Basic information

2008/2225(INI) INI - Own-initiative procedure	Procedure completed
Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment **Subject** 4.40.08 Language learning, regional and local languages	

Key players

European Parliament

Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
CULT Culture and Education	GRAÇA MOURA Vasco (PPE-DE)	07/05/2007

Committee for opinion	Rapporteur for opinion	Appointed
EMPL Employment and Social Affairs	SÓGOR Csaba (PPE-DE)	06/10/2008
AFCO Constitutional Affairs	The committee decided not to give an opinion.	

Council of the European Union

Council configuration	Meetings	Date
Education, Youth, Culture and Sport	2905	2008-11-20

European Commission

Commission DG	Commissioner
Education, Youth, Sport and Culture	ORBAN Leonard

Key events

Date	Event	Reference	Summary
13/04/2007	Non-legislative basic document published	COM(2007)0184	Summary
23/09/2008	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
20/11/2008	Resolution/conclusions adopted by Council		
17/02/2009	Vote in committee		Summary
24/02/2009	Committee report tabled for plenary	A6-0092/2009	

23/03/2009	Debate in Parliament		
24/03/2009	Decision by Parliament	T6-0162/2009	Summary
24/03/2009	Results of vote in Parliament		
24/03/2009	End of procedure in Parliament		

Technical information

Procedure reference	2008/2225(INI)
Procedure type	INI - Own-initiative procedure
Procedure subtype	Initiative
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 55-p4 Rules of Procedure EP 55
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	CULT/6/66772

Documentation gateway

European Parliament

Document type	Committee	Reference	Date	Summary
Committee draft report		PE416.668	15/12/2008	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE418.448	28/01/2009	
Committee opinion	EMPL	PE416.527	11/02/2009	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A6-0092/2009	24/02/2009	
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T6-0162/2009	24/03/2009	Summary

European Commission

Document type	Reference	Date	Summary
Non-legislative basic document	COM(2007)0184	13/04/2007	Summary
Supplementary non-legislative basic document	COM(2008)0566	18/09/2008	Summary
Document attached to the procedure	SEC(2008)2443	18/09/2008	Summary
Document attached to the procedure	SEC(2008)2444	18/09/2008	
Document attached to the procedure	SEC(2008)2445	18/09/2008	
Commission response to text adopted in plenary	SP(2009)3245	08/10/2009	

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.

Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment

2008/2225(INI) - 18/09/2008 - Supplementary non-legislative basic document

PURPOSE: to propose a framework for action to improve multilingualism in the European Union.

BACKGROUND: the EU has some 500 citizens, 27 Member States, 3 alphabets and 23 official languages. While this increased linguistic diversity is a source of benefit and richness, without adequate policies, it presents challenges: it can widen the communication gap between people and increase social divisions; it can also prevent EU citizens and companies from fully exploiting the opportunities offered by the single market and be an obstacle to effective cross-border administrative cooperation.

The 2005 Commission communication "*A new framework strategy for multilingualism*" (see INI/2006/2083) reaffirmed the value of linguistic diversity and revealed the need for a broader policy to promote multilingualism. That is the purpose of this Communication, relying on experience gained by the EU in this area and reintegrating multilingualism into the wider context of EU action in terms of social cohesion and prosperity.

CONTENT: the aim is to **minimise the obstacles that EU citizens and companies encounter** and to respond to the challenge set by the Union of "mother tongue plus two", defined by the Member States in Barcelona (i.e. enabling citizens to communicate in two languages in addition to their mother tongue). The measures proposed by the Commission to fulfil these objectives can be summarised as follows:

(1) Multilingualism for intercultural dialogue: in this area, the Commission proposes to:

- **value all languages** and to not distinguish between them: in order for this to happen, it is essential to, first of all, master the national language (s);
- **overcome language barriers in the local environment** by encouraging the provision of information in several languages through Points of Single Contact, which will be established by the end of 2009 under the Services Directive.

In order to fulfil these objectives, **the Commission** will: (i) run awareness-raising campaigns on language learning for intercultural dialogue; (ii) monitor citizens' language skills through the Language Indicators and Eurobarometer surveys; (iii) exchange good practices, train and network legal interpreters and translators and develop specific translation tools. As for **Member States**, they shall: (i) make efforts in order to have Points of Single Contact under the Services Directive working in several languages to facilitate cross-border provision of services; (ii) facilitate access to targeted courses of the host country's language(s) for non native speakers.

