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# GLOBALIZATION IN THE WEST AND EAST

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## CENTRAL EUROPE FROM A LINGUISTIC VIEWPOINT

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### **1. The Multilingualism of Central Europe**

There are many definitions of Central Europe. For the sake of this article it is the middle one-third of the continent or the zone bordered by Italy and the German-speaking polities of Germany and Austria in the West and the multilingual Russian Federation in the East.

The general linguistic shape of Central Europe as we know it today coalesced between the arrival of the Hungarians (or rather a coalition of Finno-Ugric and Turkic ethnic groups) in the Danube basin in the tenth and fourteenth century founding of the Romance-speaking principalities of Walachia and Moldavia (that is, the predecessors of modern-day Romania and Moldova). In the middle of the region the East Romance languages of Moldovan and Romanian alongside with the Finno-Ugric one of Hungarian are spoken from the Black Sea to Austria, which is the part of the German-speaking zone. This multilingual belt separates the North and South Slavic dialect continua (that is, geographically continuous zones within which a language changes gradually from a locality to a locality; the cleavage of mutual incomprehensibility occurs where two continua meet). At present the former is identified with Polish, Czech, Slovak, Belarusian, Ukrainian and Russian, while the latter with Slovenian, Croatian, Bosnian, Serbian, Montenegrin, Macedonian and Bulgarian.

At Central Europe's southern end terminating in the Mediterranean and the Bosphorus the Indo-European isolates (mutually incomprehensible languages, with no cognates) of Albanian and Greek brush side with Turkish which is part of the Turkic dialect continuum extending to Kazakhstan, Central Asia and eastern China. In the North the sole surviving Baltic languages of Lithuanian and Latvian are squeezed between the North Slavic dialect continuum and the Finno-Ugric language of Estonian.

### **2. Religion, Language and Identity**

Well until the modern times people in Central Europe chose to express their identity through religion rather than a language. All the three monotheistic faiths come complete with their Holy Writs and respective traditions of literacy, most visibly expressed by various scripts (alphabets) employed to write in the 'holy languages.' Accordingly, Jews write in Hebrew characters of the Hebrew-language original of the Pentateuch and Muslims – in Arabic letters of the Arabic-language original of the Koran. In the case of Christians, these who pay allegiance to the pope in Rome (Catholics) write in Latin (Roman) letters of the Vulgate, or the official Latin translation of the Bible. Those who adopted Christianity from Byzantium, and at present consider the ecumenical patriarch

in Constantinople (Istanbul) the highest authority in the Orthodox Church, were allowed a greater degree of multilingualism. Greeks (and earlier also Orthodox Slavs, Albanians and Turks under Constantinople's direct ecclesiastical control) write in Greek letters of the ancient Greek-language original of the New Testament. In the mid-ninth century the Slavs of Greater Moravia (today's Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia) adopted Christianity from Byzantium but in the Slavic language of Salonika written in a specific script, Glagolitic. In the following century Cyrillic (developed in the Bulgarian Empire) replaced Glagolitic and the language, known as Church Slavonic, remains the language of liturgy among Orthodox Slavs (mainly in the eastern Balkans, Belarus, Russia and Ukraine) to this day.

Regarding the issue of literacy, faith and identity in the context of Central Europe, it is necessary to mention Armenia and Georgia, which were the first two states to adopt Christianity as their state religion in the early fourth century. This event was coupled with the devising of the specific Armenian and Georgian scripts with the use of which the Bible was translated into Armenian and Georgian. With time the Georgian Church became part of the Orthodox Church, while the Armenian (Apostolic) Church retained its singular (monophisitic) character and organization. Christianity and the respective traditions of literacy, complete with their specific scripts, let the Armenians and the Georgians survive as separate ethnic groups when their lands were overrun by Byzantium, the Muslim Arabs, Zoroastrian and, later, Islamic Persia, the Ottoman Empire, and Russia.

