

Linguistic Landscapes in EU Member States: Politics of Visibility and Presence*

Višeslav Raos

Faculty of Political Science, University of Zagreb

viseslav.raos@fpzg.hr

In this paper, I wish to explore linguistic landscapes in EU member states and the enactment of public visibility and presence of non-majority linguistic groups. Non-majority linguistic groups gain power, visibility and presence through the introduction of bilingual or multilingual signposts on roads, streets, squares and public buildings in towns and cities where a given linguistic group represents a significant population share. In my article, I shall engage in a comparative analysis of language policies of EU member states regarding enactment of official bilingual or multilingual signs in public space. Twenty out of twenty-eight EU member states have signed the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, while seventeen member states have ratified it. Although the Council of Europe and not the EU adopted the Charter, the Charter of Fundamental Rights, an integral part of the Lisbon Treaty, stipulates that language diversity is one of the fundamental values respected by the EU. Thus, this comparative research will assess various practices employed by member states' governments in relation to the proclaimed values of multilingualism. Consequently, the aim of this paper is to depict and compare different language policies that produce linguistic landscapes in EU member states and to determine whether there is a convergence towards a common EU policy on bilingual and multilingual signs in public space.

Keywords: linguistic landscape, language policy, public space, public visibility, public presence, politics of difference

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1. Introduction

Public space is a critical arena of the political. By inscribing meaning into space, social groups enclose it, appropriate it and guard it as part of their identities. Through inscription of meaning, public space is constructed into social, and finally into political space. Consequently, in public space, social groups become political groups and compete for public visibility and presence. In addition, they vie for distribution of power over space and its meaning. Thus, public space is a sphere where people manifest ethnic, religious, linguistic and other collective differences and become conscious of these differences. Collective linguistic differences are a particularly significant segment of manifested collective differences, as they tend to transcend other, in-group divisions, experienced by a group claiming difference in relation to the majority population. By allowing expression of linguistic traits that highlight group differences in public space, a state essentially undertakes an effort to devolve and share symbolic power with a non-majority group. Through demonstration of their linguistic differences in public space, non-majority groups in fact become stakeholders in the state's identity.

In this paper, I wish to explore linguistic landscapes in EU member states and the enactment of public visibility and presence of non-majority linguistic groups. This article only focuses on linguistic landscapes that are shaped by official bilingual (majority/minority) place names and street names. Therefore, it only analyzes the top-down approach to bilingual signs, as opposed to the informal, often illegal, bottom-up approach of societal actors that erect bilingual signs on public or private property (see also Shohamy, 2006: 115). The aim of this EU-wide comparison is to detect patterns and modes of spatial visibility and presence of non-majority linguistic groups in public space through the employment of bilingual or multilingual street signs. Furthermore, this comparison includes an assessment of different official language policies pertaining to public visibility and presence of non-majority linguistic groups. Finally, this paper wishes to examine whether there is a convergence towards a common set of EU-wide policies on bilingual street signs because of the wide acceptance of principles enshrined in the *European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages*.

2. Politics of Visibility and Presence

Geographical space on its own has a neutral value, yet territory is a constructed, political and social space that is inscribed with meaning and thus provides a reference framework for social and political actions and the understanding of self and others. Territory, as Foucault said (1980: 68-69), implies the application of power in space, power through control over knowledge and meaning of space. Thus, public signs, such as street signs and place name signs, reflect spatial power relations (Blommaert, 2013: 39). Therefore, public space is an inherent political category, a dimension through which we conduct politics – a sphere in which are politicized and essentially become citizens.¹ Social and political actors try to become stakeholders in public space. Thereby, they strive to establish themselves as relevant sources of meaning and identity of space. Therefore, politics in public space always includes a struggle for visibility and presence in space. If a group that tries to achieve certain goals is not visible in public space, it cannot hope to assert itself and lay claims on public space. In order

to become visible, one must be present, either physically or symbolically, in public space. As Marten, Van Mansel and Gorter (2012: 1) have put it, “being visible may be as important for minority languages as being heard”.

Judt and Lacorne (2004) have shown that there is an inextricable connection between politics of language and demands for rights because of collective difference. In addition, García (2012: 80, 82) indicates that the European cultural context is especially fertile for close connections between conceptions of ethnic identity and linguistic difference. Finally, we should note that regionalist movements often use language policy to further the causes of the territorial community they wish to represent and to underline the linguistic and cultural differences of their region towards the central state (see Williams, 2012).² The erection of bilingual street signs thus serves to mark space and turn it into territory accompanied with a regionalist identity.

3. Linguistic Landscapes

Linguistic landscapes, first defined by Landry and Bourhis (1997), arise from societal and political importance of visible language in public space. Other authors have referred to the same phenomenon as scriptorial landscapes (Gade, 2003: 430-431) or streetscapes (Kaplan & Baldauf Jr., 2008: 9). Landry and Bourhis (1997: 25, 27) assess linguistic landscapes through two functions – an informational one that marks a certain space as accessible through a certain idiom and a symbolic one – through which a group identifying with a certain language becomes present in public space and acquires agency. In this paper, I almost exclusively follow this second understanding of linguistic landscapes and consequently regard them as products of symbolic shaping of space through language. Accordingly, language conveys collective identity and makes collective differences visible through the expression of language differences. In his analysis of linguistic landscapes in Quebec and Tokyo, Backhaus (2009: 170) has shown that linguistic landscapes are constructed and not natural environments and that there is an established link between language policy and language visibility in public space. In other words, linguistic landscapes are not primordial settings, but rather a symbolically constructed public space (see Ben-Rafael et al., 2006) that serves to manifest societal and political power relations in a physical way.

The study of public signage and thus linguistic landscapes is usually confronted with three problems – the state of literacy, agency in public signage and the issue of counting (Spolsky, 2009: 29-32). If there are not enough people acquainted with the grammatically correct writing of a language or if a language does not possess a written form, it cannot be adequately placed into the linguistic landscape and thus cannot acquire importance and symbolic presence for the community it is supposed to represent. Regarding agency, linguistic landscapes can be shaped top-down through official policies backed by legislation and through bottom-up spontaneous action, including direct action and illegal, subversive practices as a reaction to official neglect or opposition to certain linguistic artefacts in public space. Finally, the issue of counting signs opens up the question of practical problems which street signs to enumerate and how to classify them. In this paper, I do not focus on the number of bilingual signs, but rather on the meaning they convey and the different practices of erecting such signs in various EU member states.

Although linguistic landscapes may be analyzed on several levels of government, the municipal level should actually be given preference, as this is the level at which the interactions between citizens and authorities are closest and where the shaping of linguistic landscapes through bilingual street sign policies are strongly connected to everyday life practices and experiences (see Backhaus, 2012: 226-227).