(2) Multilingualism for prosperity: in order to benefit from the linguistic diversity of the Union, the Commission proposes measures in the following areas:

- **languages and competitiveness**: better language skills could prevent 11% of exporting EU SMEs from losing business. Strategies must therefore be drawn up to improve language skills in companies;
- **languages and employability**: linguistic and intercultural skills increase the chances of obtaining a better job. Skill in several languages fosters creativity and innovation as well as worker mobility;

In this context, **the Commission** will: (i) promote mobility among students, apprentices, workers and young entrepreneurs; (ii) disseminate the results of an ongoing study on the link between language skills, creativity and innovation; (iii) create a permanent platform for exchange of best practice. As for **Member States**, they shall: (i) value and further develop language skills acquired outside the formal education system; (ii) encourage trade promotion organisations to develop specific programmes, in particular for SMEs, that include language training; (iii) supplement EU mobility schemes with specific support at national and local level.

(3) Lifelong learning: action at EU level shall focus on two aspects: offering opportunities to learn languages to as many citizens as possible and improving the quality of language learning:

- **more opportunities to learn more languages**: in nearly half of the Member States, students still do not have the opportunity to study two languages during compulsory schooling. An effort is therefore needed to motivate students and adapt teaching methods to their needs. Moreover, language learning outside formal education should make increased use of the media, new technologies, cultural and leisure activities. Efforts are also still needed to increase the number of languages taught, bearing in mind local conditions;
- **effective language teaching**: it is essential that teachers be allowed to spend time abroad in order for them to improve fluency in the languages they teach and hone their intercultural skills. The trend of the past five years has been to advance the introduction of language learning in primary education, while content and language integrated learning has gained ground, especially in secondary education. In many settings, languages are taught by non-language specialists who are not always fluent in the language they teach. Teaching staff should therefore receive better training and the teaching of a foreign language by a "national" of that language should be encouraged so as to ensure the quality and effectiveness of teaching.

In this context, **the Commission** will: (i) use EU programmes to support teaching of more languages through lifelong learning, teacher and student mobility, language teacher training, school partnerships, and research and development; (ii) draw up an inventory of best practice in language learning in the Member States. As for the **Member States**, they are invited to: (i) **provide genuine opportunities for all to master the national language(s) and two other languages**; (ii) make a wider range of languages available to learners to allow individual choice and match local needs; (iii) enhance the training of all teachers and others involved in language teaching; (iv) promote mobility among language teachers.

(4) The media, new technologies and translation: the media and new technologies can contribute to the promotion of intercultural dialogue and facilitate language learning. Moreover, human and automatic translation is an important part of multilingualism policy. For instance, the Internal Market Information System (IMI) is being developed to allow Member States to exchange information in all official EU languages. In terms of human translation, the Commission will explore ways of optimising synergies between initiatives and programmes supporting translation, with a view to facilitating access to our common cultural heritage and to support the development of a European public sphere.

In this context, **the Commission** will: (i) support subtitling and the circulation of European media productions; (ii) support projects developing and disseminating language and communication technologies; (iii) hold a conference on the role of translation in promoting intercultural dialogue; (iv) extend the scope of IMI. As for the **Member States**, they are invited to: (i) work with stakeholders to promote multilingualism through the media - notably by supporting film subtitling - and the circulation of cultural works in Europe; (ii) stimulate and encourage further development and use of new technologies supporting multilingualism.

(5) The external dimension of multilingualism: the core objective is to promote the teaching and learning of EU languages abroad through exchanges of expertise, good practice and joint stakeholder groups. Concrete steps in this direction have already been undertaken with non-EU countries.

In this context, **the Commission** will: (i) develop partnerships and enhance cooperation on multilingualism with non-EU countries; (ii) promote the teaching and learning of all EU languages abroad. As for the **Member States**, they are invited to further enhance networking and cooperation among relevant institutes to better promote EU languages abroad.

Implementation: multilingualism policy has a wide range of stakeholders, at local, regional, national and EU level. The Commission will pursue structured dialogue with five strands:

1) it will work together with Member States through the Open Method of Coordination within the Education and Training 2010 process and aim to reinforce multilingualism in the new strategic framework for cooperation after 2010. To this end, it will expand the remit of the Working Group on Languages to cover all aspects of multilingualism;

2) it will create a platform with the media, cultural organisations and other civil society stakeholders to discuss and exchange practices to promote multilingualism for intercultural dialogue;

3) it will set up a permanent framework for cooperation with the relevant stakeholders;

4) it will gather and disseminate good practice and systematically promote synergies. It will review progress regularly, for instance by holding an EU language conference every second year;

5) it will mainstream multilingualism in relevant EU policies.