In the Catholic areas of Central Europe, due to the rise of distinctive and durable polities and reaffirmation of the secular power in them, people began to write in the new administrative languages of German (the twelfth – the thirteenth centuries), Czech (the fourteenth – fifteenth centuries), Polish (the fifteenth – the sixteenth centuries), and Croatian (the sixteenth – the seventeenth centuries), obviously, with the use of the Latin script. The only exception was northwestern Croatia's Adriatic littoral where the Catholic Glagolitic-based tradition of Church Slavonic liturgy survived until the mid-twentieth century. In the Orthodox zone of the region, Romanian began to be used for official purposes in the sixteenth century, and was written in Cyrillic until the mid-nineteenth century. The Cyrillic-based Slavic idiom of Ruthenian (seen as the common predecessor of Belarusian and Ukrainian) was the official language of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (coterminous with present day Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine) until the end of the seventeenth century. In the Ottoman Empire Ottoman (Old Turkish) and Persian were employed for administration and literary endeavors, respectively, and predictably both were jotted down in Arabic characters. In the fifteenth century the need arose among Bosnia's Slavophone Muslims to write in Slavic, which was done in the Arabic script. Slavic publications in Arabic characters written and published there until the early 1940s are perceived as the beginning of the Bosnian language. Likewise, Muslim Tatars who settled in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the fourteenth century followed the same practice to write in Ruthenian and Polish. In a similar fashion, ethnic Greeks and Albanians professing Islam wrote down their idioms in the Arabic script, too; and when beginning in the fifteenth century Jews developed their written tradition in the Germanic language of Yiddish and the Romance idiom of Spanyol (Ladino), they wrote both in Hebrew characters.

In the Catholic segment of Central Europe the development of new written languages in the sixteenth–seventeenth centuries is connected to the Reformation, which appealed for translating the Bible into the ethnic languages of the faithful. Later,

the Catholic Church also adopted this approach in an effort to reform itself and reverse the spread of Protestantism. Hence, Protestant and Catholic translators made Hungarian into an official language in the Ottoman fief of Transylvania; ushered into being Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian and Slovenian; revived Czech and Croatian; and inspired Slovak. This last language was actually formed in the first half of the nineteenth century, mainly under the influence of the novel force of nationalism.

The splitting of the north and centre of Central Europe between Catholicism and Protestantism (mainly Lutheranism) was also reflected in scriptural practices. Catholics employed the Antiqua type of the Latin alphabet, while Protestants – the Gothic type (Black Letter, or Fraktur). It was not an absolute norm, as Catholic German-speakers and Czech-speakers employed Gothic, while Calvinist Hungarian- and Polish-speakers Antiqua. In the nationalist nineteenth century the use of Gothic was gradually limited to the German language, though some Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian books were published in Gothic until the interwar period.

Another effect of the Counter-Reformation was an attempt to bring the Orthodox population of the Catholic polities of Poland-Lithuania and historical Hungary (coterminous with today's Hungary, Slovakia, southwestern Ukraine, northwestern Romania, northern Serbia and northwestern Croatia) into a union with the Catholic Church. As a result Uniate (Greek Catholic) Churches were founded. In the case of Transylvania's Uniate and Orthodox Romanians this change facilitated the adoption of Romanian as their language of liturgy, increasingly written in Latin characters.

### **3. Modernity, Language and Nationalism**

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Napoleonic armies brought the idea of nationalism to Central Europe. German and Italian nationalists worked out the specifically Central European form of nationalism aptly qualified with the adjective 'ethnolinguistic'. This ethnolinguistic national ideology entails that all the speakers of various dialects construed as a single language form a nation. In turn the contiguous area inhabited by the members of such a linguistically defined nation should be organized into their nation-state. The success of the Kingdom of Italy (1861) and the German Empire (1871) built in this way from a multitude of polities encouraged the rise of various ethnolinguistic national movements across Central Europe. These movements endangered the existence of the multiethnic empires of Russia, Austria and the Ottomans among which the region was divided then.