In terms of the struggle for visibility in public space, a language associated with a (ethnolinguistic) group does not have to be a language of everyday communication. Its introduction in public space often does not serve to enhance communication, but to highlight the physical presence of a minority identity in public space. The role of a language in the expression of ethnic minority identity is thus often largely symbolic (O'Reilly, 2003: 30). Therefore, the importance of linguistic landscapes that arise from the application of bilingual street signs lies not in the functionality of the added language, but in the meaning that the inhabitants of such a bilingual landscape inscribe into the added language and the street signs displayed in this language.

Legislation on linguistic landscapes depends on many geographic, historic and political factors and thus varies worldwide (Backhaus, 2009: 157). However, this article aims to examine whether EU member states show some common patterns and practices in applying policies that produce bilingual and multilingual landscapes. In order to actually execute a bilingual policy in a local setting and introduce bilingual street signs, one usually requires a broad coalition of advocacy groups and social actors working towards a common goal (see Sloboda et al., 2010), notwithstanding the various national legal frameworks providing criteria for the introduction of bilingual street signs.

We should also remember that the inclusion of minority place and street names constitutes an act of name change and creation of new socio-spatial realities. One might therefore perceive it as a threat to the existing order (see Puzey, 2009). Opponents of bilingual street signs might argue that the new, additional names lead to confusion among tourists and diminish the recognizability of a given location. Yet the struggle between supporters and opponents of bilingual street signs ultimately comes down to mutual contestation of public space – a battle over meaning, visibility and presence in space.

4. Policies of Bilingual Signs in the EU

Multilingualism and an open language policy are essential parts of the identity and self-understanding of the project of European integration. Article 3 of the consolidated text of the *Treaty on the European Union* explicitly mentions linguistic diversity (European Union, 2010: 17), while the core of EU policy on promotion and protection of language diversity is rooted in the *European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages* (ECRML), a 1992 Council of Europe treaty. The European Commission has recommended the application of the *Charter's* principles to all EU member states, albeit with no repercussions in case of non-compliance (Ammon, 2012: 588). The *Charter* provides for a number of linguistic rights, yet two provisions are crucial for our discussion of linguistic landscapes shaped by bilingual street signs. Article 7 of the *Charter* sets objectives and principles of language policy, including “the respect of the geographical area of each regional or minority language in order to ensure that existing or new administrative divisions do not constitute an obstacle to the

promotion of the regional or minority language in question” (Council of Europe, 1992: 4). Article 10 of the *Charter*, which deals with the question of regional and minority languages concerning administrative authorities and public services, encourages “the use or adoption, if necessary in conjunction with the name in the official language(s), of traditional and correct forms of place-names in regional or minority languages” (Council of Europe, 1992: 9). While Article 7 of the *Charter* warns against ethnolinguistic gerrymandering,³ Article 10 explicitly speaks of the introduction of place-names in regional and minority languages alongside official (majority) languages, thus laying the groundwork for policies of bilingual street signs. *Table 1* shows that most EU member states have signed the *Charter*, as well as ratified it and entered it into force. We may assume that those member states that have failed to sign this treaty will show greater reluctance towards introduction of bilingual street signs or will follow policies that greatly diverge from member states that are signatories to this treaty. In addition, we may expect those member states that have ratified the *Charter* to show stronger compliance with its stipulations, since this implies a higher level of adherence to the *Charter’s* text (Nic Craith, 2003: 57). However, the ECRML defines neither what a “minority”, nor what a “language” is, so that the exact application and extension of linguistic rights depends on national interpretations and established practices in each of the member states (Nic Craith, 2003: 60-61).⁴ On the other hand, the text of the *Charter* makes it clear that it does not apply to dialects of the official language and to immigrant languages, but to languages traditionally spoken in certain parts of the country by a non-majority group (Ammon, 2012: 588). Although one might doubt the actual effectiveness of the *Charter* in forwarding language rights in signatory states, one can certainly observe a Europe-wide increased awareness of language policy (Grin, 2003: 196). The design and application of specific policies concerning majority and minority languages has become much more prominent since the *Charter’s* adoption in 1992. As Nelde (2007: 73) has noted, a single EU language policy is “bound to fail”. However, given the general trends of globalization, identity fragmentation and the weakening of the classical European nation state rooted in a codified national culture, we can expect further movement towards acceptance of linguistic difference. This, in turn, might also include a greater acceptance of bilingual street signs as physical markers of linguistic identity and manifestations of differences, set in public space. On the contrary, some authors (Nic Craith, 2006: 186-187) have noted that the focus of EU language policy is on increased communication skills (as prerequisites for the full application of a single market and possibly a single media sphere) and not on language equality, since the history of European politics of language has always been a history of privilege and deprivation, status and shame, dominance and submission.

Beside the ECMRL, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), of which all EU member states are part, has provided recommendations for application of linguistic rights that explicitly include bilingual signs. *The Oslo Recommendations regarding the Linguistic Rights of National Minorities*, issued in 1998, encourage public authorities to “make provision for the display, also in the minority language, of local names, street names and other topographical indications intended for the public” in “areas inhabited by significant numbers of persons belonging to a national minority and when there is sufficient demand” (OSCE, 1998: 5). Furthermore, the *Recommendations* claim that opposition to the “validity of historic denominations” (i.e. historic place and street names in a minority language) “can

constitute an attempt to revise history and to assimilate minorities, thus constituting a serious threat to the identity of persons belonging to minorities” (OSCE, 1998: 15). The OSCE has, thus, made a strong endorsement for the introduction of bilingual street signs and established a clear link between prevention of establishment of such street signs and politics of suppression of minority identities. However, as we shall see from our comparison of various national practices of enactment of bilingual street signs, “significant numbers of persons belonging to a national minority” and “sufficient demand” are notions that are open to numerous interpretations.

Table 1. EU Member States and the ECRML

Country	Signed	Ratified	Entered Into Force
Austria	1992	2001	2001
Belgium			
Bulgaria			
Croatia	1997	1997	1998
Cyprus	1992	2002	2002
Czech Republic	2000	2006	2007
Denmark	1992	2000	2001
Estonia			
Finland	1992	1994	1998
France	1999		
Germany	1992	1998	1999
Greece			
Hungary	1992	1995	1998
Ireland			
Italy	2000		
Latvia			
Lithuania			
Luxembourg	1992	2005	2005
Malta	1992		
Netherlands	1992	1996	1998
Poland	2003	2009	2009
Portugal			
Romania	1995	2008	2008
Slovakia	2001	2001	2002
Slovenia	1997	2000	2001
Spain	1002	2001	2001
Sweden	2000	2000	2000
United Kingdom	2000	2001	2001

Source: ECRML

In our comparative analysis of policies of bilingual street signs, we shall focus solely on street signs, understood as place-names and street-names on officially mandated signboards. Thus, they do not include unofficial and possibly illegal, as well as private signage in non-majority languages appearing alongside official (majority) languages. The comparison of policies of official bilingual signs in EU member states follows the ensuing criteria:

1. Does the member state enable official bilingual street signs?
2. What is the legal basis for the rights to bilingual street signs?

3. What are the prerequisites for the introduction of official bilingual street signs?
4. Is there an equal representation of majority and minority languages on street signs or is there a graphical difference between them?
5. Are there problems with the implementation of bilingual street signs?

