

ELNA UPDATE

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ESPERANTO IN 1996

In 1996 there were especially fruitful relations between Esperantists and international organizations. Some believe that we have seen the beginning of a new era in relations with Unesco. Esperantists participated both in the youth conference of Unesco and its general conference of non-government organizations; and Esperanto played a role in several references during the Conference on Language and Communication sponsored by Unesco on the theme "Languages and Worldwide Education".

Eminent officials of Unesco participated alongside of specialists about linguistic rights and language policy also during the Nitobe Seminar which took place during the World Congress of Esperanto in Prague, dealing with the theme "Language for International Peace and Democracy". This seminar was in homage to Dr. Nitobe Inazo, assistant secretary general of the League of Nations, who visited Prague exactly 75 years earlier during the World Congress of Esperanto. (Nitobe's very favorable report did not at that time lead to support of Esperanto on the part of the League of Nations largely due to opposition by the French government.)

Esperantists also contributed to the World Conference on Language Rights, initiated by the writers' organization PEN International, where they called attention to the fact that linguistic rights must also apply to many languages which do not have their own territory.

The Esperanto movement includes great diversity in the goals and opinions of its supporters, but in 1996 there was a very successful attempt to summarize its principles in a concise document. The "Prague Manifesto", which has already won the support of thousands of Esperantists, describes the goals of the Esperanto movement under the titles Democracy, Transnational Education, Effective Education, Multilingualism, Linguistic Rights, Linguistic Diversity and Human Emancipation. All organizations and individuals are invited to participate in this project. The text of this Manifesto has been translated into many national languages and distributed by Esperanto clubs and the internet. [The complete text of the Prague Manifesto appeared in English translation in *ELNA Update* 3/96.]

In 1996 there was continued growth in the number of members of the European Parliament who support the possibility of using Esperanto to help solve the language problem in the European Union. Already 85 of the 626 MEPs have expressed their support.

In several universities new Esperanto courses have been started. For the first time, Esperanto is being taught at the universities of Valencia, Spain and Havana, Cuba; while in Siena, Italy, there is a new Esperanto course targeted primarily at teachers in Italian schools; and the Esperanto department of ELTE University in Budapest, Hungary, decided to continue its three-year international correspondence course in interlinguistics and esperantology, which prepares students for a doctoral degree.

More than 3000 participants in the World Congress of Esperanto in Prague during July of 1996 had the chance to participate in their own "Congress University" with speeches about various scientific themes. This year for the first time there was a Nobel prize winner among the lecturers: Reinhard Selten, who received the Nobel prize in economics in 1994, presented introductory lectures about his field of specialization, game theory. Afterwards he led an eight-hour course in game theory co-sponsored by the International Academy of Sciences. IAS, which celebrated its ten-year anniversary and its acceptance by the thousand-member International Scientific College in 1995, aims to improve international scientific communication by means of Esperanto. Mihail Gorbachev, who in September announced his collaboration with IAS as an honorary professor, was among those who approved its goals.

Besides the very successful World Congress in Prague one can mention other Esperanto gatherings among the hundreds which occurred throughout the year—from ski-weeks in Switzerland to study-sessions in Slovakia—especially the Children's Congress, which took place at the same time as the World Congress and involved 59 Esperanto-speaking children. Following this was the 18th Meeting of Esperantist Families, to which came 26 families from 15 countries. The traditionally strong Chinese Esperanto movement hosted the first Asian Congress in Shanghai with 584 participants, to herald a new tradition of congresses on that continent. And the relatively young movement in Tanzania hosted the fourth African Congress. In China there was also the fifth International Conference of Science and Technology in Esperanto, in which more than 500 scientists participated.

We celebrated the centennial year of Esperanto theater, because in 1896 in Smolensk, Russia the first Esperanto play was presented. Therefore theater occupied an important position in the artistic programs of this year's

Esperanto congresses. Esperanto music also flourished, especially during youth gatherings. During the Esperanto Cultural Festival in Copenhagen there were concerts by musicians from Sweden, France, Zaire and Brazil; and three new CDs of Esperanto music were on sale, including the second volume of the compilation *Vinilkosmo*, which includes Esperanto songs of 20 different groups, mostly in rock style.