In the Austrian Empire German replaced Latin as the official language at the close of the eighteenth century, but an outcry against this imposition in the Hungarian half of the monarchy led to the reinstating of Latin in the Kingdom of Hungary where it remained the official language until the mid-nineteenth century. The 1867 overhauling of the Austrian Empire into Austria-Hungary made Hungarian into the official language of the Kingdom of Hungary. In the Austrian half of the Dual Monarchy German remained the most important language, but in the non-German-speaking crownlands (administrative regions) and communes Croatian (Serbo-Croatian), Czech, Polish, Slovenian, and Cyrillic-based Little Ruthenian (Ukrainian) (pressure exerted in the 1850s for coaxing Ukrainians to write and print in Latin characters eventually failed) were introduced as official, co-official and auxiliary languages. In the Hungarian half of the empire only Croatian was recognized as official in the kingdom's Croatian lands, though Serbian (Cyrillic-based Serbo-Croatian), Slovak, Romanian, and Cyrillic-based Rusyn were grudgingly accept-

ed as media of education and pastoral service. In Bosnia, occupied by Austria-Hungary in 1877, apart from German variously named Slavic (Bosnian, Croatian, Serbo-Croatian) was employed in administration and print, in Latin characters for Catholics (identified as Croats), in Cyrillic for Orthodox (identified as Serbs) and in Arabic characters for Muslims (identified as Bosnians).

In the western provinces of the Russian Empire German and Polish were used as official languages. The former on the territory of present-day Estonia and Latvia, and the latter in what today is Lithuania, Belarus and central Ukraine. The formation of the Russian language began with Peter the Great's early eighteenth-century decree to use modernized Cyrillic (Grazhdanka, or civil script modeled on the Latin script, or its most popular form today, Antiqua) for the production of non-ecclesiastical books in Church Slavonic. In the second half of the eighteenth century Russian written in Grazhdanka was standardized on the basis of Church Slavonic and the dialect of Moscow. The use of Russian for literary pursuits and administration spread in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In this century's other half Russian replaced German and Polish as the sole official language in the western provinces. A ban was placed on White Russian (Belarusian) and Little Russian (Ukrainian) because they were construed as 'unworthy peasant' dialects of the (Great) Russian language. The fledgling use of Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian and Cyrillic-based Moldavian (Moldovan) in elementary schools was abolished until 1905. Then German and Polish were reintroduced as languages of instruction, as well.

In the Ottoman Empire the population was divided into non-territorial confessionally defined millets. Thus, Orthodox Greek-, Slavic-, Turkic- and Albanian-speakers belonged to the Orthodox millet and their Muslim counterparts to the Muslim millet. The administrative language of the latter millet was identical with the empire's official language, Ottoman written in the Arabic script. In the Orthodox millet archaizing Byzantine Greek dominated though some use of Church Slavonic was reluctantly accepted in low-key liturgy and elementary schools in some Slavophone areas. In the eighteenth century the sultan replaced local Romanian rulers in Walachia and Moldavia (southern and eastern Romania) with more loyal Greek administrators from Constantinople, which led to the replacement of Cyrillic-based Romanian with Byzantine Greek as the official language there. The Ottomans reversed this arrangement in the 1820s when the Greek War of Independence led to the founding of independent Greece (1832), where Byzantine Greek replaced Ottoman as the sole official language.

The period from the 1810s to the 1910s was marked by the retreat of the Ottoman Empire from the Balkans due to the rise of autonomous and then independent (predominantly) Christian nation-states, encouraged by the West and Russia. Bulgarian, Montenegrin and Serbian national leaders wrote in Cyrillic-based Church Slavonic and marked the ethnic difference vis-à-vis one another referring to the tradition of medieval polities and Orthodox patriarchates pegged on them. These patriarchates continued to exist after the incorporation of the polities into the Ottoman Empire in the fourteenth century. The first Balkan nation-state founded purely on the basis of language was Albania (1913), or the polity for Albanian-speaking Muslims, Orthodox Christians and Catholics.

In the 1880s the movement for the replacement of Byzantine Greek (Katharévousa, or 'purifying language') with modern-day Greek (Demotic) unfolded in Greece. Between 1917 and 1974 once Demotic and on another time Katharévousa was announced as the official language, before the former won the contest permanently. The two varie-

ties of Greek did not diverge into two different languages because the linguistic difference was not translated into an ethnic cleavage but political one. Greek conservatives side with Katharévoussa and liberals with Demotic. On the other hand, liturgy in Greek Orthodox churches continues to be said in the ancient Greek of the New Testament.