The first criterion considers the basic question whether or not a state gives a notional opportunity for current or future introduction of official street signs that would include a non-majority language alongside the official idiom. The second point questions whether the right to bilingual street signs is entrenched in constitutional law, minority law, language law or a special regional statute (especially in federal and devolved states). The third question asks about the requirements for the attainment of official bilingual status in a city, municipality or region. We can expect that these requirements would include a stipulated percentage of the local population that has officially declared that it belongs to a certain linguistic minority or a percentage of local inhabitants that would petition the local government to provide street signs in a given language. Furthermore, member states might opt not to require an exact percentage of current population speaking a non-majority language, but grant bilingual status and thus enable bilingual street signs based on historic criteria, i.e. on a historic connection between a territory and a language. In addition, some member states might link the right to bilingual street signs to territorial autonomy. The fourth point tries to distinguish between different visual practices of executing bilingual signs policies. We may find cases whereby both the official majority and the official minority language in a given city, municipality or region are equally visually displayed (employment of the same font, color and size). Yet, we may also find those situations in which the display of street signs in the additional, minority language is in smaller print, clearly graphically different from the street signs in the majority language. Depending on the context, we could interpret that such situations indicate that the introduction of bilingual street signs took place in a haphazard and non-consistent way. However, we may also claim that the graphical subordination of the added, minority languages conveys a specific message in such a bilingual linguistic landscape – a message that the added street signs in a minority language are not on equal footing with their majority language counterparts. Finally, we ask whether there are political and societal actors opposing bilingual street signs. In addition, we inquire whether the authorities entrusted with the enactment of bilingual street signs policy have fully implemented it or have shown reluctance and obstructive behavior. We can envisage cases where the speakers of the official majority language oppose bilingual signage and destroy or prevent the placement of street signs that include another, minority language. On the contrary, in areas where minority language speakers represent a clear demographic majority, street signs in the official, national majority language might suffer from defacement or destruction. Finally, local and regional government authorities that are responsible for the erection of bilingual street signs might be hesitant to implement such a policy in full extent. Instead, they might pursue a policy of token application of public bilingualism by putting up just a handful of bilingual street signs as opposed to full coverage of the whole area of an officially bilingual city or municipality.

Besides comparing EU member states along the aforementioned criteria, this analysis shall also look into possible differences between old member states⁵ and post-communist member states. In addition, we shall examine several EU member states that are officially bilingual (or multilingual) on national level and assess specific traits of their street signs policies.

4. 1. Old Member States

The overarching juxtaposition of English as a *lingua franca* of the British Isles and a former imperial language with the various Celtic idioms that suffer from decreasing numbers of active speakers drives language policies and the ensuing linguistic landscapes in both United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. There is no official British language policy, nor a policy on bilingual street signs. However, legislation in Wales and Scotland has enabled partial introduction of bilingual street signs.

The 1993 *Welsh Language Act* (UK National Archives, 1993) established the Welsh Language Scheme, a policy tool through which the Welsh government was empowered to introduce bilingual street signs. There was slow and inconsistent introduction of Welsh street signs alongside existing English ones since the 1960s. Welsh signs were sometimes removed in areas dominated by English-speaking residents. A direct action group called the Welsh Language Society was involved in attacks on English-only street signs and public displays of rage against unilingual English signs as symbols of imperialist oppression (see Merriman & Jones, 2009). Supporters of Welsh street signs discursively constructed English-only signs as “landscapes of oppression”, while the new, bilingual signs were dubbed “symbols of justice” (Merriman & Jones, 2009; Jones & Merriman, 2009). In western parts of Wales, where the Welsh speakers dominate (officially designated as *Y Fro Gymraeg*),⁶ Welsh inscriptions are written first, followed by English ones, yet in the same size and fashion, while in the rest of the country, the places of the two idioms are reversed. The government strives to full implementation bilingual street signs over time.

The *Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act* (UK National Archives, 2005) marked a shift towards a policy of active Gaelicization of the Scottish public space. Although the Scottish government is committed to recognition of Gaelic throughout the country, most Gaelic street signs are to be found in the Highlands and the Western Isles, areas that have the highest number of first language Gaelic speakers.⁷ The officially recognized Gaelic-speaking parts of Scotland are called *Gàidhealtachd*. In some parts of Scotland, such as the east and northeast, Scottish Gaelic was not historically present. Thus, the introduction of bilingual street signs could be seen as an act of linguistic innovation and expansion in public space and not a restoration of a previous linguistic state. However, ScotRail had decided to make all Scottish train stations bilingual, following the new Scottish nationalist policy (driven by the Scottish National Party) of using Gaelic as a *differentia specifica* towards England.

In Northern Ireland, the Good Friday Agreement and other post-conflict agreements that finished the decades-long interethnic conflict known as the Troubles and introduced power-sharing institutional arrangements, did not introduce official bilingual or multilingual signs, yet they did lay the groundwork for public respect for linguistic diversity. Both the Irish republican and the Ulster loyalist communities try to emphasize the language issue as a point of difference (see Muller, 2010). Although Irish is not commonly used among people who primarily identify as ethnic Irish in Northern Ireland, local councils dominated by Irish republicans have started erecting bilingual (Irish Gaelic and English) street signs. To counter this, Ulster loyalists have introduced some bilingual signs that include Ulster Scots, an idiom closely related to Lowlands Scots, a Germanic language spoken in the southern and eastern

parts of Scotland. Bilingual street signs in this part of the UK clearly testify that linguistic landscapes are often shaped by the urge to mark space and display ownership over territory and not to safeguard languages threatened by declining numbers of speakers.

Recently, certain parts of England have also seen the erection of bilingual street signs. In Cornwall, supporters of language revival and regional identity have started urging local councils to erect bilingual signs in Cornish and English. The introduction of street signs in this Gaelic idiom is still rather inconsistent, yet is met by no opposition.

Denmark does not have an official language policy and thus does not pursue an official policy on bilingualism and bilingual street signs. However, due to bilateral agreements with Germany that span several decades, local government councils in the border areas have started introducing bilingual (Danish and German) place name signs. Occasionally, these signs were removed through acts of anonymous vandalism. We can still describe bilingual signs in Denmark as token signs and not as an indication of a full policy of bilingual landscapes that would also include bilingual street name inscriptions.

The Swedish *Act on National Minorities and National Minority Languages* (Riksdag, 2009) recognizes five national minority languages (Finnish, Meänkieli, Sámi, Romani, and Yiddish). Yet, this piece of legislation does not provide a clear framework for the introduction of bilingual street signs, but proclaims that the Swedish state values linguistic richness and diversity and entrusts the Swedish Transport Administration with the erection of bilingual street signs where it deems appropriate. While speakers of Romani and Yiddish are not territorially concentrated, the Finnish-speaking population is spread out in Swedish-majority areas. Therefore, the only bilingual street signs (in the form of place name signs) currently erected in Sweden are in the far north, comprising Meänkieli⁸ and two variants of the Sámi language – Northern and Southern Sámi. Although the presentation of these languages is visually equal to its Swedish counterparts, they only appear on town entrances and road signs and not on the street signs themselves.

