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### ***On the Ecology of Culture\****

Etymologically the term „ecology” denotes the science of „habitat” or „environment” (cf. Grk. *oikía* „house”, „home”, „dwelling”). The concept of „environment” makes sense if we assume a certain center (central point) at which a human being is situated and from which he or she observes this „surrounding” or „environment”.

Under this definition of „ecology”, we must ascertain the character of such a „surrounding” or „environment”: Is this „environment” physical and/or biological or properly human, i. e., cultural and social. Accordingly, a distinction must be made between the „Physico-Biological Ecology” and the „Socio-Cultural Ecology” dealing with the humanitarian aspects of „Ecology”, which could be termed „Ecology of Culture” or „Cultural Ecology”. The latter is concerned with a human being not as a biological object subjected to the action of the physical world, but as a socio-cultural entity that establishes definite relations with the human environment, being affected by this or that social surrounding.

At meetings devoted to „Ecology” our attention is usually focused entirely on physico-biological ecology, with total disregard for problems of the „Ecology of Culture”. But at this moment the human population of our planet, and especially small nations, are no less acutely worried about the survival of their national cultures and languages and safeguarding their own and their neighbors aesthetic and ethical values than with the protection of their physical environment.

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\* The paper is printed as submitted.

Extinction of such languages and cultures is as much a disaster from cultural-ecological viewpoint as is – from the physico-biological point of view – major pollution of the environment. We enter the names of animals and plants threatened with extinction in the „Book of Endangered Species”, yet we are often oblivious of human cultures, being indifferent to the extinction of peoples and their languages, of peoples forming part of mankind’s history and culture. The loss of such peoples and languages renders humankind poorer and monotonous by losing part of its historical memory, to say nothing of national feelings of those peoples who were historically destined to witness the infringement of their national cultures, at times of their total extinction within major State Unions as a result of perverse national policies of such States. Usually, it is precisely this phenomenon that causes national unrest, sometimes incomprehensible to outside observers, that cannot be compared in its intensity and scope with any grievances caused by grave economic or social conditions. Thus, the ethnic language and cultural-economic factors acquire basic importance in the complex of problems of „Cultural Ecology”. A „*Book of Languages and Peoples*” threatened with extinction should be urgently compiled and scientific and organizational measures be taken without delay to save these languages and cultures.

In this connection there arises a whole complex of questions regarding the status of ethnic and/or minority languages and cultures and their interrelationships.

All these issues become extremely important in the epoch of total globalization and levelling of national cultures. It is also symbolic that one of the principle slogans of the „European Union” with respect to national cultures and languages is „*Diversity in Unity*”, and the year 2001 was proclaimed „*European Year of Languages*”.

All these problems belong to the sphere of the „Ecology of Culture”, and special scholarly Symposiums and Conferences should be convened devoted to the discussion of global cultural-ecological problems, in order to work out relevant recommendations and basic scientific principles of the „Ecology of Culture”. Along with „Physico-Biological Ecology” the latter should form a global ecological discipline, which may be called „Ecology of Human Society”.