

EUROPEAN UNION



Committee of the Regions

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**DRAFT OPINION
of the Commission for Culture, Education and Research
on
MULTILINGUALISM**

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This document will be discussed at the meeting of the Commission for Culture, Education and Research to be held from 10 a.m. to 1.30 p.m. on 29 April 2008. Amendments must be submitted by email and reach the commission secretariat (email: educ@cor.europa.eu) no later than **22 April**.

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Reference document

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

1. congratulates the European Commission on the powerful impetus given to the multilingualism agenda by the creation on 1 January 2007 of a portfolio dedicated to it and assigned to Commissioner Leonard Orban;
2. underscores the priority that multilingualism has in the European policy agenda - a priority which embraces every area of Europe's social, economic and cultural life;
3. endorses the work programme set out by Commissioner Orban, who considers multilingualism to be instrumental in achieving a more integrated Europe and increased dialogue between cultures;
4. believes that, given the importance of linguistic diversity in the European Union, the intention when creating a multilingual society must be to maximise the benefits of diversity and minimise its drawbacks, thus putting a premium on the individual's linguistic heritage rather than merely exploiting diversity as the means to an end;
5. draws attention to the study of the high-level group on multilingualism set up in 2005 and endorses the action it calls for, namely:
 - more work to raise awareness, especially through information campaigns targeted at parents, young people and organisations in education and culture;
 - initiatives to improve people's motivation to learn new languages, especially through extracurricular, leisure and informal activities;
 - greater attention to the cultural and linguistic potential of immigrants;
 - and extending European multilingual activity to the languages of third countries in order to maximise European competitiveness;
6. points to the findings of the on-line consultation initiated in September 2007, which makes the following key points regarding action on multilingualism:
 - language learning is the key element for retaining or raising the individual's chances of employment;
 - the best way to encourage language learning is to begin early in the education process and to provide incentives for spending time studying and working abroad;
 - making teaching methods as effective as possible requires above all work on non-standard methods of transferring linguistic competence that take the needs of the individual on board;
 - linguistic diversity is best respected at local, national and European level by learning more about the culture behind the languages to be learned or encountered;
 - language makes a big impact on the economy, since it is easier to do business with a foreign company if one knows the language of the country in which it is located;

- the best way of improving language skills at work is to promote language courses in the workplace and to set out a clear company language strategy;
 - the use of more official languages in the work of the European Union and the administrative costs this entails is seen as desirable to boost the institutions' multilingual ethos;
7. highlights and endorses the proposals of the group of intellectuals for intercultural dialogue established at the European Commission's behest and chaired by Amin Maalouf, affirming in particular:
- that in bilateral relations between two peoples of the European Union, their two languages should be used rather than a third "universal" one;
 - that it is important for the European Union to champion the idea of a foreign language chosen by the individual;
8. stresses that the promotion and safeguarding of cultural and linguistic diversity is a top priority;
9. Throughout the European Union, the regional and local tiers bear prime responsibility for the protection and promotion of linguistic diversity. The regional and local levels are also responsible for education, training and adult education, as well as being one of the social partners and coordinating regional and local growth and development;
10. When training continues throughout the career, the concepts of "knowledge" and "learning" grow in importance, partly because the world of work now requires better language skills;
11. Regional and local authorities are ideally placed to build a constructive partnership with language-teaching institutions in order to devise teaching and training courses that meet specific local needs and demands;
12. maintains, therefore, that regional and local authorities are the best equipped to satisfy the various local language needs;

General comments

13. considers that Europe must build its social and economic cohesion by making the most of the opportunities afforded by mobility, globalisation, European culture and the sense of European citizenship;

14. The only way this can be achieved is by eliminating the linguistic hurdles that countries and individuals have to face, since:
- a) knowledge of foreign languages is a prerequisite for professional, educational, cultural and personal mobility. The European Union will never be a true union if its people fail to achieve a greater level of internal mobility;
 - b) knowledge of languages markedly improves competitiveness by enabling new contacts to be made, practices to be exchanged and products sold. Globalisation opens up commercial and labour markets which demand the use of effective competition instruments that enable operators to get involved rather than being excluded. A core requirement in winning the global challenge is to establish closer partnerships with other Community countries and companies in order to achieve a better position internationally and a footprint in countries other than the country of origin;
 - c) language is the most immediate expression of culture and helps to improve communication between the people of Europe. "European culture" cannot be based on the acceptance and passive establishment of a mosaic made up of the cultures of the Member States (a multicultural society), but is consolidated through the cultural encounter between citizens and the affirmation of the value of differences and of cultural identity (an intercultural society). Language – the possibility of a Frenchman making himself understood by a German and conveying what lies behind his traditions – becomes an element of strategy;
 - d) promoting active citizenship, the institutional involvement of the regions, consulting and listening to the people and social inclusion are all needed to ensure more effective European action on the legislation front which must be increasingly supported and shared by the regions and individuals. The European Community must therefore speak the language of its own citizens in its documents and in its external institutional relations so that they can be understood, so that local institutions (municipalities and regions) are able to interact and so that members of the public can get the message and participate in the life of Europe and act as a sounding board for the strategic objectives proposed;
15. Regarding the open-coordination method in respect of multilingualism, the Commission must be at pains to involve not only the national level of administration, but also the local and regional ones, since it is often these that bear most responsibility for implementing the relevant measures in their area;
16. In this connection, attention must also be given to the respect and dignity of non-official languages spoken by minorities, which – no less than the official languages – constitute an element of regional culture that must have its place in European programmes of inclusion;