According to its *Language Act* (Ministry of Justice of Finland, 1996) Finland offers full bilingual status, including bilingual signage, to all municipalities that have more than 8 percent or 3000 speakers of a minority language. In addition, if this percentage drops to 6 percent, the local councilors may vote to renew the municipality's bilingual status nevertheless. Such legal provisions position Finland as the one EU member state that has the most flexible and forthcoming policy towards bilingual signage. This is a consequence of the complex history of language policy in this country and the co-official status of Swedish on the national level. Beside this, the autonomous Åland Islands are officially monolingual, with no Finnish street signs allowed. There are numerous bilingual communities with Finnish and Swedish street signs along the southwestern and southern coast of the country, while in the far north, there are municipalities with Northern Sámi street signs alongside Finnish ones. Finland maintains full implementation of such a bilingual policy. This includes not only place name signs, but also street name signs. All languages are displayed in the same fashion, with the majority language of a given municipality featured on the top of a given street sign.

The Netherlands are a unitary state, yet its provinces enjoy a considerable amount of autonomy. Thus, bilingual policy is enacted on provincial level, in the far north of the country. Although Frisian is a co-official language in the province of Friesland (Fryslân in Frisian), the Dutch government is not really committed to fully implementation (Cenoz &

Gorter, 2006: 69). Bilingual street signs in Frisian and Dutch are constructed in such a fashion that visual equality is achieved with place name signs, while street names are usually still in Dutch only or have been change to local names, so that they are effectively unilingual (Frisian). There is no open opposition to the introduction of Frisian into the linguistic landscape, yet the slow implementation of full bilinguality may be interpreted as a sign of reluctance of the Dutch government to devolve too much symbolic power to its northern province.

Due to the federal nature of the German state, matters of bilingual street signs are determined by the respective legislatures (*Landtage*) of the federal states (*Bundesländer*). Acts passed by the Landtag of Schleswig-Holstein have enabled the introduction of bilingual street signs in areas historically inhabited by speakers of North Frisian, as well as Danish speakers. Danish-German bilingualism is also a result of bilateral state agreements in the 1950s, so that German speakers north of the border enjoy bilingual street signs, as well as Danish speakers south of the border. Reciprocity in bilingual street signs policy is usually established through bilateral state agreements that precede regional and local legislative arrangements in the respective countries. Regional legislation (Landtag of Schleswig-Holstein, 2004) defines bilingual areas as those where one can determine historic continuity of ethnolinguistic presence. In other words, bilingual street signs policy in Germany follows a territorial logic, as well as historic claims, but does not take into account current numbers of speakers of the respective regional and minority languages. Such an approach once again confirms the thesis that linguistic landscapes shaped by bilingual street signs serve to establish presence and visibility of an ethnolinguistic minority identity in public space, notwithstanding the actual merits of introduction of an additional language into administrative practice or the demands and needs of current or potential speakers of the respective language. Similarly, regional legislation (Landtag of Brandenburg, 1994; Saxon Landtag, 1999) in eastern federal states defines historic communities that comprise the ethnolinguistic region of Lusatia (Lausitz in German)⁹ and can thus become bilingual, with street signs in Lower and Upper Sorbian respectively. In the federal state of Lower Saxony, a single municipality (Saterland) uses bilingual street signs in German and Saterland Frisian. Apart from several cases of defacement of Sorbian signs in Lusatia, there are no problems with the implementation of bilingual street signs in Germany. When speaking about equal visual presentation of languages depicted on bilingual street signs, one can say that Germany's bilingual policy shows both signs of equality and deliberate difference. Communities that just have bilingual place names at town entrances are more common than those that also have street names written in multiple languages. Place names at town entrances show the German name in bigger letters, above the minority name in smaller print. However, where there are bilingual street names as well, both languages are depicted in the same manner.

In Austria, protection of national minorities, including introduction of bilingual street signage, was laid down through the *State Agreement*, which ended the Allied and Soviet post-World War II occupation. The *State Agreement* (Bundesgesetzblatt, 1955) spoke of settlement areas of Croats in the federal state of Burgenland and of Slovenian settlements in the states of Carinthia and Styria and the introduction of bilingual street signs. However, there were no exact provisions for the implementation of such a policy. Thus, a Law on Ethnic Groups (Bundeskanzleramt, 2015) was passed that set the threshold for the introduction of bilingual

signage at 25 percent. According to this provision, bilingual street signs were introduced in numerous Croatian and Hungarian speaking communities in Burgenland. On the contrary, local citizen groups, symbolically linking the Slovenian language with Yugoslav partisans and irredentism, met the introduction of Slovenian signage in Carinthia with fierce opposition. Although there are still cases of destroyed or defaced bilingual place name signs, the opposition is less violent than during the 1970s. However, the Austrian Constitutional Court declared the 25 percent threshold as too high, lowered it to 10 percent, and ordered the introduction of bilingual signage in Carinthia. Nevertheless, there are still problems with full implementation of bilingual street signs in this part of Austria. In contrast, Burgenland, bilingual street signs, with the German inscription somewhat bigger than the Croatian or Hungarian ones, are not contested.

The ratification of the ECRML in France was thwarted by the Constitutional Council, which maintained that it had to uphold the French principles of republican unity and equality against particularistic claims made by proponents of regional and minority languages (Nic Craith, 2003: 63). Therefore, there is no commitment of the French government to introduce bilingual street signs. However, with the introduction of regions in 1982 and the subsequent move towards decentralization, regional governments have started recognizing regional and minority languages and have thus created a basis for the introduction of bilingual signage. Still, the actual application of bilingual signage depends on decisions made by local government in the respective departments (2nd tier government level) and communes (3rd tier government level). In each region, usually an official language board for the respective regional or minority idiom encourages local authorities to introduce bilingual signage. The example of Brittany shows that the introduction of bilingual signage did raise public awareness about the language and increased its social and political status, yet it was not necessarily conducive towards increased usage of the Breton language in various everyday situations (see Hornsby, 2008). On the contrary, on Corsica, an autonomous island region, Corsican street signs are used both as a strong symbol of the local national movement and serve to increase the visibility of the language and reinforce a sense of independence from mainland France (see Blackwood, 2011). Corsica is the only French region that has fully implemented bilingual street signs, while nationalist activists often cross out French inscriptions. Apart from Breton, there are also sporadic street signs in Gallo in eastern parts of Brittany. In the Pyrenees departments, there is an increase in street signs with inscriptions in Basque and Catalan alongside French ones. In the southern regions of Midi-Pyrénées, Languedoc-Roussillon, and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, there is a growing number of street signs in Occitan. In the old town of Nice, there are inscriptions in Niçard (an Italian dialect), while in Alsace, there are street signs in Alsatian (a German dialect). The last two examples display the importance of symbolism in the construction of linguistic landscapes. By refraining from calling these idioms Italian and German and instead referring to them by their local variants, the French government tries to guard the unity of the country and undermine any claims Italy and Germany might lay on their former territories. Finally, we must note that inscriptions in regional and minority languages on street signs in France are usually graphically different from their French counterparts.

