Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment

2008/2225(INI) - 13/04/2007 - Non-legislative basic document

PURPOSE: to establish a **European survey to measure overall foreign language competence** in each Member State.

BACKGROUND: in its Communication "The European Indicator of Language Competence in 2005", the Commission outlined a detailed strategic approach for the creation of a European Survey on Language Competence as a means to collect the data necessary to construct a European level indicator. On this basis the Council concluded in May 2006 on a number of key issues concerning the European Indicator of Language Competence, and stressed that a survey should be carried out as soon as possible. The Council invited the Commission to set up the European Indicator of Language Competence Advisory Board of national experts to advise the Commission on the preparation and implementation of the survey. The work of the Board has formed an important input to the writing of this communication. The Council furthermore requested the Commission to report back to the Council on the progress of work. The present Communication answers this request.

CONTENT: the European survey aims to provide Member States, policy makers, teachers and practitioners with reliable and comparable data on foreign language competence in the European Union. It will provide knowledge about the multilingual capacities of young people, on where good practice and performance can be found, and on progress towards the objective of **improving foreign language learning**.

The survey will be implemented by the Commission advised by the Board in close cooperation with the Member States.

The main issues are as follows:

1. **Language Skills to be tested**: in the first round of data-gathering, tests will be developed on three language skills: reading comprehension; listening comprehension; and writing. The Commission will take the initiative to develop instruments to cover the fourth skill speaking in time for the subsequent surveys.
2. **Languages to be tested**: the European survey in each Member State should cover tests in the first and second of the most taught official European languages of the European Union, namely English, French, German, Spanish and Italian. The framework for testing will be made available for all countries that wish to ensure that tests other than in these five languages can be included in the first round of the survey as national options.
3. **The framework of reference**: the survey should be based on an instrument measuring a continuum of increasing levels of competences from level A1 to level B2 on the scales of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.
4. **Contextual data to be collected**: a questionnaire for students, teachers, head masters and governments will be developed, to gather contextual information that will allow analysis of possible factors which might impact on pupils' language competences.
5. **Population to be tested in the survey**: the "total population" of the survey, in statistical terms, should be the total number of pupils enrolled in the final year of lower secondary education (ISCED 2), or the second year of upper secondary education (ISCED 3), if a second foreign language is not taught at lower secondary education. The "target populations" are the pupils, enrolled in schools from the total population that are taught the language being tested.

6. **Testing instruments**: both computer based tests, using open source software, and paper and pencil tests should be made available to countries in the survey. The testing instrument should permit adaptive testing.
7. **Implementation costs of the survey**: the national cost of implementing the survey will depend on the final structure of the survey. The survey should use national experiences in order to find economies of scale. The international costs will be covered by the European Union.
8. **National organisational structures for implementing the survey**: Member States should take initiatives to ensure that the necessary organisational structures are available to permit the implementation of the survey and that responsibilities are defined from the very start. Most Member States have experiences from national surveys or participation in similar international surveys and could draw on such experiences.
9. **Implementation of the survey**: the Commission will take steps to develop the survey on language competence. Technical work should be launched in March 2007 in order to enable tests to be carried out in the beginning of 2009.

The Commission invites the Council to take note of the proposed framework of the survey as presented in this Communication, concerning the following items:

- skills to be tested
- the languages to be tested;
- the levels the CEFR to be used;
- the collection of contextual information;
- the target and the total population to be tested;
- the development of testing instruments, both computer based tests and paper and pencil tests;
- the implementation of the survey.

On that basis the Commission would be able to launch preparations for the survey. This will be done in close cooperation with the Board and with the Member States. Testing instruments should be developed with a view to the implementation of the survey in the beginning of 2009.