

The International Politics of Esperanto

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As many of you already know, the Transnational Radical Party has recently been recognized as a non-governmental organization in category 1 – the highest level in the United Nations. On obtaining this new status we presented, a few months ago in New York, a formal request to introduce a new discussion item, Esperanto as an international auxiliary language, in the agenda of the Economic and Social Council, ECOSOC. We have been informed unofficially that the first, even though modest, result has been reached: the UN has introduced our request in the order of the day of the Non Governmental Organization Committee scheduled for March-April 1997. That is a first small step. Basically the Committee will have to decide whether or not to introduce the argument in the next session of the ECOSOC, which is scheduled for July 1997 in Geneva.

I don't want to hide a certain pessimism about this possibility. There are too many contradictions in facing a debate about the adoption of an international auxiliary language. The member states of the UN are not very much interested, and the UN itself with its eternal financial difficulties will hardly agree to add another agenda item to a lot of others which have been discussed for years with more or less success. The main resistance either of the UN or in NGOs will be likely to come from those who speak the so-called major languages, the present or former languages of empires. The so-called linguistic equality at the UN is a fiction. There is no linguistic democracy. Those who have no command of one of the six languages are basically excluded from comprehension. And those who speak them with less than native ability are at a real disadvantage. But in fact only English is the real lingua franca, even in a corrupted version, for the UN and most other international institutions, organizations, and interparliamentary bodies.

The UN spends about 20% of its budget – the European Parliament more than 45% with ten or more languages – simply in translating and interpreting a given set of words into its equivalent into five other languages. Obviously, this is a foolishness. The reason of this foolishness is not linguistic, or pluralistic, or equal opportunity. It is politics. There is nothing linguistically correct or superior about the particular mix of languages in international use today. This mix exists as it is for political and economic reasons only. No wonder if even the NGOs skip away from considering the question, preferring to believe they can communicate in a couple of languages. The reality is that they are largely ruled by the inner circle of an Anglo-Saxon mafia in many of their activities. No wonder that the Esperanto cause is so largely neglected in the world of the international organizations and non-governmental organizations. Here too, we find no particular reason other than politics.

As you see, in international relations we remain in a kind of coloni-alist policy about languages. Even the Internet, which seems to be the most open, efficient, and inexpensive instrument of communication, is dominated by one language, English. But a bizarre English, one made of ideograms, Tarzan-English, drawings, etc. – something quite different from a precise and efficient language, something elementary and undersized. Wouldn't it be better to propose Esperanto rather than to return to a level of communication such as "Me Tarzan, you Jane"? Isn't that the responsibility of the international organizations? But, as we have seen, the quality of this decision is always political. It is at this level that the Transnational Radical Party has made its proposal. We believe that only support at this level could hope to give new strength and vitality to the movement which has kept Esperanto alive for over a century.

Basically we have to increase our involvement at the political level of the international institutions such as the UN, European Parliament, the Council of Europe; at the

interparliamentary and non-governmental organizations. I think that it would be very useful to create a non-governmental coalition for an international auxiliary language, starting from the NGOs with UN status, as proposed by the Bahá'í representative. But it is really necessary to create some synergy between the UEA and many other organizations for more effective lobbying at the political institutional level, without losing sight of educational and cultural activities. We need to organize our activities and programs around the goal of placing the issue of Esperanto as an international auxiliary language on the agendas of the international institutions.