The collapse of Franco's authoritarian regime brought about the end of centralized and Castilian-centered cultural and language policies and enabled an increase in the visibility of

non-majority ethnolinguistic identities (see Beck, 1994). In the Basque Country and Navarre, the regional governments strive to promote the Basque language (Cenoz & Gorter, 2006: 69), which also affects the linguistic landscape, as the authorities wish to fully implement bilingual signage in order to highlight the differences towards the dominant Castilian language and Spaniard culture. In Catalonia, one can find both Spanish-only, Catalan-only and bilingual inscriptions, yet the regional government seeks to make the whole region bilingual. Besides Catalonia, there are Catalan street signs in the Valencian Community and on the Balearic Islands. Other regional languages that enjoy co-official status in autonomous regions and thus have the legal right to bilingual signage are Galician in Galicia and Occitan (called Aranese) in Catalonia. In addition, there are some bilingual street signs in the autonomous community of Asturias, although the Asturian language is not an officially recognized regional language. Some idioms, such as Aragonese, are contested, with supporters demanding bilingual signs and opponents claiming that the language does not possess distinctiveness. Even though Spain could be regarded as a highly decentralized country that enables public displays of ethnic and linguistic diversity, the degree of implementation of bilingual signs policy is far from complete, while the various languages are not always presented in a visually equal fashion.

Portugal is a linguistically very homogenous country. However, in the far northeast of the country, there is a community of speakers of Mirandese, a small regional language, related to the Asturian idiom in Spain. With the legal recognition by the Parliament of Portugal (Official Gazette of Portugal, 1999), Mirandese became co-official in the municipality of Miranda do Douro and thus bilingual street signs were introduced. The signs face no opposition and are graphically quite different from their Portuguese counterparts.

The Italian example shows that street signs in regional and minority languages do not serve to enhance communication, as most citizens speak Italian as their first language, but are “a means which the local community constructs its (public) linguistic image” (Dal Negro, 2009: 207). Italy has a very rich linguistic diversity, yet most of its regional minority languages (apart from German in South Tyrol)¹⁰ have only gained public visibility and acceptance with the process of devolution of powers to regions that started in the 1970s and matured in the 1990s. According to the *Law on Norms in Matters Concerning the Protection of Historic Linguistic Minorities* (Official Gazette of the Italian Republic, 1999), provincial governments have to introduce bilingual street signs if 15 percent of citizens of a municipality or one third of municipal councilors demand it. Apart from this law, the statutes of autonomous regions (Aosta Valley, Sardinia, Sicily, Trentino-South Tyrol and Friuli-Venezia Giulia) regulate bilingual street signs. Italy has the most varied linguistic landscape in the European Union, with 12 languages enjoying bilingual street signs status and thus becoming embedded in public space. In Aosta Valley, there are French and Franco-Provençal¹¹ signs; Occitan ones in Piedmont, Sardinian and Catalan on the island of Sardinia; Friulian and Slovenian in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Veneto regions and German and Ladin in Trentino-South Tyrol. Furthermore, there are bilingual street signs for Albanian speakers in the regions of Molise, Basilicata, Calabria and Sicily, as well as street signs including Croatian inscriptions in Molise and Greek inscriptions in Calabria and Apulia. The implementation of the bilingual signs policy generally faces no obstructions¹² and local government authorities tend to follow the practice of ensuring graphical equality of all the languages included in bilingual or multilingual (some parts of Trentino-South Tyrol and Friuli-Venezia Giulia) street signs.

Greece follows a strict policy of national unity that tries to deny the existence of ethnic minorities. This policy also extends to language-related issues. Thus, there are no legal provisions for, nor attempts at erecting bilingual street signs anywhere on Greek territory. Street signs are displayed only in Greek language and alphabet, usually accompanied with an equivalent in Latin script.

4. 2. Post-Communist Europe

The language policies of countries of the Visegrád Group (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary) are determined by their historic experience of the linguistic patchwork of multiethnic German, Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires, but also by the legacy of forced Germanification and Russification.¹³

The introduction of German inscriptions in post-communist Poland represents a sharp change in policy, as communist Poland used to engage in removal of all signs of German language in public space (see Wolff & Cordell, 2003: 106, Wolff, 2001). The *Act on National and Ethnic Minorities and on the Regional Languages* (Sejm, 2005) allows all communes in which at least 20 percent of the population belongs to a national minority, to introduce bilingual signage. There is a complete implementation of bilingual signs, with graphical equality of both languages on display. Bilingual signage does not include only place names on town entrances, but also street name signs. In Silesia, there are German street signs, in the northern coastal region Kashubian enjoys bilingual signs, while in the east there are street signs with inscriptions in Belarusian and Ruthenian (called Lemko in Poland).

In the Czech Republic, the *Act on Rights of Members of National Minorities* (Government of the Czech Republic, 2001) offers provisions for the introduction of bilingual street signage in areas with a sizeable population of traditional (autochthonous) national minorities. However, the requirements for the introduction of street signs that would establish official bilingual landscapes are rather high. In order to erect bilingual street signs, a local community in Czech Republic would have to have at least a 10 percent of the respective ethnolinguistic minority but also receive backing by a petition signed by 40 percent of adult citizens of a given community (Zwilling, 2004: 4). While the first threshold is very low, the second one may effectively prevent the introduction of bilingual signage if members of the minority fail to mobilize enough support to file a petition. The only language enjoying official bilingual street signs in Czech Republic is Polish, in the area of Czech Teschen,¹⁴ in the Moravian-Silesian region. In this case, we can speak of full implementation of the bilingual street sign policy, with both Czech and Polish inscriptions equally treated in terms of size and appearance.

The post-communist Slovak government saw the bottom-up, unofficial erection of Hungarian place name signs as illegal, yet in 1994 a new law enabled the introduction of bilingual street signs in areas with a sizeable ethnic minority population, albeit with inscriptions in the minority language written in a smaller and different font (Sloboda, 2009: 183-184). However, a subsequent *Law on the Use of Minority Languages* (Slovak Ministry of Culture, 1999) introduced provisions that are more equitable, so that nowadays place name signs at town or village entrances may still feature minority language inscriptions written in a separate and smaller fashion, while street names are written in the same manner in both

languages. Although Slovak-Hungarian relations remain somewhat strained, the shaping of bilingual landscapes was accepted as part of the broader process of Europeanization and implementation of EU policies. Besides Hungarian street signs) in the southern borderlands, there are also Ruthenian street signs in the northeastern part of Slovakia. There is full implementation of bilingual street signs and there are no formal or informal political or societal actors engaged in obstruction of this policy or vandalism against signposts.

