Regional and less-used languages in Europe in the context of the enlargement and cultural diversity

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Michl EBNER (EPP-ED, I) on European regional and lesser-used languages - the languages of minorities in the EU - in the context of enlargement and cultural diversity. Pointing out that around 40 million people in the EU were estimated to use a regional or minority language regularly in addition to the official language(s) of their country, the report criticised the lack of EU legislation on such languages. A budget line introduced in the 1980s by Parliament to support these languages was currently a dead letter because the Commission had been unable to use the funds following a 1998 ruling by the Court of Justice that there was no appropriate legal basis for the policy. To overcome this problem, the committee called on the Intergovernmental Conference which would be discussing the draft constitution proposed by the Convention to include in the provisions on EU culture policy a reference to the promotion of linguistic diversity, including regional and minority languages as an expression of cultural diversity. MEPs also made a number of other recommendations to the Commission, calling for: a feasibility study on the creation of a European Agency for Linguistic Diversity and Language Learning; a multi-annual programme on linguistic diversity (including regional, minority and sign languages); and financial measures to promote acceptance of multilingualism, including co-existence between official and "co-official" languages. They added that the budgetary impact of these measures should be compatible with the ceiling of Heading 3 of the budget (internal policies) without a reprogramming of existing policies. In addition MEPs argued that since the EU had adopted a mainstreaming strategy in its funding policy, the goal of promoting and protecting regional and minority languages should be clearly stated as part of the objectives, "at least of all the language and content industry related programmes".