Lastly, in partnership with Member States, the Commission will carry out a global review in **2012**.

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.

Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment

2008/2225(INI) - 18/09/2008 - Document attached to the procedure

This staff working paper accompanies the communication ‘Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment’. The strategies adopted in that communication go beyond the ‘mother tongue plus two’ recommendations of the Barcelona Council in that they extend the scope of multilingualism policy to new areas such as the internal market, enterprise and employment. While the communication sets out the new policy approach on multilingualism, this Commission staff working paper creates a framework by mapping action currently taken in this field by the various Commission departments, paying particular attention to cross-cutting aspects of multilingualism in the Commission, among stakeholder groups and among the general public.

Action currently taken in this field: the report presents an inventory of Community actions in the field of multilingualism. The 2005 communication "*A new framework strategy for multilingualism"* was the first step towards promoting multilingualism in a wider context. It reaffirmed the Commission’s commitment to multilingualism in the European Union and set out a number of specific actions for the Commission and for Member States. Commission actions focused mainly on the following policies and sectors: i) education and training; ii) translation; iii) interpretation; iv) research and information technologies.

Actions concerning education and training ranged from supporting language teaching and learning through Community programmes, making studies available (e.g. on language certification, early language learning, and the impact of shortages of language skills on the European economy) and developing the European language indicator. On translation and interpretation, actions including publishing a multilingual database (IATE), reinforcing initial training for translators and interpreters and launching a Languages portal on Europa. A complete overview of the actions set out, their state of implementation and main output is given in the Annex. This communication **extends the areas covered by the new policy approach on multilingualism to include**:

- culture,
- youth,
- media,
- employment and social affairs,
- single market,
- enterprise policy,
- health and consumer policy,
- justice and home affairs.

Establishing national plans for multilingualism was a new recommendation made in the 2005 communication. The Commission promoted a first exchange of practice in this field through the Working Group on Languages, bringing together Member States’ representatives, in 2006.The two last actions recommended by the 2005 communication — setting up a High Level Group on Multilingualism and holding the first-ever ministerial conference on multilingualism — paved the way for the current communication, to which this paper is attached.

Studies: the policy messages in the communication rely on the findings of a number of studies conducted in this field during the preparation phase, which are reviewed in this paper.

Online consultation: in drafting the communication, the Commission also consulted widely with policy makers, stakeholders and, most importantly, citizens. An online consultation held between 15 September and 15 November 2007, inviting organisations and individuals to give their views and

expectations concerning language policy, attracted 2 419 replies, which the Commission took into consideration. The findings of this survey, which forms part of a broad consultation process, have served as a basis for the new Commission Communication which this document accompanies.

The questionnaire covered six different areas, all closely linked to the ways and the extent to which languages are used and promoted within the EU, from learning provision, through social, cultural and economic aspects, to the functioning of the EU institutions. This document presents the main findings of the consultation. The report reveals that the high rate of participation, across such a vast geographical area and mainly by private individuals, clearly shows that the way languages are taught, treated and spoken in Europe is an issue particularly close to people's hearts.

Moreover, the significant proportion of respondents whose mother tongue is not one of the EU official languages provides evidence that multilingualism in the Europe of today is a reality whose complexity goes far beyond the management of 23 operational languages. More than 96% of the respondents agree that the linguistic diversity of the EU calls for special attention from European politicians. According to respondents, the most important factors for successful language learning are an **early start and direct experience of the country of the target language**. Most people think that the linguistic diversity of the EU is an asset to be safeguarded and wish to see it placed in a context going beyond economic and functional aspects, which recognises the identities and cultures represented in languages. Advocates of the cause of **regional and minority languages** think more respect could be shown to these languages especially in education and public services and would like to see the EU adopting a more protective role in this respect. The vast majority of respondents share the view that it is easier to do business abroad if you know the local language and that, therefore, companies have an interest in investing in the development of the language skills of their staff. The majority share the view that migrants should preserve their language of origin and treat their linguistic and cultural identity as a necessary basis for integrating into a linguistic and cultural community different from their own.