After the collapse of communism, Hungary has experienced a strong surge in the number of citizens identifying as ethnic minorities. Between the 1991 and 2001 censuses, the number of ethnic Germans rose by more than 100 percent, although only a fraction of them indicated German as their mother tongue (Wolff & Cordell, 2003: 101). This shows that with the onset of democracy more citizens felt free to identify with an ethnic minority, notwithstanding the fact that they did not possess the cultural resources (i.e. language knowledge) to exercise this identity in full. However, as we have already noted, the demand for public visibility of a minority language does not have to be followed by actual usage of that same language. Similar to the Polish and Slovak cases, the *Act on Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities* (National Assembly of Hungary, 1993) enabled the introduction of bilingual street signs in those municipalities that have at least 20 percent of the population belonging to a recognized ethnolinguistic minority. The total number of members of ethnic minorities in Hungary is not high, yet they are usually concentrated in several small towns and rural areas, so that they manage to pass this threshold and qualify for bilingual status. Thus, there are municipalities with Croatian, German, Romanian, Serbian, Slovak, and Slovenian street signs. While the place name signs usually differ in size and font from their Hungarian equivalents, street name signs are printed in the same manner for both languages. One may say that the policy of bilingual signs has achieved full implementation in Hungary and that there no incidents involving destruction of such signage.

In 1989, all three Baltic countries adopted laws that ended the predominance of the Russian language and established Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian as the respective state languages (Hogan-Brun, 2003: 124-125). Although they are majority languages, the new post-communist governments treated them as endangered idioms, in need of special protection. Later on, such a view served as justification for suppression of Russian in the public sphere and especially as a justification for the abolishment of Russian street signs. Since the question of language is closely linked to citizenship issues in the Baltics, especially in Estonia and Latvia (see Hogan-Brun, 2003: 129), the governments of these two countries might perceive demands for Russian bilingual street signs as a sign of failed integration of the Russian community. In Latvia, Russians are often viewed as potential traitors and are thus treated with suspicion that translates into a restrictive language policy and prohibition of bilingual street signs (see Dobson, 2001).

The post-communist Estonian governments have either removed or effaced previous Russian street signs in cities and towns. Yet, some Russian signage remains in towns where local government officials are ethnic Russians. According to the *Place Names Act* (Riigikogu, 2004); non-Estonian place names may be permitted, if proven that they have a historic origin prior to 1939, i.e. the incorporation of pre-World War II Estonia into the Soviet Union. There is a 50 percent nominal threshold for administrative bilinguality on municipality level, but according to 1939 census data. This year is taken as year zero because of the official Baltic

policy that claims that the Soviet Union occupied Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania from 1941 to 1989. Thus, all immigrants from Russia, Belarus and the Ukraine are viewed as settlers that came together with occupying forces. In Noarootsi Parish, in the northwestern part of the country, there are Swedish place names, although there are no more than 200 Swedish-speaking people left in Estonia. In the southern part of Estonia, there are also bilingual street signs that include inscriptions in Võro, a language closely related to Estonian and historically regarded as a South Estonian dialect.

Latvian regulation on place names (Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia, 2000) insists that all place names (and hence street names) have to be in Latvian. This regulation essentially forbids bilingual street signs, yet allows street signs in the extinct Livonian language and street signs in the Latgalian language, an idiom closely related to Latvian. Latgalian is officially not considered a separate language, but only a historically different literary standard of Latvian, in usage in the southeastern part of the country. Therefore, in practice, there are no official bilingual street signs in this country. However, in parts of the country with a strong presence of Russian speakers (such as the city of Daugavpils), there remain Soviet-era bilingual (Russian-Latvian) street signs. These signs are officially not valid any more, yet still serve their purpose of marking space and conveying meaning and identity.

In Lithuania, the *Law on the State Language* (Ministry of Justice of Lithuania, 1995) stipulates that public signs may only be in the state language (Lithuanian), while ethnic minority organizations may use their languages solely for informational signs depicting their organizations. Constitutionally, Lithuanian is the only permitted official language, while the *Law on Ethnic Minorities* practically prohibits bilingual street signs, allowing them only in areas where more than 70 percent of the population belongs to a given ethnic minority (Kallonen, 2004: 5-6). After the scrapping of the *Law on Ethnic Minorities* in 2010, bilingual street signs have *de facto* become illegal. In areas around the capital city of Vilnius, where Polish speakers form the majority, local councilors, as well as ordinary citizens, have begun erecting Polish-Lithuanian street signs on private houses, claiming that private property is exempt from Lithuanian language legislation. The Lithuanian government is still looking for a compromise solution that would satisfy the Polish community but also remain true to its proclaimed unilingual policy.

The Slovenian Constitution allows Italian and Hungarian to be co-official (including bilingual street signs) in those areas where these two ethnic minorities are autochthonous (Petričušić, 2004: 6-7). In the Slovenian coastal area, there is full implementation of bilingual (Italian and Slovenian) street signs, while in the northeastern Prekmurje region, there is full application of Hungarian-Slovenian street signs. These bilingual street signs have become an accepted part of Slovenia's linguistic landscape and thus do not suffer from opposition or destruction.

In Croatia, the *Constitutional Law on National Minorities* (Croatian Parliament, 2002) stipulates that official bilinguality has to be introduced in cities or municipalities where more than one third of the population belongs to one of the constitutionally defined national minorities. However, the Croatian legal framework does not prevent local and regional government units from introducing bilingual signage where and when they see fit, even if they do not meet this requirement. Thus, the Istrian Democratic Assembly, a regionalist party that has dominated local and regional politics in the western peninsula of Istria for more than two

decades, introduced official bilinguality on regional (county) level and established bilingual street signs (Croatian and Italian) in cities and municipalities along the western and southern coast of Istria, in areas traditionally populated by Italian-speakers. In some of these communities, bilingual street signs follow the orthography of one language at the expense of the other language or include incomplete translations of toponyms. Apart from Italian, Czech and Hungarian speakers also enjoy partially implemented bilingual street signs in their respective municipalities. However, some local councils have forfeited their potential bilingual status. This includes not only the municipality of Punitovci (37% Slovak-speaking), but also many Serb-majority areas along the border to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although usually governed by ethnic Serb parties, these communities show reluctance to ask for Serbian Cyrillic street signs out of fear from stirring ethnic animosities with the Croatian majority. After the 2011 census, the city of Vukovar, on the Croatian-Serbian border, qualified for bilingual status as the number of ethnic Serbs rose above one third. However, the erectment of bilingual street signs was met with violent opposition. Protesting war veterans openly destroyed bilingual inscriptions, interpreting them as symbols of enemy forces from the 1991-1995 Croatian War of Independence. The government has promised to enforce the application of constitutional provisions for bilingual street signs in all cities and municipalities that qualify for bilingual status.

In 2001, the *Law on Local Public Administration* (Official Gazette of Romania, 2001) enabled administrative bilinguality. According to this piece of legislation, bilingual street signs may be introduced in municipalities or cities where the share of a given ethnic minority is at least 20 percent (Constantin, 2004: 8-9). Although only the Hungarians have a sizeable population in Romania, many smaller ethnolinguistic communities have geographically concentrated settlements throughout the country. Thus, beside Hungarian, there are municipalities with bilingual street signs that include inscriptions in Bulgarian, Croatian, German, Polish, Serbian and Ukrainian. There are no problems with the implementation with this aspect of language policy and the bilingual street signs usually display both languages in the same graphical fashion.