These days we hear more and more about the communications potential of the internet. Esperantists are not being left behind in their application of the net. By the end of 1996, already some 250 Esperanto organizations and journals were advertising their internet addresses, and dozens had their own WorldWideWeb pages. The magazine *Monato*, an international magazine about politics, economics and culture, made a selection of its articles available on its web-pages; and the bi-weekly magazine *Eventoj* (whose hundredth issue appeared in April) announced that it would soon be available in e-mail version. [This has now come to pass!] Among the thousands of WWW-pages available in Esperanto (the Flemish Esperanto League alone offers more than a megabyte of information, and even has its own search engine!) one can find among other things a calendar of Esperanto gatherings, schedules of Esperanto radio broadcasts, book catalogs, large essays about grammar and computer science, literary works, information about Esperanto music, catalogs of Esperanto libraries, the Esperanto home-page of a Japanese sake manufacturer, information about Esperanto in several national languages, even an Esperanto page about the actress Sandra Bullock—with pictures. To help Esperantists create their own web-pages, there are now two courses about HTML (Hyper-Text Markup Language), in book format and on-line on the web. And an Esperanto course for Portuguese-speakers has been added to the list of Esperanto courses on the World-Wide Web. With the new technical possibilities to communicate electronically with the whole world, the language problem becomes more visible, and so the internet is fertile ground for Esperanto.

Among the hundreds of new books of 1996, one must mention two great new dictionaries, Hungarian-Esperanto and Italian-Esperanto; the new pocket-sized edition of *Pasporta Servo* with addresses from 68 countries of Esperantists who host Esperanto-speaking guests; Esperanto translations of *The Search for the Perfect Language* by Umberto Eco and the drama *Audience* by Václav Havel (President of the Czech Republic), who was High Protector of the World Congress in Prague; and indeed the fifth volume of Asterix comix in Esperanto.

In 1996, the Esperanto movement congratulated Zsuzsa Polgár, who in February became women's world champion in chess, and whose entire family speaks Esperanto; Ralf Gian Fröhlich, an active participant in the Esperanto youth movement, who in March was elected president of

the European Coordinating Bureau of International Youth Organizations; Nora Moerbeek, who in April received a Dutch government award for her work with the International League of Blind Esperantists; Reza Kheir-khah, an Iranian Esperantist, who in June received high marks in a Japanese speech contest for a speech on "Asia and the Common Language".

[Translated from an article by Edmund Grimley-Evans which originally appeared in *Eventoj* 1/January 1997.]

CALENDAR 1997

May 30—June 1, **Northwest Regional Esperanto Conference & Canadian Esperanto Convention**, Sidney (BC). Info: Wally du Temple, 765 Braemer Av., North Saanich BC, Canada V8L 5G5; ☎ 205/656-1767, fax 205/656-7012, e-mail: dutemple@islandnet.com

June 23—July 11, **Summer Esperanto Workshop**, San Francisco State University. Info: Cathy Schulze, 410 Darrell Rd., Hillsborough CA 94010; ☎ 415/342-1796

July 6—11, **Esperanto Summer Workshop**, University of Hartford (CT). Info: Office of Summer Programs, University of Hartford, 200 Bloomfield Av., West Hartford CT 06117, ☎ 860/768-4978 or 800/234-4412

July 12—14, **ELNA Annual Convention**, University of San Francisco. Info: Esperanto League for North America, P.O. Box 1129, El Cerrito CA 94530; ☎ 510/653-0998, fax 510/653-1468, e-mail: elna@netcom.com

July 19—26, **Universala Kongreso de Esperanto**, Adelaide, Australia. Info: Universala Esperanto-Asocio, Nieuwe Binnenweg 176, NL-3015 BJ Rotterdam, Netherlands; ☎ +31-10-4361044, fax +31-10-4361751

July 24—31, **Internacia Junulara Kongreso de Esperanto**, Assisi, Italy. Info: Tutmonda Esperantista Junulara Organizo, Nieuwe Binnenweg 176, NL-3015 BJ Rotterdam, Netherlands; ☎ +31-10-4361044, fax +31-10-4361751;

<http://www.silab.dsi.unimi.it/~gc412712/ijk.html>

For travel arrangements please contact: Esperanto Travel Service, 6104 La Salle Av., Oakland CA 94611; ☎ 510/339-2001, fax 510/531-0152, e-mail: lusiharmon@aol.com

1997 ELNA BOOK SERVICE CATALOG

This 28-page catalog details every item available from the ELNA Book Service. The catalog is sent to ELNA members and "Friends of Esperanto" at no cost. Non-members should send \$2.00 to ELNA Book Service (P.O. Box 1129, El Cerrito CA 94530). Those purchasing the catalog will receive a coupon worth \$2.00 off their next order.