Recommendations and key actions

17. considers it important to enshrine the aims of Europe's multilingual policies in the "mother tongue plus two" objective;
18. believes that everyone in the EU, while preserving his own mother tongue as the badge of his own cultural heritage, must in the course of his life additionally acquire a language of communication and a third language chosen on the basis of cultural affinity or the social and economic mobility requirements of the country or region of origin;
19. The choice of the third language must be made not only from what are considered the official languages of the EU, but also from European minority languages and, above all, non-European languages that offer major cultural, economic and social opportunities for the growth of Europe's competitiveness;
20. proposes that the following key recommendations be adopted as priorities in Europe's multilingual policy and implemented in order to motivate the population, preserve diversity and put regional bodies centre-stage in the choice of approaches to learning;

Regional involvement

21. Local authorities (regions and municipalities) are key players, not just because of their political and administrative powers in the sphere of education and training, but also because of their ability to better monitor the situation of public multilingualism and trends in the application of relevant Community directives and programmes. It is at local level that powers acquired and measures carried out are tested, which can give a strong impetus to European political action;
22. With a view to achieving the objective of "mother tongue plus two", the regions must play a leading role, especially in implementing the education programmes;
23. Although English is now almost universally acknowledged to be the European lingua franca and therefore should be adopted in all the Member States as the first foreign language on educational curricula, the decision about which second language to select should be taken not just at national level, but above all at regional level;
24. In any country, each region may have its own specific cultural, social and economic characteristics;
25. Regional diversity must be encouraged, which means that each region should be able to select a different first foreign language on the basis of studies and research, surveys of cultural traditions carried out by cities and regions, the wishes of the general public, and the socio-economic outlook and requirements of the region;

26. It would thus be possible to monitor consistency between local needs and current educational programmes and to take advantage of flexibility at local authority level to adjust educational initiatives that have not produced the results hoped for;
27. The language selected must be freely chosen from the official languages of the European Union, the languages spoken by minority groups of European citizens and the languages of non-EU countries based on regional cultural, social and economic affinities and interests;
28. We would therefore propose that all regions be encouraged to set up local multilingualism forums which would monitor local social, economic and educational trends and put forward measures to raise public awareness and motivation in relation to lifelong learning of "mother tongue plus two" and to revise school curricula;
29. Programmes to include migrants must also be strongly promoted. Migrants and their children must be able to preserve their own language. In the same way, languages spoken by minority groups must be safeguarded in the education process;
30. In short, regional and national institutions must encourage the education system to include a broad range of languages in the education curriculum tailored to regional social, economic and cultural requirements;

Non-exclusion

31. As far as the languages spoken by minorities are concerned, it should be remembered that these help to boost the basic European cultural value of diversity and should therefore not be placed at a disadvantage in this process. Such languages are considered minority languages because they are shared by a smaller number of people living in Europe or in regions within a Member State that recognises a more commonly spoken language as its official language (e.g. Catalan vs. Spanish);
32. The designation "minority" must not become a reason for discrimination against the language;
33. Thus it is important to begin a process of officially recognising minority languages which represent firmly rooted European traditions and cultures;
34. This would allow official recognition by the EU, so that it would translate its own texts into more languages than the current 23, thus fostering direct dialogue between Europe and its citizens;
35. However, the language recognition process must also involve the national and regional levels. Each individual country must be encouraged to practise linguistic flexibility, allowing the

regions to adopt their own language as their mother tongue even if it is different from the country's majority language;

36. The European process of officially recognising languages and regional diversification will enhance social inclusion;
37. Languages that are not recognised as official languages, either at European or local level, must nevertheless continue to be covered by programmes to protect cultural identity;