Bulgaria is one of the few post-communist EU member states that does not allow bilingual street sign. Such a language policy is a direct result of a general national identity policy, whereby Bulgaria follows the Greek example and refuses to acknowledge the existence of ethnic (and thus ethnolinguistic) minorities. Therefore, although the Turkish ethnolinguistic community represents over 10 percent of the population and is geographically concentrated in the southern province of Kardzhali and the northeastern province of Razgrad, there are no Turkish street signs in Bulgaria.

4. 3. Special Cases: Belgium, Luxembourg, Malta, Ireland and Cyprus

Belgium is constitutionally a multilingual federal state without a single majority language. However, besides monolingual areas (Dutch-speaking Flanders and French-speaking Wallonia), the Brussels Capital Region applies bilingual (French and Dutch) street signage, although over 50 percent of Brussels inhabitants speak only French at home, while less than 10 percent speak Dutch (Janssens, 2008: 5). The German-speaking areas in the east of the country have bilingual signs (German and French). In addition, there are municipalities (along

the linguistic border between Flanders, Wallonia and the German-speaking eastern municipalities) that offer public services (e.g. schooling, public acts) to speakers of the non-majority language (Dutch, French or German) residing across the language border. These services also include bilingual street signage. The majority language is written above the non-majority language, in a somewhat bigger size. Any municipality that has more than 30 percent of speakers of a non-majority Belgian language has to become a municipality with language facilities. Besides the three official languages (French, Dutch and German), there are some places in Wallonia that have Walloon street signs alongside French ones, albeit written in a smaller font. The application of Walloon street signs is not universal, but rather sporadic.

According to the *Law on Language Regime* (Government of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, 1984), this country practices functional and not territorial multilingualism. The state language is Luxembourgish; the legal language is French, while the official languages are Luxembourgish, French and German. Thus, the whole nation is trilingual, while the linguistic landscape is plurilingual. Therefore, no push for politics of visibility of presence arises. Yet, we should note that French is the dominant feature of the linguistic landscape, while Luxembourgish is often written in a smaller font, beneath the French and/or German inscriptions.

The Irish case is a peculiar one, since Irish Gaelic is demographically a minority language, yet it is not a language associated with a non-majority group, i.e. an ethnolinguistic minority living in the Republic of Ireland. Officially recognized areas with Irish as the dominant language – *Gaeltacht*. Rapid decline of speakers, yet, whole of Republic of Ireland is officially bilingual, with bilingual place names and street names in Irish and English. Although Irish is constitutionally the first, national language of the country, it is often displayed in italics, above the English-language street names, leading to confusion. In some *Gaeltacht* areas there are monolingual, Irish-only signs. Ever since the late 19th century, Irish republican political elites have tried to strengthen the public presence of Irish Gaelic through the process of Gaelic Revival. However, despite the strong presence of Gaelic in education, national media and in public space through place and street names, the actual number of speakers of Gaelic as first language is rather low and keeps declining, although many Irish citizens do possess a certain level of command of Irish.

According to its constitution (Presidency of the Republic of Cyprus, 1960), Cyprus is officially bilingual, with both Greek and Turkish declared official languages. However, with the partition of the island as an established fact, the Cypriot government does not extend this official bilinguality to street signs. There are very few trilingual (Greek, Turkish, and English) road signs throughout the southern part of the island, while most of the street signs are exclusively in Greek and English. In this case, English does not serve as a foreign language added for tourist purposes, but shows the persistence of British influence that stems from colonial times before 1959.

Similar to Cyprus, Malta is also constitutionally a bilingual country. The constitution proclaims Maltese the country's national language, while English is granted official status alongside it (Justice Services of Malta, 2014). All street signs are both in Maltese and English, with Maltese as the first, national language, and English as the former colonial language. However, although Italian has a long history of presence in Malta, it is nowhere to be seen on street signs.

Table 2. Bilingual Signs Policy in EU Member States

Country	Bilingual signs	Legal basis	Requirements	Equality	Implementation
Austria	YES	Constitution, Law on Ethnic Groups	25% (10%)	Yes	Partial
Belgium	YES	Constitution	30% (facilities)	Yes and No	Full
Bulgaria	NO	-	-	-	-
Croatia	YES	Constitution, Constitutional Law on National Minorities	33%	Yes	Partial
Cyprus	YES	Constitution	-	Yes	Partial
Czech Republic	YES	Act on Rights of Members of National Minorities	10%/40%	Yes	Full
Denmark	YES	local language acts	territory-based	No	Partial
Estonia	YES	Place Names Act	historic claim	Yes	Partial
Finland	YES	Language Act	8%/3000 speakers	Yes	Full
France	YES	regional language legislation, local language acts	historic claim	No	Partial
Germany	YES	regional acts on minority rights	territory-based	Yes and No	Full
Greece	NO	-	-	-	-
Hungary	YES	Act on National and Ethnic Minorities	20%	Yes and No	Full
Ireland	YES	Constitution	-	No	Full
Italy	YES	Law on Norms in Matters Concerning the Protection of Historic Linguistic Minorities, regional statutes	territory-based, 15%/33%	Yes	Full
Latvia	NO	-	-	-	-
Lithuania	NO	-	-	-	-
Luxembourg	YES	Law on Language Regime	-	No	Partial
Malta	YES	Constitution	-	Yes	Full
Netherlands	YES	Frisian Language and Culture Covenant	territory-based	Yes	Partial
Poland	YES	Act on National and Ethnic Minorities and on the Regional Languages	20%	Yes	Full
Portugal	YES	Law on Official Recognition of the Mirandese Language	territory-based	No	Full
Romania	YES	Law on Local Public Administration	20%	Yes and No	Full
Slovakia	YES	Law on the Use of Minority Languages	20%	Yes and No	Full

Slovenia	YES	Constitution	territory-based	Yes	Full
Spain	YES	Constitution, regional statutes	territory-based	No	Partial
Sweden	YES	Language Law	historic claim	Yes	Full
United Kingdom	YES	Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act, Welsh Language Act	territory-based	No	Partial