SUPPRESSION OF MINORITY LANGUAGES

by Aryeh Neier

On the eve of the October 1995 referendum in Québec on whether to remain a part of Canada, the Speaker of the House of Representatives of the United States, Newt Gingrich, suggested that the possible disintegration of America's neighbor to the North was a warning signal. "If we don't insist on renewing our civilization, starting with insisting on English as a common language, we are just going to devour this country," he said. Gingrich went on to repeat his call for legislation to make English the only official language of the United States. The effects would be far-reaching, prohibiting practices that range from the printing of ballots and voting instructions in Spanish or Asian languages as well as in English in certain states, to ending the bilingual public education in parts of the country with substantial minority populations.

Gingrich's views about the divisive effects of permitting minorities to preserve and develop their own languages are widely shared. On such grounds, many governments around the world in states where more than one language is spoken have established an official language and have coupled this with efforts to suppress the languages of minorities. Sometimes, this has been a practice of dictatorship, as when Generalissimo Francisco Franco, not long after consolidating power, banned the use of Catalan; or when Nicolae Ceaușescu sought to eliminate the language principally used by Romania's large ethnic Hungarian minority.

Though the suppression of minority languages is promoted with the claim that it will have a unifying effect, the actual consequences are quite different. Two notable examples are Sri Lanka and Turkey.

During two centuries of British rule preceding Sri Lanka's independence in 1948, the language of government and business was English. Yet only a relatively small part of the population spoke the language of the colonial rulers. The English speakers held the country's key civil service posts and were prominent in commerce. Among them were a significant number of Tamils. After independence, members of the Sinhalese majority—constituting roughly three quarters of the population—sought to end the dominance of English speakers by demanding a "Sinhala-only" policy in the schools and in government administration. Prime Minister Bandaranaike took up the Sinhala-only cause and, in 1956, Parliament adopted an Official Language Act. A country noted for harmonious relations between different ethnic groups thus became increasingly divided. By now, tens of thousand have been killed and hundreds of thousands have been driven from their homes in a bitter civil war that shows no signs of coming to an end. Though other factors also propelled Sri Lanka's descent into the maelstrom, language policy, and the effort to assert ethnic dominance that it epitomized, did the greatest harm of all.

Turkey also suffers from a protracted internal armed

conflict. That conflict has been fueled in part by suppression of efforts by the Kurdish minority of about ten million to use the Kurdish language. As recently as in the 1980s, Kurds were imprisoned for speaking Kurdish, or identifying themselves as Kurds ("mountain Turks" was one of the preferred substitutes), possessing tapes of Kurdish music, or giving their children Kurdish names. Today, they have achieved those rights, but still may not form associations along ethnic lines, study in Kurdish in the schools, or speak their language on radio and television broadcasts. So far as it is possible to measure public opinion among a minority that suffers from severe repression, it appears that most of the Kurds in Turkey do not seek to establish a separate state. Many Kurds have suffered directly from more than a decade of war by the separatist Kurdish Worker's Party (PKK). Yet Turkey's language policy, somewhat modified in recent years, has fostered support for the PKK that has helped to sustain its armed struggle.

There is, of course, nothing new about discrimination on grounds of language. Herodotus divided humanity into Greeks (that is, all who spoke Greek, whether they were Athenians, Lacedaemonians, or Trojans) and everyone else. The concept of language as the distillation of the experience of a particular group of people that may be called a nation is far more recent, however. It was developed by the German poet and philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder in his *Treatise Upon the Origin of Language* (1772). A generation later, the concept was endowed with heightened nationalist fervor by Johann Gottlieb Fichte in his *Addresses to the German Nation* (1807-8) in which he proclaimed the superiority of an original language, such as German, to composite or derivative languages such as English or French.

There is little need to spell out the historical consequences of ethno-linguistic nationalism. It is possible to hear echoes of the thinking about ethnic and linguistic purity of some of the German romantic philosophers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and their followers in other countries in the rhetoric of contemporary apostles of ethnic cleansing. Indeed, in the case of one of the latter, the connection is particularly direct: Radovan Karadžić takes pride in pointing out that he is from the same family as Vuk Karadžić (1787-1864), the codifier and purifier of the Serbian language.

Restrictions on the use of minority languages have been adopted by many countries. Far from promoting unity, they are frequently the cause of strife. There are few means of expressing cultural identity that are more significant to minorities worldwide than the use of their own languages.

[Excerpts from an article published in *Open Society News* Summer 1996.]