



Education and Culture DG

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

A REWARDING CHALLENGE
HOW THE MULTIPLICITY OF LANGUAGES
COULD STRENGTHEN EUROPE

Proposals from the Group of Intellectuals
for Intercultural Dialogue set up at
the initiative of the European Commission



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Brussels 2008

The President of the European Commission, Mr. José Manuel Durão Barroso, and the Commissioner for Multilingualism, Mr. Leonard Orban, asked that a group of personalities active in the area of culture be formed to advise them on the role multilingualism could play in regard to the intercultural dialogue and the mutual comprehension of the citizens of the European Union.

The Group, chaired by **Mr. Amin Maalouf**, writer, included :

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writer,

M. Tahar Ben Jelloun,
writer.

Three rounds of meetings were held in Brussels in June, October and December 2007. The report which follows was drafted by Mr. Maalouf draws on the ideas of all the members of the Group and is a reflection of the discussions that took place.

Linguistic diversity is a challenge for Europe, but, in our view, a rewarding challenge. To manage this diversity effectively, the European Union has to address issues which in today's world have become priority issues and can no longer be sidestepped if the future is not to be jeopardised. These issues are: how do we get so many different populations to live together in harmony, how do we give them a sense of a shared destiny and of belonging together? Should we be seeking to define a European identity? If so, can this identity take on board all our differences? Can it accommodate elements of non-European origin? Is respect for cultural differences compatible with the respect for fundamental values?

We have sought to tackle these very delicate issues frankly and dispassionately. Our brief was to reflect on multilingualism and what role it could play in European integration and the dialogue between different cultures. We accordingly opted to leave aside the most optimistic and the most alarmist of our presuppositions in order to take the most neutral observation as a starting point, viz. that in any human society linguistic, cultural, ethnic or religious diversity has both advantages and drawbacks, and is a source of enrichment but also a source of tension. The wise course is to recognise how complex this is and at the same time endeavour to maximise the positive effects and minimise the negative effects. This was how we approached our work between June and December 2007.

While being persuaded that such issues will continue to be debated for many generations to come, we nevertheless wanted to come up with some answers and propose to the European leaders and to our fellow citizens a possible approach. Throughout our meetings, we were moved by the firm conviction that the European project pursued since the end of the Second World War is one of the most promising the world has ever known; and, in particular, that efficient management of our linguistic, cultural and religious diversity would produce a reference model indispensable to a planet tragically afflicted by chaotic management of its own diversity.

The principles

Needless to say, language diversity entails constraints; it weighs on the running of the European Institutions and has its cost in terms of money and time. This cost could even become prohibitive if we wanted to give dozens of languages the rightful place which their speakers could legitimately wish for.

Against this background, there is therefore a strong temptation to tolerate a de facto situation in which a single language, English, would be dominant in the work of the European Institutions, in which two or three other languages would more or less manage to hold their own for a little longer, while the vast majority of our languages would have but a symbolic status and would hardly ever be used in joint meetings.

A turn of events of this kind is not desirable. It would be damaging to the economic and strategic interests of our continent and all our citizens irrespective of their mother tongue. It would also be contrary to the whole ethos of the European project, in more ways than one :

I – Respect for our linguistic diversity is not only to take due account of a cultural reality stemming from history. It is the very basis of the European ideal as it emerged from the ashes of the conflicts which marred the 19th century and the first half of the 20th.

While most of the European nations have been built on the platform of their language of identity, the European Union can only build on a platform of linguistic diversity. This, from our point of view, is particularly comforting. A common sense of belonging based on linguistic and cultural diversity is a powerful antidote against the various types of fanaticism towards which all too often the assertion of identity has slipped in Europe and elsewhere, in previous years as today.

Born of the will of its diverse peoples who have freely chosen to unite, the European Union has neither the intention nor the ability to obliterate their diversity. On the contrary, its mission historically is to preserve, harmonise, strike a balance and get the best out of this diversity, and we think that it is up to the task.

We even believe that it can offer the whole of humanity a model for an identity based on diversity.

II – Europe is today pondering its identity and how to define what that entails, keeping an open mind vis-à-vis itself and the rest of the world. Our belief is that the way to address this delicate issue in the most constructive, the most dispassionate and the healthiest way is by reflecting upon its own linguistic diversity.