Likewise, to this day Church Slavonic is preserved as the language of liturgy in Slavic Orthodox and Greek Catholic churches. Modern Cyrillic and vernacular-based Slavic languages were earmarked for temporal matters. This new trend spread from Russia to the Balkans, where the tsar reaffirmed his international role as the protector of Christians. The codification of Bulgarian followed the Russian model of mixing elements of Church Slavonic and the dialect of Sofia. Serbian as employed in Serbia and Montenegro also developed in this direction (obviously, with the use of different dialects), but in the second half of the nineteenth century the idea of creating a common Serbo-Croatian language for the Slavic-speakers in the western half of the Balkans won the day. However, Catholics were to write this language in the Latin script and Orthodox Christians in Cyrillic. The Albanians were undecided whether to write their own language in Greek, Latin, Cyrillic, Arabic characters or a mixture of those before they settled for the Latin alphabet in 1911.

The significance of ethnic languages written in their specific scripts for individual (usually national) identification rose with the spread of popular literacy. Although full literacy was achieved among Central Europe's German-speakers and Czechs by the 1870s, elsewhere in the region the process was completed only after the founding of the communist regimes in the wake of World War II. Earlier, literacy was a privilege of the narrow elite (often only its male half), meaning nobility (later intelligentsia and middle class), 'professional Ottomans' (Muslim administrators) in the Ottoman Empire, and clergy. In the Catholic zone of Central Europe the elite employed Latin, the knowledge of which spread eastward among the Orthodox due to the rise of the Greek Catholic Churches. The eighteenth-century disavowal of Church Slavonic was accompanied with the elevation of Latin and German as the languages of learning and progress in Russia. Besides, beginning from the eighteenth century French emerged as the language of cultured discourse across entire Europe. It remained the main sociolect of Central Europe's and Russia's aristocracy and richer nobility until their destruction as a cohesive group by the Bolshevik Revolution, and then during and after World War II. The modernization of the Ottoman Empire, which commenced in the 1840s also made French into the language of choice among the elite there.

#### **4. Linguistic Nation-States**

##### *Interwar Period*

The Western Allies beseeched by delegations of various national movements agreed to create ethnolinguistic nation-states in this region, that is, polities for nations speaking their specific languages, not shared by any other nations or polities, namely: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary (or one-third of the former Kingdom of Hungary), and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (since 1929 Yugoslavia). The only non-national polity of interwar Central Europe was the Free City of Danzig, predominantly inhabited by Germans. Short-lived independent Belarus and Ukraine were divided between Poland and the Soviet Union. However, the administrative division of the latter polity was based on ethnonational union republics with their specific languages as official ones. Thus, Ukrainian was the official language of Soviet Ukraine. Soviet Belarus was

exceptional in the fact that apart from Belarusian and Russian also non-Cyrillic-based Yiddish and Polish were used there as co-official languages until 1938.

The Soviet authorities consciously used language as an instrument of politics and social engineering. For instance, in order to prevent the rise of a Turkicphone Muslim nation that, extending from the middle Volga to the Crimea and the Caucasus, and from what today is Kazakhstan to Central Asia, would have endangered the demographically dominant position of the Russians, the Bolsheviks banned the long-established Arabic script-based Turkic languages of Tatar and Chaghatai employed for widespread communication among Turkic Muslims. The use of Tatar was limited to Tatarstan and elsewhere it was replaced with the brand-new languages of Azeri, Bashkir, Chuvash, Crimean Tatar and Kazak, developed on the basis of local dialects. Chaghatai disappeared completely and in its stead Karakalpak, Kyrgyz, Turkmen and Uzbek were created. Furthermore, in 1923 the Arabic script was replaced with the Latin alphabet for writing these languages, as the latter script was perceived to be a 'tool of progress'. In the 1930s Cyrillic superseded the Latin script for writing these languages.

The developments in Central Europe and the Soviet Union convinced the Turkish nationalists that their cause could be served only by giving up the Arabic-speaking areas of the Ottoman Empire and overhauling the Turkish-speaking core into a Turkish nation-state. The Republic of Turkey was proclaimed in 1923. Ottoman replete with numerous Arabic and Persian linguistic loans was replaced with vernacular-based Turkish, intensively purged ('reformed') of non-Turkic elements especially in the 1930s and 1940s. Impressed by Soviet linguistic and social engineering, the Arabic alphabet was replaced with the Latin script for writing Turkish in 1928. This event triggered the Cyrillicization of the Latin alphabets of the Turkic languages in the Soviet Union, due to the Kremlin's fear of opening a channel of Latin-script based communication that would allow for the flow of unwanted ideological influence from Turkey to the Soviet Union.

