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United Nations International Year of Languages and the Baška Slab

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United Nations International Year of Languages and the Baška Slab

1. United Nations International Year of Languages

The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the year 2008 as the International Year of Languages. It was launched by UNESCO on 21 February 2008 by International Mother Language Day.

Language is one of the fundamental dimensions of a human being. It embodies national and cultural identity for each person. It is essential to the identity of groups and individuals. Cultural diversities are closely related to linguistic diversities.

Today there are about 7000 languages spoken in the world. Less than a 2000 of these languages are currently used in schools, and most are used only sporadically. Within the a few generations, more than 50% of all languages may disappear, because they are not represented in government, education and the media.

Globalization processes and a harmonious relationship between the global and the local are strongly depending on cyberspace communication. Cyberspace communication is unifying languages. There is strong relationship between languages and the economy. The languages are promoted as a tool for social integration.

Geographical features that are surrounding us (on and under the land and water, in the universe) should be named so that we know where we are, and to be oriented in the space. Without languages it would be hard to recognize our surroundings. Different languages and processes of globalizations are forcing standardization of geographical names.

For example, in India there are 1,650 languages recognized, with 400 used as languages of communication, and 22 languages are listed in the Indian constitution.

UN goal is to ensure that the importance of linguistic diversity and multilingualism in educational, administrative and legal systems, cultural expressions and the media, cyberspace and trade, is recognized at the national, regional and international levels. It is promoting the idea that “languages matter!”.

UN day of languages symbolizes promotion and protection of all languages, particularly endangered languages, in all individual and collective contexts.

2. The Baška Slab

The Baška Slab is the first written monument with a Croatian name written for the first time in the Croatian language (s. Fig. 1). It was made around year 1100. The Baška Slab is a monument that symbolizes the birth of Croatian language. The Slab was written in the Croatian Glagolitic script in the old Croatian language containing elements of the Slavic church language.



Fig. 1: The Baška Slab.

It was found in the church of St. Lucy (Sv. Lucija) in Jurandvor near the town Baška on the island Krk (s. Fig. 2 and 3).



Fig. 2: Church of Sv. Lucija (St. Lucy) in Jurandvor.



Fig. 3: The Baška slab in the Church of Sv. Lucija (St. Lucy).

The script bears the mention of the Croatian king Zvonimir donating a meadow to St. Lucy's church. The translation of the script reads:

I, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, I, abbot Drzhiha, wrote this about the plot of land which was given by Zvonimir, the Croatian king, in his days to St. Lucy and witnesses are: Desimir, prefect of Krbava, Martin in Lika, Pribinezba in Vinodol, Jakov on the island. If anyone denies it, may he be cursed by 12 Apostles and 4 Evangelists and St. Lucy. May anyone who lives here pray for them. I, abbot Dobrovit, built this church together with my mine brothers in the days of Duke Kosmat who ruled the wholw Country. In those days Mikula was in Otocac with St. Lucy.

From the text it could be easily recognized that without geographical names it would not be possible to identify spatial relations and connect people and events.

Since 1934 the Baška Slab is placed in the main building of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Zagreb.