Europe's identity is neither a blank page nor a pre-written and pre-printed page. It is a page which is in the process of being written. There is a common artistic, intellectual, material and moral heritage of untold richness, with few equivalents in the history of humanity, constructed by generation after generation and which deserves to be cherished, acknowledged and shared. Each and every European, wherever he or she may live, wherever he or she may come from, must be able to access this heritage and recognise it as his and hers, without any arrogance but with a legitimate sense of pride.

Our heritage is not, however, a closed catalogue. Every generation has a duty to enhance it in all areas without exception according to every person's sensitivity and as a function of the various influences which today come from all four corners of the earth.

Those entering Europe – and this could include people as diverse as immigrants, citizens of the new Member States, and young Europeans from all countries as they begin to discover life – must be constantly encouraged in this dual path, i.e. the desire to gain acquaintance with the common heritage and the desire to make their own contribution, too.

III – While it is indispensable for Europe to encourage the diversity of cultural expression, it is equally essential for it to assert the universality of essential values. These are two aspects of a single credo without which the European project would lose its meaning.

What constitutes the *raison d'être* of the European project as embarked upon in the aftermath of the Second

World War is the adherence to certain values. These values have often been formulated by European thinkers, but have to a large extent also been the result of a healthy reaction to bloody and disgraceful chapters in the history of Europe itself.

The European Union came into being against the devastation of war, against totalitarian ventures, against racism and anti-Semitism. The first steps in the construction of Europe also coincided with the end of the colonial era and heralded a change in the nature of relations between Europe and the rest of the world.

It is never easy to accurately or exhaustively pinpoint those values to which everyone should adhere if they are to be welcomed fully into the European fold. However, this lack of precision, which stems from legitimate intellectual caution, does not mean we have to resign ourselves to relativism when it comes to fundamental values. Upholding the dignity of human beings, men, women and children, sticking up for one's physical and moral integrity, halting the deterioration of our natural environment, rejecting all forms of humiliation and unjustified discrimination on the grounds of colour, religion, language, ethnic origin, gender, age, disability, etc. — are values on which there must be no compromise in the name of any specific cultural feature.

In a word, the European ideal is founded on two inseparable conditions: the universality of shared moral values and the diversity of cultural expression; in particular, linguistic diversity for historical reasons is a major component as well as being — as we will try to illustrate — a wonderful tool at the service of integration and harmonisation.

The way forward as we see it

In the light of these principles we have been working towards a solution which would be both ambitious and realistic. Ambitious in that the objective set is not to “delay the inevitable”, but on the contrary to anchor linguistic diversity in a sustainable way in the lives of the people of Europe — its citizens, its peoples and its institutions; ambitious because the solution should be able to function whatever the number of languages involved and also because the aim is not just to find a compromise which will not impede European integration, but to find a way which will allow significant headway to be made towards European integration.

At the same time we would like our approach to be realistic. Throughout our discussions we never lost sight of the fact that what we are seeking to do would be meaningless if the outcome did not produce proposals which could be applied on the ground. Obviously there are no simple solutions to such complex problems, but it is essential to map out where we want to go.

Our approach involves two ideas which are in fact the two sides of one proposal :

A The bilateral relations between the peoples of the European Union should hinge by way of priority on the languages of the two peoples involved rather than on another language.

This means that every European language should have, in each of the countries of the European Union, a substantial group of proficient and highly motivated speakers.

Numbers would of course vary substantially depending on the language concerned, but the number should everywhere be large enough for its speakers to be able to cater for all aspects — economic, political, cultural, etc. — of the « binary » relations between the two countries concerned.

B In order to allow cohorts of speakers to be formed, the European Union should advocate the idea of personal adoptive language.

The idea is that every European should be encouraged to freely choose a distinctive language, different from his or her language of identity, and also different from his or her language of international communication.

As we see it, the personal adoptive language would in no way be a second foreign language but, rather, a sort of second mother tongue.

Learned intensively, spoken and written fluently, it would be part and parcel of the school and university curriculum of every European citizen, and of everyone’s occupational curriculum.

Learning that language would go hand in hand with familiarity with the country/countries in which that language is used, along with the literature, culture, society and history linked with that language and its speakers.

Using this approach, we would hope to overcome the current rivalry between English and the other languages, a rivalry which results in the weakening of the other languages and which is also detrimental to the English language itself and its speakers.