The normative imperative of one language for one nation-state was of such importance for statehood legitimization in Central Europe that the *par excellence* multi-ethnic polities of Czechoslovakia and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes proclaimed Czechoslovak and Serbocroatoslovenian as their respective official and national languages. The two languages were a constitutional fiction as in reality, both, Czech and Slovak were used in Czechoslovakia, while bi-scriptural Serbo-Croatian and Latin script-based Slovenian in the Kingdom. After the 1929 proclamation of Yugoslavia, Serbocroatoslovenian became eponymously known as Yugoslavian.

#### *The Communist Years*

During the war and after it until 1950 vast border changes and huge multidirectional ethnic cleansing were carried out. About 47 million people were expelled or displaced. The most visible result of this exercise was the disappearance of German-speaking communities in Central Europe and of German as the region's leading language of interethnic communication.

In this manner an unprecedented level of ethnolinguistic homogeneity was achieved in Central Europe's nation-states. The postwar constitutional construct of the Czechoslovak people consisting of the two fraternal nations of the Czech and the Slovaks the latter saw as an instrument to the perpetuation of Czech dominance over Czechoslovakia. In 1969 the polity was overhauled into a bi-national federation with genuine full Czech-Slovak bilingualism. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania annexed by the Soviet Union

were made into union republics with their respective languages as official-cum-national ones; and unusually, Cyrillic was not imposed on these languages.

Neither the constitutional fiction of Yugoslavian nor the unitary character of state was possible to maintain in postwar Yugoslavia. The polity was federalized. The newly formed Cyrillic-based languages of Macedonian and Slovenian were excluded from the commonality of Yugoslavian and made into the official and national languages of the Yugoslav Republics of Macedonia and Slovenia, respectively. Officially named Serbo-Croatian/Croato-Serbian was retained as the common language for other republics, but it was written in Latin characters in Croatia, in Cyrillic in Serbia, and in both scripts in Bosnia and Montenegro. However, the dialectal base of this language slightly differed in all the four republics, as provided by law. Furthermore, in Serbia's Autonomous Republic of Kosovo Albanian was made co-official, while in Serbia's other Autonomous Republic of Vojvodina this status was shared by Hungarian, Slovak, Romanian and Rusyn.

## 5. After Communism

### *Post-Soviet States*

The fall of communism in 1989 also spelt the end of it as a viable ideology of statehood legitimization. This precipitated the breakup of the studiously non-national communist polity of the Soviet Union into 15 ethnolinguistic nation-states, including Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, and Ukraine in the case of Central Europe. The transformation into ethnolinguistic national polities was most successful in the case of the three Baltic republics where no official status was accorded to Russian, though Russian-speakers account for as many as one-third of Estonia's and Latvia's inhabitants. In Ukraine an Autonomous Republic of Crimea was founded with Latin alphabet-based Crimean Tatar and Russian as co-official languages. In Belarus, after the period of 1991–1995 when Belarusian was the sole official and national language, Russian was made into a co-official language, though *de facto* it is the dominant language, which effectively de-Belarusified the polity. Thus, at present Belarus is the only Central European nation-state that does not draw statehood legitimization from language.

In Moldova Cyrillic was replaced with the Latin script for writing Moldovan, which for all practical reasons made it identical with Romanian. This, coupled with a drive to unite the country with Romania, alienated Russian-speakers concentrated east of the Dniester River. In Transnistria Cyrillic-based Moldovan, Russian and Ukrainian were made into co-official languages. In an effort to reestablish the territorial unity of Moldova, autonomy was granted to Transnistria, and Moldovan (constitutionally kept separate from Romanian) remains the state's official language. In addition the autonomous region of Gagauzia was established for the Gagauzes, or Turkic-speaking Orthodox Christians, whose language is close to Turkish. In the Soviet times Cyrillic was used for writing Gagauz, but today the Latin script is employed for this purpose. In Gagauzia Russian is recognized as a co-official language, as well.

