Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment

2008/2225(INI) - 24/03/2009 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 335 votes to 279, with 69 abstentions, a resolution on multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment.

The text adopted in plenary had been tabled by the PES, ALDE and Greens/EFA groups, in accordance with Rule 45(2) of the Parliament's Rules of Procedure, in the form of a proposal for a resolution to replace the proposal for a resolution contained in the own-initiative report tabled by the Committee on Culture and Education.

The resolution recalls that linguistic and cultural diversity has a significant impact on the daily life of citizens of the European Union and that the acquisition of a diverse range of language skills is considered to be of the greatest importance for all EU citizens, since it enables them to derive full economic, social and cultural benefit from freedom of movement within the Union and from the Union's relations with third countries.

Recognising linguistic parity: MEPs welcome the submission of the Commission Communication on multilingualism and the attention paid to it by the Council. They consider that Europe's linguistic diversity constitutes a major cultural asset and it would therefore be wrong for the European Union to restrict itself to a single main language. Therefore, they insist on the need for recognition of parity between the EU's official languages in all aspects of public activity.

A transversal issue: the resolution recalls that the importance of multilingualism is not confined to economic and social aspects and that attention must also be paid to cultural and scientific creation and transmission and to the importance of translation, both literary and technical, in the lives of citizens. It stresses that multilingualism is a transversal issue and calls on Member States to mainstream multilingualism in policies other than education, such as lifelong learning, social inclusion, employment, media and research. In this context, MEPs stress the vital importance of creating specific programmes to support translation and of setting up multilingual terminology database networks.

Language learning: the Parliament stresses the need, in Member States with more than one official language, to ensure full mutual intelligibility between those languages, especially in relation to senior citizens and to the legal system, health, administration and employment. It believes it necessary to create opportunities for foreign language learning in adulthood (through vocational and lifelong learning programmes) and emphasises the vital need to provide special attention and support at school to pupils who cannot be educated in their mother tongue. In this context, it regrets that the Commission has so far not instituted either a multi-annual programme or a European Agency on linguistic diversity and language learning.

Integration of immigrants: MEPs stress the importance of a full knowledge of the host state's official languages for the full integration of immigrants and their families. They call on Member States to provide immigrants with the necessary means to learn the language and culture of the host country, while allowing and encouraging them to maintain their own language.

Mobility: stressing the importance of promoting mobility and exchanges of language teachers and students, MEPs urge the Commission and the Member States to encourage professional mobility for teachers and cooperation between schools and different countries in carrying out technologically and

culturally innovative teaching projects. They suggest to the Member States that they examine the possibility of exchanges of teaching staff at different educational levels, with the aim of teaching different school subjects in different languages.

Minority languages: the Parliament encourages and supports the introduction of mother-tongue minority, local and foreign languages on a non-compulsory basis within school programmes and/or in the context of extracurricular activities open to the community. It reiterates its longstanding commitment to the promotion of language learning, multilingualism and linguistic diversity in the European Union, including regional and minority languages, as these are cultural assets that must be safeguarded and nurtured.

Media: the Parliament recommends and encourages the use of ICTs as an indispensable tool in language teaching. It also suggests that an adequate degree of multilingualism should be ensured in the media and in Internet content, and most particularly in the language policy of European and other European Union-linked sites and portals. It notes that the use of subtitles in television programmes will facilitate the learning and practice of EU languages and better understanding of the cultural background to audiovisual productions.

Support to help citizens: according to MEPs, sufficient support should be provided to help citizens of all age groups to develop and improve their language skills on an ongoing basis by giving them access to suitable language learning or other facilities for easier communication. In particular, the Commission and the Member States are called upon to promote measures facilitating language learning by people in disadvantaged situations, persons belonging to national minorities and migrants, in order to enable these persons to learn the language(s) of the host country and/or region in order to achieve social integration and combat social exclusion.

Narrowing the gap between multilingual and monolingual people: the resolution draws particular attention to possible dangers in the communication gap between individuals with different cultural backgrounds and the social divide between multilingual and monolingual people. It therefore urges the Commission and the Member States to take measures to narrow the gap between multilingual people, who have more opportunities in the European Union, and monolingual people, who are excluded from many opportunities.

Exchange of best practice: lastly, MEPs call on the Commission and the Member States to strengthen their efforts in enhancing cooperation between the Member States by making use of the open method of coordination, in order to facilitate the **exchange of experiences and good practices in the area of multilingualism**, taking account of the economic benefits, for example in multilingual undertakings.