By drawing a clear distinction, when the choice is made, between a language of international communication and a personal adoptive language, we would encourage Europeans to take two separate decisions when it comes to language learning, one dictated by the needs of the broadest possible communication, and the other guided by a whole host of personal reasons stemming from individual or family background, emotional ties, professional interest, cultural preferences, intellectual curiosity, to name but a few.

For each of these decisions the choice would be as open as possible.

As regards language of international communication, we are well aware that most people would today opt for English. However, some could well choose French, Spanish, Portuguese, Mandarin or any other language.

As regards a personal adoptive language, the choice is virtually unlimited. Needless to say, many Europeans

would go for one of the major emblematic languages which have played a leading role in the history of our continent; indeed these languages could thus stem their decline and begin a vigorous new lease of life.

At the same time, the languages which have fewer speakers, including those which are very much minority languages, would get an unprecedented boost. The logic of a policy based on a personal adoptive language is that the choice of language would be made in the same way as the choice of a profession. Achieving fluency in a comparatively rare language would give the individual an added advantage comparable to that of a rare specialisation in a leading-edge field. In the long run, all the languages would have their speakers, albeit in a very uneven, but still significant way.

And, in particular, in a lasting way. One of the big advantages of the approach we propose is that every European language would have a special place in the bilateral exchanges with all European partners, that none would be condemned to disappearance, none would be reduced to the status of local dialect. Accordingly, the native speakers of that language, however few they may be, would no longer have to feel belittled, excluded or overwhelmed.

To neglect a language is to run the risk of seeing its speakers becoming disenchanted with the European project. People cannot be expected to be wholeheartedly behind Europe unless they feel that their specific culture, and primarily their language, is fully respected and that the integration of their country in the European Union contributes to the flourishing of their language and culture rather than marginalising them. So many of the crises we have witnessed in Europe and elsewhere stem from the fact that a community has sometime in the past felt that its language was not respected; we have to remain careful to head off such feelings from emerging in the years and decades ahead, for they would undermine European cohesion.

Every language is the product of a unique historical experience, each is the carrier of a memory, a literary heritage, a specific skill, and is the legitimate basis of cultural identity. Languages are not interchangeable, none is dispensable, none is superfluous. To preserve all the languages of our heritage, including the ancestral European languages such as Latin and ancient Greek; to encourage, even for languages which are very much minority languages, their development in the rest of the continent, is inseparable from the very idea of a Europe of peace, culture, universality and prosperity.

What do we expect to achieve?

True to the ideals which give modern Europe its *raison d'être*, the approach we advocate should also have an impact on the quality of life of the citizens of Europe, on the quality of relationships between the European nations, on the relations of our continent with the rest of the world, on the harmonious coexistence of cultures in our societies, on the smooth running of the Community institutions, and, more generally, on the pursuit and consolidation of European integration.

- 1 For the people of Europe, old and young alike, intensive and in-depth knowledge of a language and all the culture that it transmits is a major factor of fulfilment.

In a civilisation in which communication is becoming so important and in which there is an increasing amount of free time, to add to one's existence this exploration of another linguistic and cultural universe can only bring enormous professional, intellectual and emotional satisfactions.

Moreover, mastering a personal adoptive language and familiarising oneself with the universe of its speakers should be conducive to a more outward-looking attitude to the world and others, and strengthen the sense of belonging to Europe ; not at the expense of belonging to one's country or culture of origin, but in addition to it, particularly as, in his or her relations with the speakers of the personal adoptive language, a European citizen would naturally tend to extend to them knowledge of their own country and their own culture.

From the professional point of view, the pointers would all seem to indicate that English will in the future be increasingly needed, but at the same time less and less sufficient on its own. While in certain areas of activity, English is already virtually essential, the inclusion in one's curriculum vitae of a language which might already have been mentioned by all the other candidates does not give the applicant any additional asset in the quest for a job, or in pursuing an activity. This is already the case to a very large extent today and will be increasingly so in the future. People will have to have another string to their bows to stress their distinctiveness, to mark out their specific « domain », and thus enhance their profile in the employment market; to do that, they will have to have another language, their own language, their distinctive language, not as ordinary as English, and at the same time different from the one they already share with their compatriots.