### *The Fate of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia*

In 1993 Czechoslovakia split into the two ethnolinguistic nation-states of the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Interestingly, only when for the first time in history Czech was made into the sole official language in the Czech lands (earlier it had shared this role either with German or Slovak). The breakup of Yugoslavia was followed by bloody wars and successive waves of ethnic cleansing. Eventually, between 1991 and 2008

the process spawned seven polities, including six ethnolinguistic nation-states. The latter group is composed of Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia. In order to conform to the normative paradigm of ethnolinguistic nationalism the previously common language of Serbo-Croatian was split into Latin script-based Bosnian and Croatian, Cyrillic-based Serbian, and bi-scriptural Montenegrin. In reality about half of the publications produced in Serbia are in Latin characters. Latin script-based Serbian is used by liberal and pro-European Serbs, while the official Cyrillic version by nationalists and conservatives.

Bosnia does not conform to the usual paradigm of the ethnolinguistic nation-state, as this polity is composed of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Serbian Republic. In the former entity Bosnian and Croatian are employed, both written in Latin characters, while Cyrillic-based Serbian in the latter entity. Initially, in Bosnia not language but religious difference was used to differentiate between Bosnians, Croats and Serbs. It is only nowadays that the ethno-religious difference is translated into the linguistic one. (Sometimes Bosnians and their language are referred to as 'Bosniak' and the label 'Bosnian' is reserved for referring to Bosnia's entire citizenry, irrespective of ethnic, religious or linguistic difference.) Similarly, Serbia is not a model of an ethnolinguistic nation-state either, with its Autonomous Republic of Vojvodina, where after the split of Serbo-Croatian Croatian was added to the four co-official languages alongside the new statewide language of Serbian.

Kosovo is the sole non-ethnolinguistic nation-state spawned by the breakup of Yugoslavia, and the only recognized one of such a character in today's Central Europe. The polity's de facto official and dominant language is Albanian and Kosovo's Albanian-speakers define themselves as Albanians. Hence, Kosovo is a second Albanian nation-state, which is in clear breach with the unspoken principle of Central Europe's ethnolinguistic nationalism that the speakers of a single language form a nation, which should live in its own single nation-state. The not yet promulgated Kosovan constitution of 2008 accords the status of a state co-official language on Serbian, while at the local level also Bosnian, Romani and Turkish are to serve as co-official languages.

## **6. Forgotten Languages**

### *Romani*

In the wake of the fall of communism Roma intellectuals and leaders from many Central European countries began to cooperate in order to address the dire economic and social plight of the Roma, but also to codify their Romani language and to create a Romani national movement. The first efforts to publish in Romani were undertaken in the interwar Soviet Union (in Cyrillic) and in communist Yugoslavia (also in Cyrillic). Despite many centuries of persecution at least half of the Roma continue to speak Romani. The traditional orality of their culture stands in the way of making Romani a written language. Various codifications of Romani, based on different dialects, and conducted with the use of either the Cyrillic, Latin or Greek script have been created in Central European polities. Interestingly, the Romani Wikipedia is available in Latin characters and the Indian script of Devanagari, which is a reflection of New Delhi's 1970s policy to recognize and support the Roma as one of India's peoples (ethnolinguistic nations). There are no regular schools with Romani as the medium of education, yet it is generally recognized as a minority language.



*Minority Languages*

In Central Europe small ethnic and regional languages abound in the borderlands of the erstwhile Kingdom of Hungary, all of them Slavic, namely: Cyrillic-based Rusyn (today in eastern Slovakia, eastern Hungary, southwestern Ukraine and Serbia's Vojvodina), and Latin script-based: Paulician (cognate with Bulgarian, eastern Romania), Bunjevacian (Serbia's Vojvodina), Čakavian and Kajkavian (western Croatia), Prekmurjan (northeastern Slovenia) and Burgenland Croatian (eastern Austria). Two further languages belonging to this group already became fully recognized national languages complete with their respective nation-states, that is, Bosnian and Slovak. In the meeting zone between the West Romance and South Slavic dialect continua, the Slavic languages of Molisean (cognate with Croatian) and Resian (cognate with Slovenian) emerged in what today is northeastern Italy.

