

# Promoting multilingualism and language learning in the European Union: the European Indicator of Language Competence

2005/2213(INI) - 01/08/2005 - Non-legislative basic document

**PURPOSE:** The establishment of a “European Indicator of Language Competence”.

**CONTENT:** In a diverse union, encompassing some 450 million people from distinct ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, the importance of acquiring language skills can not be over-estimated. In March 2002, the Heads of Government recognised the need for EU citizens to learn at least two EU languages at an early age and called for the establishment of a linguistic competence indicator. The realisation of this indicator is the purpose of this Commission proposal.

The Commission points out that there is, at present, a lack of accurate data on the actual language skills of people in the EU, hence the need for a reliable system to measure progress in language acquisition across the EU. The objective, therefore, of a language indicator would be to measure overall foreign language competencies in each of the EU’s Member States. In line with similar international indicators the Commission proposes that the data should be gathered at regular intervals – certainly within a three year cycle. The data for the indicator would be gathered from pupils at the end of compulsory education or training, by which stage all basic objectives should have been reached. The age proposed by the Commission is 15. Six levels of scales from the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages would be used as a benchmark. Students would be tested on at least two languages, which are not their mother tongue. The kind of skills tested would include reading, listening, speaking and writing. The tests would be complemented by questionnaires to teachers and pupils in order to gather contextual information. In addition, the Commission proposes the setting up a European Indicator of Language Competence Advisory Board. Its role would be to advise the Commission on tendering for testing instruments, to help assess the work of the contractor, offer advice on standards and technical protocols for data gathering activities in the Member States and to help monitor the results. The Commission suggests that the first meeting of the Advisory Board should take place before the end of 2005 to allow for tender co-ordination by Spring 2006. The first pilot exercise could be up and running by 2007.

To conclude, the Commission notes that the European Indicator of Language Competence has a value all of its own. It will allow the EU to better understand the multilingual capacities of young European in a way that is impossible to achieve using present methods. The Commission invites the Council to express its agreement with the proposal so that preparatory work can go ahead at an appropriate speed. Indeed Council support before the end of the year is vital if the time-table outlined above is to be respected.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS :

- Budget lines and headings: 15.02.02.02 Socrates and 15.03.01.02 Leonardo da Vinci. As from 2007 the budget line will correspond to the proposed programme “Life-long Learning”, which was presented as a Decision by the Commission in July 2004 (2004/0153(COD)).

- Period of application: The programme is due to begin in 2005 - it could become permanent but will last for at least three years.

- Operational expenses: The Commission has made an estimate for central costs based on the central costs for PISA. The appropriate resources have been approved within the budgets of Socrates and Leonardo da

Vinci for 2005 (later Lifelong Learning). The Commission suggests that similar sums be made available for the years 2006. From 2007 onwards the cost for running the indicator should be covered by the new Life Long Learning programme. As far as Member State estimate of resources is concerned, these will depend on the methodology finally chosen in consultation with representatives of the Member States. However, the functions set out will necessarily involve some costs. An indication of these can be gained by referring to the relevant national budgets for PISA.

- Technical and administrative assistance and support expenditure: EUR 0,594 million, of which EUR 0,054 for 2005 and EUR 0,108 million as from 2006 ;
- Human Resources: 2 x 0,25 posts for 2005 and 2 x 0,5 posts as from 2006.
- Administrative costs: EUR 0,516 million – or EUR 0,086 million per year.
- Overall total: EUR 1,110 million, including the cost of human resources.