For those Europeans whose mother tongue has a dominant place in the world, and we think immediately of the British, acquiring a personal adoptive language is probably even more vital than for others, given that the temptation to remain ensconced in monolingualism is probably much stronger than elsewhere. Without a special effort to promote, from the very earliest age, the intensive learning of an additional language, the advantage which English speakers today have would rapidly become eroded, and the globalisation of their mother tongue would have an adverse effect on their competitiveness at both individual and collective levels. This paradoxical pattern of events was stressed in no uncertain terms in a recent study commissioned by the British Council.¹

It might perhaps be worth stressing here that some Europeans should obviously choose English as their personal adoptive language, following the example of Joseph Conrad who was of Polish mother tongue, had French as a language of international communication, and became one of the greatest writers of the English language. It is important for English to retain and consolidate the eminent place it holds as a language of culture rather than being straitjacketed in the role of instrument of global communication, a flattering but detractive role, and one which is potentially a factor of impoverishment.

¹ English Next, par David Graddol, 2006.

2 By underlining the bilateral nature of linguistic relations between the different countries, our approach should have a positive impact on the quality of relations between Europeans, individuals and peoples alike.

We feel that this policy would be considerably enhanced if everyone could express themselves in a language they are perfectly fluent in, either their own or that of their partner, rather than, as so often happens nowadays, through the medium of a third language in which they lack that fluency. Recent studies indeed tend to show that business negotiations arrive at a successful outcome far more frequently when each of the partners feels free to express himself in his own language.

By quality of relations, we mean at the same time the effectiveness of the exchanges, the subtlety of the human contacts, and also the intensity and solidity of people-to-people relations within our vast European family.

Europe has arisen from several centuries of conflict between its nations and primarily between neighbours. Accordingly, to learn the language of a partner who happens to be a former enemy is very important, both for its symbolic value as well as for its practical advantages.

If there is to be greater cohesion between the countries of the European Union, it is not enough for them to simply all belong to the same entity, the bilateral links between each country and each partner must be cemented by powerful ties based in particular on the special place occupied, for the citizens of each country, by the language of the other.

Despite the efforts of certain leading founder countries, such as France and Germany, we are witnessing an erosion of the level of knowledge of the neighbour's language in favour of a language of international communication, which is deemed to be more useful. If we are to reverse this seemingly inexorable trend we have to make a clean break with the traditional logic behind language learning, by making a clear distinction between the two choices to be made, one depending on the international status of a language, and the other, that of the personal adoptive language, based on completely different criteria which are very varied and very subjective. By allowing people not to have to choose between utilitarian considerations and cultural affinity, we would restore a powerful motivation to learn every European language, which might be that of a distant country, but could just as well be that of the neighbour.

3 For relations between Europe and the rest of the world the advantages of such an approach would be just as great.

While it is likely that most of our fellow citizens would select as their personal adoptive language that of another country of the European Union, it is also likely that many of them would opt for languages from other continents, ideally the languages of the big Asian countries which have become major economic partners.

The arguments developed on the subject of Europe could in part be transposed to the planet in its entirety. The fact that relations with different countries are essentially managed by Europeans who have thoroughly studied the language of the country concerned, along with its culture, its society, its history, its laws, its institutions, is a desirable development which can only bring advantages for the European Union at all levels. One economist judiciously remarked that a man speaking only one international language could always buy what he wanted anywhere in the world; but if that man wanted to sell rather than buy then it would be better for him to know the language of the prospective purchaser. The requirement may not be an imperative one, but there is no doubt that those who have learned the languages of their business partners would have a decisive advantage over those who had not learned them.

Europe has every interest in having significant cohorts of speakers for all the world's languages. The strategy that we are proposing should be conducive to this. As we see it, the choice of a personal adoptive language should, we repeat, be as wide-ranging as possible and as free as possible. No language should be overlooked, for every one opens professional, cultural or other horizons, to citizens, to countries and to the whole continent.

4 Our group long pondered the problem of preventing cultural diversity from having a negative impact on harmonious coexistence within European societies.

Immigration is occupying an ever bigger place in the political, economic, social and intellectual life of our continent. We could say in this regard what we said on the subject of European diversity in general, i.e. that it is simultaneously a source of enrichment but also a source of tension, and that a wise policy is one which while recognising the full complexity of the issue would endeavour to make the utmost of the advantages and play down the drawbacks. We feel that the approach we are proposing to manage linguistic diversity could contribute significantly to this twofold objective.

For immigrants, the personal adoptive language should in the normal run of events be that of the country in which they have chosen to live. A thorough knowledge of the national language and the culture it carries with it is essential if they are to integrate into the host society and play their part in economic, social, intellectual, artistic and political life. For immigrants to Europe, it is also a factor of adhesion to Europe in general, its Community project, its cultural heritage and its fundamental values.