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we have tried to show the importance of bilingual street signs in shaping linguistic landscapes and making ethnolinguistic groups visible and present in public space. A comparison of various policies and practices in EU member states has revealed that there is no convergence towards common patterns of dealing with bilingual signage (*Table 2*). Yet, we could detect several features that distinguish old member states from post-communist states, federal from unitary states, as well as policies towards minority languages and policies towards regional languages. From 28 member states, 24 states allow bilingual signs, while four of them are states that are officially bilingual or multilingual on national level. Interestingly, none of the four countries that do not allow bilingual signs (Bulgaria, Greece, Latvia, and Lithuania) has signed the ECRML. Of the 20 countries that do allow bilingual street signs for regional and minority languages, four have constitutional provisions for introduction of bilingual street signs (Austria, Croatia, Slovenia, and Spain), while the other 16 countries use a combination of minority rights laws, language laws and regional and local statutes. All 20 countries stipulate some conditions for the introduction of bilingual street signs. Among old member states, these requirements are usually connected with officially proclaimed settlement areas of a respective ethnolinguistic community (historic claim) or linked to a subnational administrative unit (territory-based). Among post-communist member states, there are percentages of minority population in a given municipality that serve as thresholds for the introduction of bilingual signage. The most common threshold is 20 percent, while no country requires a municipality to be a minority-majority territorial unit (more than 50 percent) in order to qualify for bilingual signage. Out of these 20 member states with bilingual street signs, nine countries provided visual equality for all depicted languages, four did not, while seven provided partial equality. Regarding implementation, 11 cases achieved full implementation, while the other nine only partially implemented its bilingual signs policies. Considering issues with implementation, two cases stand out – the Austrian and the Croatian one. In both cases, there was violent opposition to introduction of bilingual signs in a specific language and in a specific place, while elsewhere in the country bilingual signage met no disapproval. Furthermore, in both cases the arguments raised against bilingual signage were the same – the invocation of memories of war sufferings and the anxiousness about potential irredentism.

Table 3 shows that there are numerous languages enjoying official bilingual street sign status in EU member states, including both big languages backed by nation states where that language is official, as well as small regional languages, used by only a handful of speakers. Italy enabled by far the most languages to enjoy public visibility and presence through bilingual street signs, followed by France, Romania, and Spain. *Table 4* shows that out of 24 official languages of EU member states, 16 languages enjoy bilingual sign status in at least

one other member states, with German present in six countries, Hungarian in five and Croatian in four.

We can conclude by pointing out that linguistic landscapes shaped by bilingual street signs in Western Europe tend to be driven by regional governments and show lots of inconsistency and a tendency to limit bilingual signage to place name signs only. In contrast, in Eastern Europe, one is more likely to find strict rules and constitutional guarantees for bilingual signage, including street name signs.

Table 3. Languages Enjoying Bilingual Sign Status

Country	Languages enjoying official bilingual street sign status
Austria	Croatian, Hungarian, Slovenian
Croatia	Czech, Hungarian, Italian, Serbian
Czech Republic	Polish
Denmark	German
Estonia	Swedish, Võro
Finland	Swedish, Northern Sámi
France	Alsatian (German), Breton, Basque, Catalan, Corsican, Gallo, Niçard (Italian), Occitan
Germany	Danish, Lower Sorbian, North Frisian, Saterland Frisian, Upper Sorbian
Hungary	Croatian, German, Romanian, Serbian, Slovak, Slovenian
Ireland	Irish Gaelic
Italy	Albanian, Catalan, Croatian, Franco-Provençal, French, Friulian, German, Greek, Ladin, Occitan, Sardinian, Slovenian
Netherlands	Western Frisian
Poland	Belarusian, German, Kashubian, Lithuanian, Ruthenian
Portugal	Mirandese
Romania	Bulgarian, Croatian, Hungarian, German, Polish, Serbian, Ukrainian
Slovakia	Hungarian, Ruthenian
Slovenia	Hungarian, Italian
Spain	Aranese (Occitan), Asturian, Basque, Catalan, Galician
Sweden	Meänkieli, Northern Sámi, Southern Sámi
United Kingdom	Cornish, Irish Gaelic, Scottish Gaelic, Ulster Scots, Welsh

Table 4. Official EU Languages Enjoying Bilingual Signs as Minority Languages

Language	Countries
Bulgarian	Romania
Croatian	Austria, Hungary, Italy, Romania
Czech	Croatia
Danish	Germany
French	Italy
German	Denmark, France, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania
Greek	Italy
Hungarian	Austria, Croatia, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia
Irish Gaelic	United Kingdom
Italian	Croatia, France, Slovenia
Lithuanian	Poland
Polish	Czech Republic, Romania
Romanian	Hungary
Slovak	Hungary
Slovenian	Austria, Hungary, Italy
Swedish	Estonia, Finland

We might argue that bilingual signage in old member states is a result of decades-long struggle of ethnolinguistic advocacy groups for visibility and presence of their idioms in

public space. On the contrary, in post-communist member states the introduction of bilingual street signs was achieved as part of wider policy change during the process of Europeanization and adoption of EU-mandated minority protection schemes. In Eastern Europe, it was much easier for the Brussels administration to push through with policy proposals that included interventions in public space and its reshaping into bilingual landscapes than to achieve implementation in old member states.

In quasi-federal countries such as the United Kingdom, Spain and Italy, bilingual signage closely followed the processes of devolution and the rise of regionalist and ethnoregionalist political parties. Thus, policies of bilingual signage became a form of accommodation of centrifugal political forces and a way of management of ethnic differences and conflicts.

Both the popularity of demands for bilingual signage for a plethora of different European regional and minority languages, as well as the fierce opposition to its introduction in the Baltics, or the partial, localized and violent protests against its implementation in Austria and Croatia, testify about the importance of visibility and presence of language artefacts for the identity and agency of ethnolinguistic groups.

Notes

¹ On politics of public space, see also Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003.

² For a comprehensive discussion of language policy and its wider implications, see also Spolsky, 2004.

³ Electoral gerrymandering refers to the arbitrary drawing of boundaries of electoral constituencies in order to gain favor for own party or candidate or put the competitors in a disadvantaged position. Similarly, ethnolinguistic gerrymandering includes changes to administrative borders (of a city, municipality or region) in order to fragment concentrated areas inhabited by an ethnolinguistic group that seeks to claim certain political and linguistic rights.

⁴ Thus, when dealing with member states' policies on regional and minority languages, we can recall Max Weinreich's notion that a "language is a dialect with an army and navy".

⁵ In this case, the notion of "old member states" refers to established democracies and not necessarily member states that have joined the EU a long time ago.

⁶ *Y Fro Gymraeg* stands for "Welsh Language Area".

⁷ As part of the policy of Gaelicization, the Western Isles, also known as Outer Hebrides, were officially renamed to Na h-Eileanan Siar, making this part of Scotland the only local council with a Gaelic-only official name.

⁸ Meänkieli is a language closely related to Finnish. Descendants of Finnish-speaking reindeer hunters and woodcutters in northern parts of Sweden speak it.

⁹ Łužica in Upper Sorbian and Łužyca in Lower Sorbian.

¹⁰ The introduction of bilingual street signs in South Tyrol followed because of post-World War II negotiations between the Italian and Austrian governments (see more in Dal Negro, 2009: 209).

¹¹ This Romance tongue is also known as Arpitan or Romand (in Switzerland).

¹² In South Tyrol, German-speakers often object to inventions of new Italian names for previously German-only toponyms.

¹³ On the linguistic history of Central Europe and its political implications, see more in Kamusella, 2009.

¹⁴ This is the Anglicized version of town's name, in Czech it is called Český Těšín and in Polish is known as Czeski Cieszyn.

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