



MULTILINGUALISM STRATEGY: RESPONSE OF EARLALL

We welcome the inclusive approach to language learning and linguistic diversity that the Commission has been promoting with the 2004-6 action plan and the more recent Communication on multilingualism. The recommendations are in line with current policy directions across EARLALL member regions and local authorities - in terms of the importance of content and integrated language learning or early language learning for example.

Some of the regions and local authorities in the Association have a regional or minority language spoken within their territories - for example in Wales, Scotland, the Basque Country, Catalonia and Brittany. Therefore, we stress that the teaching of RMLs should not be considered in isolation from that of modern and foreign languages since there is a desire to transfer lessons learnt from the teaching of RMLs to the context of MFLs (and vice versa).

As regards the multilingualism strategy, the Association is particularly pleased with its general emphasis on the importance of linguistic diversity and with its specific references to regional and minority languages - in the context of the national strategies and the EC research programme for example.

We also welcome suggestions to set up a European network of "Language Diversity Centres" which should have the promotion and safeguarding of regional and minority languages as a clear focus. The Association agrees that this network should build on the valuable work undertaken, amongst others, by the grouping of eight official language boards which in the last five years have developed a co-ordinated voice for regional and minority languages at the European level. In this context, we hope that EC funding for the network of centres will be maintained during the reconfiguration of the Integrated Lifelong Learning Programme to fit the revised budget proposal agreed by the European Parliament and the Presidency on the 4 April 2006.

In addition, EARLALL fully supports the proposal set out in the strategy to establish a high level group on multilingualism and to organise a Ministerial conference on the subject. As far as the high level group is concerned, we urge to ensure that experts on language planning from regional and minority language speaking communities are invited onto the group.

Finally, it may also be worth inviting political representatives from regions where these minority and regional minority languages are spoken to the Ministerial conference on multilingualism that you are planning, particularly since in many Member States the responsibility for promoting language learning and linguistic diversity has been devolved to sub-national level.