Intergenerational solidarity

38. There is also the problem of how to support citizens in the lifelong learning process;
39. Although it may be easier to "direct" language learning at school and help today's young people not to later lose the intercultural linguistic awareness acquired at their desks, the problem becomes more complex with generations who have left the education system a long time ago and have never followed a multilingual training process;
40. The over-50s generation who have never engaged with other languages, either in their everyday lives or for professional reasons, risk having no means of expression in their old age, excluding themselves from citizenship;
41. It is therefore necessary to promote systems of learning that are not only affordable (the cost of language courses often hinders the delivery of education to older people), but also available to people who have mobility problems or cannot make the active commitment required in terms of time;
42. The CoR also points out that studying the grammar of the foreign language is not essential, especially for those coming to languages outside the school environment and in older age;
43. It is important to stress, therefore, that less rigorous ways of learning do exist which enable people to acquire rudimentary language skills with which they can understand and be understood. These methods of learning should be promoted by regional institutions and funded by the EU to disseminate learning opportunities and bridge the generation gap in language learning;
44. This also means supporting passive learning through multimedia by promoting media transmissions in the original language with subtitles (e.g. TV programmes, films, news), as well as broader use of computer language courses or online translation programs. In other words, a sort of lifelong "self-learning";

45. In young people and children, on the other hand, the motivation to learn new languages must be kindled at an early age. Nursery schools should become the cradle of language learning, where children become familiar with the sounds of a foreign language;
46. The education process must provide more opportunities to speak a foreign language at primary school, and to learn a third language at secondary school;
47. University education must provide facilities for perfecting or further improving a person's linguistic skills, which also means boosting the Erasmus and Socrates programmes;
48. But universities must open their doors not just to mature students who want to brush up their language skills but also to businesses, which must be helped and encouraged in enabling their staff and management to take on the challenge of learning new "commercial" languages by providing tailor-made courses;
49. It is also necessary to develop translation and interpreting courses that involve not just institutions (from the general public to the regions and the European Parliament: promoting and rewarding cities that can present their own websites and external documentation in several languages is a good incentive for local institutional multilingualism), but also points of contact with the general public, such as public and private legal and business agencies;

Interdisciplinarity

50. Multilingualism can be promoted on the basis not just of education and training but through recreational activities;
51. For example, developing the use of more languages in sport is a way of raising awareness among a wide range of people, from children to adults;
52. Music is already in itself a global and multilingual market: it would be useful, for example, to promote a EuroMusic Open Day;
53. Circulation of literary works in bilingual editions (original and translation) should be stepped up, not just on the initiative of individual publishing houses but also through public partnerships set up to encourage regional governments to promote private multilingual initiatives;

EU institutions

54. "Institutional" multilingualism within the EU is obviously indispensable;
55. Although a system of formal and informal translation into all languages in Europe, including the less widely spoken ones, is economically unsustainable, it is absolutely necessary to

provide for multilingualism, i.e. to ensure that bilateral communication can take place in the languages of the participants at informal meetings too;

56. For formal meetings and for working and official documents there must be translation into all the official Member State languages. Given that the Member States sustain the EU economically, the EU in return must be accessible by giving each of them, in their national language, the documents through which an active European citizenship can be exercised;

EU external borders

57. Multilingualism must not be limited to developing social and economic mobility within the EU, but should also allow European citizens to become open to markets and cultures outside Europe;
58. This is also important in the light of current trading trends that are pushing the EU increasingly towards contacts with markets such as China, Russia and Japan;
59. Improved EU external competitiveness thus also depends on upgrading education and training courses in non-EU languages;
60. The selected third language can also be chosen from all the languages that European countries use in their contacts, bearing in mind especially the languages of emerging non-EU countries and the cultural profile of countries with which Europe is building up its trade relations (notably the social and commercial frontier represented by the Arab countries and the Far East).

Brussels, ...

The President
of the Committee of the Regions

The Secretary-General
of the Committee of the Regions

III. PROCEDURE

Title	Outlook opinion on multilingualism
Reference(s)	-
Legal basis	Article 265 (1) TEC
Procedural basis	
Date of Commission letter	4 February 2008
Date of Bureau/President's decision	
Commission responsible	Culture, Education and Research (EDUC)
Rapporteur	Roberto Pella (IT/EPP) Member of Biella Provincial Council
Analysis	28 January 2008
Discussed in commission	29 April 2008
Date adopted by commission	
Result of the vote in commission	
Date adopted in plenary	
Previous Committee opinions	<p>Opinion on the First European Community Framework Programme in Support of Culture (2000-2004) including a Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Decision Establishing a single financing and programming instrument for cultural cooperation (Culture 2000 programme) (CdR 227/98 fin)¹</p> <p>Opinion on the Proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Culture 2007 programme (2007-2013) (CdR 259/2004 fin)²</p> <p>Opinion on the integrated action programme in the field of lifelong learning (CdR 258/2004 fin)³</p> <p>Opinion on the Communication on Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity: An Action Plan 2004-2006 (CdR 248/2003 fin)⁴</p> <p>Opinion on the Promotion and Protection of Regional and Minority Languages (CdR 86/2001 fin)⁵</p>

1 [OJ C 51, 22.2.1999, p. 68](#)

2 [OJ C 164, 5.7.2005, p. 65](#)

3 [OJ C 164, 5.7.2005, p. 59](#)

4 [OJ C 73, 23.3.2004, p. 33](#)

5 [OJ C 357, 14.12.2001, p. 33](#)