In southern Italy and Sicily Latin alphabet-based Arbëresh is spoken, while Greek script-based Arvantika in central Greece, both cognate with Albanian, or its Tosk dialect. The remnants of the Romance-speakers who used to be the link between the West and East Romance dialect continua, today are spread thinly across the Balkans from Greece and Bulgaria to Croatia's Istria. Their three distinctive groups go by the names of Aromanians, Meglano-Romanians and Istro-Romanians. (The two former groups are also referred to as 'Vlachs'.) They write their languages variously in the Latin, Greek or Cyrillic script. In southern Bulgaria, and across the border in northern Greece, the Muslim Slavophone group of Pomaks live. They use Cyrillic and the Latin alphabet (and more rarely the Arabic script) to write their Pomakian language.

In the former meeting zone between the West Germanic and North Slavic dialect continua (after 1945 shifted by ethnic cleansing to the Oder-Neisse line) the following Slavic languages (with strong Germanic influence on lexicon, syntax and phonology) emerged: Mazurian (in present-day northeastern Poland), Kashubian (northern Poland), Sorbian (eastern Germany), Silesian (southern Poland and the northeastern corner of the Czech Republic) and Moravian (the southeast of the Czech Republic). At the confluence of the current Belarusian, Polish and Ukrainian borders the bi-scriptural, Cyrillic and Latin alphabet, Polesian language coalesced. In a similar manner Goralian (Podhalanian) emerged in the Polish-Slovak borderland of the High Tatras.

In Latvia and Lithuania the use of erstwhile parallel dialectal bases of Latvian and Lithuanian has revived, namely: Latgalian in eastern Latvia and Samogitian in western Lithuania. Significantly, Latgalian- and Samogitian-speakers amount to one-third of all Latvian- and Lithuanian-speakers, respectively. Latvia protects the north-western littoral of the Gulf of Riga, dubbed as the Livonian historical territory, which is more of cultural and touristic importance than linguistic, because the remaining speakers of the Finno-Ugric language of Livonian number less than 50. In Estonia southern Estonian, which used to be a former dialectal basis of the Estonian language, was also revived. Nowadays it comes in two closely related varieties, one used by the Lutheran inhabitants of the Estonian town of Võro and its vicinity and the other by Orthodox Finno-Ugric-speakers living across the border in Russia, who refer to themselves as Setus. Thus, it is usual to refer to this language as Võro-Seto.

Some of the mentioned languages are tiny, weak or even moribund, and thus usually of little or no political significance (Istro-Romanian, Livonian, Mazurian, Meglano-Romanian, Molisean, Paulician, Polesian, Prekmurjan or Resian). Some are fully or almost fully recognized as national languages of stateless nations (Aromanian, Sorbian

and Rusyn, the last one is also known as Lemkian in Poland). Others are recognized as specific of regional groups of a nation enjoying its own nation-state (Ćakavian, Goralian, Kajkavian, Kashubian, Latgalian, Samogitian or Võro-Seto). Still others are construed as of separate ethnic groups which do not express any clear desire to overhaul themselves into nations (Arbëresh, Arvantika, Burgenland Croatian, Ćakavian, Kajkavian, Kashubian or Pomakian). Some of the languages are also deployed for building political movements that may be qualified simultaneously as regional and national (Bunjevacian, Kashubian, Moravian or Silesian).

Interestingly, although the Silesians constitute the largest ethnic or national minority in today's Poland (according to the 2002 Polish census), neither they nor their language are recognized in the country. Similarly no recognition was granted to Goralian, either. In the emulation of the French example Greece does not recognize any minorities or minority languages on its territory, except Turks and Turkish. Bulgaria considers Pomakian a dialect of Bulgarian, though the Pomaks, also due to their language interlaced with numerous Turkicisms, are customarily excluded from the commonality of the Bulgarian nation. Romania claims Aromanian, Istro-Romanian and Meglano-Romanian as the southern dialects of Romanian, but the speakers of the three languages beg to differ. Although Ćakavian and Kajkavian are more different from standard Croatian than this standard from Bosnian, Montenegrin or Serbian, anyway they are construed as dialects of Croatian.