon the Government of Croatia, and other parts of public

administration, local and regional, science institutions, media and organizations to contribute to the popularization and standardization of the Romani language, and for the preservation of the cultural and national identity of the Roma people. The Parliament also called upon all other national parliaments, international institutions and organizations to join the initiative to commemorate 5 November as World Day of Romani Language. The Croatian Parliament unanimously accepted to support this international initiative to declare 5 November as World Day of Romani Language.

8. Thereby, the Croatian Parliament became the first parliament in the world that had supported the initiative of declaring 5 November as World Day of Romani Language and by doing so marked the world history of Roma people. It should be the example to other national parliaments to accept this important date for Roma community. This initiative is in full agreement with the National Program for Roma and with the Action Plan of the Decade for the Integration of Roma (2005-2015).

9. The World day of Romani language is today celebrated in the Republic of Croatia as a national holiday of Roma people and it has rightfully taken its place along with other national holidays: World Day of Roma People – 8 April, and the Holocaust – Samodaripen/Porajmos – 2 August. The World day of Romani language promotes education, language and culture of Roma people and supports multicultural values.

10. On the International Symposium, held annually in Zagreb, *Ferec Sztojka* and *Šaip Jusuf* prizes for achievement are regularly awarded to individuals. The prizes have been named after the first Roma Lexicographer Ferenc Sztojka who has by the end of the nineteenth century published the first international dictionary with 13,000 Romani words. Šaip Jusuf from Macedonia was contemporary author of the first grammar of Romani language.

11. During the International Symposium on Romani language – 5 November 2012, a lecture on the Romani language was organized for the first time at the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Zagreb. In association with the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb, the Department for Indiology and Far East studies, it has started: Introduction to the Romani language I and II, and Introduction to Romani literature and culture. The first lecture was given by Professor Ljatif Demir from Macedonia. In 2013, the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Zagreb formed a bilingual panel, the first in Europe for Romani language. First courses were held as optional subjects and in 2015 both courses are upgraded as Romani studies.

12. The initiative to proclaim World Day of Romani language as UNESCO protected heritage was started by the Association for education of Roma people in Croatia “Kali Sara” and is joined by other associations and organizations of the Roma people in Croatia.

13. Every year, experts for Romani language from around the world meet in Zagreb at the International Symposium on the occasion of the World Day of the Romani language, to work on further guidelines in the process of language standardization. The conclusions are meant to be recommendations for Roma community and their relevant institutions to create a positive environment in which conclusions can be implemented in practice.

14. Through presentation of the project “The World Day of Romani Language”, we have attempted to summarize years and years of work on the recognition of the Romani language as an important element of identity and equality of the Roma community in Croatia, and throughout the world. We also showed a short summary of the scientific and other expert work being carried out on the standardization and codification of the Romani language, whose authenticity has begun to fade with each new generation of Roma. Proclaiming World Day of Romani language and through the regular maintenance of the International Symposium on the Romani language, we were able, at least to some degree, to stop this process. We encouraged generations of young Roma and enable them to learn their mother tongue in educational institutions, not just from their parents.

15. Proclaiming the World Day of Romani language by UNESCO, countries with respectful Roma population will be additionally encouraged for an even greater involvement of solving this problem. Roma people had never had their own homeland. They have always been migrating and in search for a better life. To quote Czeslaw Milosz: “Language is your only homeland.”

16. By proclaiming World day of Romani language, UNESCO sends clear message that Romani language is part of cultural heritage and cultural wealth of the world, so as such it needs to be preserved. Romani language has its past, as well as its present, but if we want it to have future it requires the support of all of us, especially support of UNESCO. Founded 70 years ago UNESCO built a lasting peace on the basis of humanity’s moral, intellectual solidarity and intellectual understanding through protection of heritage and support for cultural diversity. We believe that Romani language can be part of this process.

DRAFT DECISION

17. The Executive Board may wish to adopt a decision along the following lines:

The Executive Board,

1. Aware of the Romani Language’s role in the contribution to the preservation and dissemination of human civilization and culture,
2. Understanding the need to implement more wide-ranging cooperation between peoples through linguistic pluralism, cultural rapprochement and dialogue among civilizations, in line with what is set out in the Constitution of UNESCO,
3. Convinced that UNESCO has an active role to play and important contribution to make in promoting multicultural values in education, language and culture of Roma people,
4. Recalling 38 C/Resolution/... and welcoming the Decade of Roma inclusion 2005-2015,
5. Expressing appreciation for the active engagement of the international community in promoting and participating in the World Day of Romani Language, as Roma people are citizens of almost all the countries in the world,
6. Determined that UNESCO should continue to take the lead in enhancing intercultural dialogue, fostering cultural rapprochement especially by proclaiming World Day of Romani Language that will help further develop and research of Romani language in member states,
7. Recognizing that proclamation of the World Day of Romani Language sends a clear message that Romani languages represent a rich linguistic and cultural heritage of the world,
8. Invites the Director-General to promote especially during the 70 anniversary of UNESCO, the celebration of World Day of Romani Language on 5 November of every year as one of the international days marked by UNESCO, it being understood that this should have no financial impact on the regular budget of the Organization;
9. Recommends that the General Conference, at its 38th session, proclaim 5 November of each year as World Day of Romani Language.