

“We can support your culture and tradition, but avoid claiming that what you speak is a language.” Emerging trends in the legal protection of linguistic diversity in Poland and Italy.

The paper will analyze recent debates and decisions concerning the protection of minority languages in Poland and Italy from historical and comparative perspectives. I will discuss essential limitations of the main legal acts in both countries (e.g., operating on the basis of a closed list of preferred languages) and potential strategies to improve the protection of linguistic diversity. The most important step is to recognize the long shadow and impact that nation-state ideologies cast on current marginalization. The ratification (Italy) and implementation (Poland) of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages constitute a perfect opportunity to promote linguistic diversity, but require political decisions that respect all speakers.

In the 2021 national census in Poland, 467,145 citizens indicated that Silesian was the language used at home¹. In February 2026, the president rejected the ninth attempt to recognize Silesian as a regional language and explained: “...scientific facts are not determined by a vote in the Parliament. We must listen to what experts have to say on this matter. Experts and linguists point out that the Silesian dialect is a dialect of the Polish language. We cannot set a precedent in which the political majority decides on scientific matters [...] At the same time, **I urge work on the bill already submitted to the Parliament regarding the promotion of Silesian culture and the Silesian dialect. I will sign such a bill because I want to genuinely support traditions, culture, and scientific research, and enable the study of the dialect as an extracurricular activity funded by the state or local government. Support for culture and tradition. Yes. Political games with Silesian culture. No.**”²

In a similar reasoning the Italian constitutional court noted: “regions in Italy do not encounter obstacles in promoting local idioms ‘**as long as they limit themselves to the provision of cultural interventions and economic support**’ and as long as they ‘**refrain from recognizing linguistic minorities/minority languages and from extending to other idioms the guarantees provided by Law 482/1999 for explicitly enumerated languages**, because such a competence belongs – according to the Constitutional Court – exclusively to the state legislature”³.

In both countries, the acceptance of a broader perspective and respectful dialogue with marginalized communities might lead to more effective protection of linguistic diversity.

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¹ [Statistics Poland. National Population and Housing Census 2021 Population. Size and demographic-social structure in the light of the 2021 Census results, p. 120](#) (Accessed 15.04.2026).

² [Statement by Karol Nawrocki, President of the Republic of Poland, February 12, 2026](#) (Accessed 15.04.2026).

³ Mattia Zeba, „Italy: From Article 6 of the Constitution to the Ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages – At a Crossroads of Illusions, Inaccuracies, and Biases”, *European Yearbook of Minority Issues Online* 22, nr 1 (2025): 92, https://doi.org/10.1163/22116117_02201005.