In parallel with this and, we might say, in reciprocal fashion, it is vital for the countries of Europe to understand how important it is for every immigrant or person originating from immigration, to maintain knowledge of their own language of origin. A young person who loses the language of his ancestors also loses the ability to communicate effortlessly with his parents and that is a factor of social dysfunctioning which can lead to violence.

Excessive assertion of identity often stems from a feeling of guilt in relation to one's culture of origin, a guilt which is sometimes expressed by exacerbated religion-based reactions. To describe it differently, the immigrant or a person whose origins lie in immigration and is able to speak his mother tongue and would be able to teach it to his children, knowing that his language and culture of origin are respected in the host society, would have less of a need to assuage his thirst for identity in another way.

To allow migrants, European and non-European alike, to gain access easily to their language of origin and allow them to maintain what we could term their linguistic and cultural dignity, to us once again seems a powerful antidote against fanaticism. A sense of belonging, in the religious and linguistic sense, is patently one of the most powerful components of identity. But the two facets function differently and sometimes vie with one another. Belonging in the religious sense is exclusive, belonging in the linguistic sense is not. We believe that it is healthy to dissociate these two powerful factors of identity, to develop linguistic and cultural belonging, not at the expense of religion but at the expense of identity-oriented use of religion, and could help to reduce tension in our European societies as in the rest of the world.

Just as immigrants would be encouraged to fully adopt the language of the host country and the culture it carries, it would be fair and useful for the immigrants' languages of identity to also be part of the languages which Europeans themselves would be encouraged to adopt. We have to gradually get out of this one-way relationship in which people from elsewhere are getting better and better at learning European languages, while very few Europeans take the trouble to learn the languages of the immigrants. The latter need to feel that their languages, their literature, their cultures are known and appreciated by the societies in which they live, and we feel that the approach based on the « personal adoptive language » could help to dispel this malaise.

- 5 Our reflection group did not set out expressly to examine the effects of language diversity on the functioning of the Community institutions. However, we feel that by stressing the bilateral language-to-language relations, the approach we advocate could help to rationalise the management of language diversity within the Union, including as regards the day-to-day running of the institutions.

Rather than be confronted with a huge tangle which is virtually impossible to unravel, consisting of dozens of languages generating hundreds of possible connections, and inevitably generating countless recriminations, we would thus be dealing with pairs of languages associated with one other on the ground, the relationships between them being above all managed by their speakers, i.e. by the people most attached to the two languages simultaneously, and best qualified to strengthen the ties between the two peoples concerned.

There is a case for having, for each pair of countries, a bilateral and bilingual organisation — an institution, a foundation, an association, or simply a committee — set up at the initiative of the political leaders or a group of citizens with a strong attachment to both countries, to their languages and to their cultures. This organisation would take initiatives to develop mutual knowledge, would endeavour to get national, regional or municipal authorities, schools and universities, the business sector, associations of teachers, translators, writers or publishers, celebrities, active citizens, etc. interested in its projects.

Amongst the wide range of tasks which could be assigned to these bilateral organisations, one of the most important would be to ensure that the language of each country is taught to a certain number of people in the partner country, that school and university courses include extended stays in the other country, that institutions and companies, both public and private, support those who were to choose these languages and offer them placements and then jobs. Any number of twinning operations between towns, districts and even villages, as well as between teaching establishments, sports associations, between publishers, etc. could also be envisaged.

Each of these bilateral organisations would focus its efforts on strengthening the links between the speakers of the two languages it is seeking to pair up. Needless to say, every country in the Union should also have similar structures reaching out with the same commitment to all the other countries. The outcome sought would be to achieve a sort of “network” covering the whole of Europe and which would strengthen the sense of community while leaving each one’s sense of identity intact.

In this picture, the role of the Community institutions would be to help to design the general framework within which these bilateral linguistic relations would be established where they do not at present exist, and if need be to harmonise them; to centralise information on each « language pair », particularly in order to extend the advantage of one party’s experience to the other and generalise the methods which produce results, while at the same time cautioning against those which fail to live up to expectations. In some cases, particularly that of relations between two essentially minority languages, the Community institutions could provide financial assistance for teaching and teacher training programmes, school and university exchanges, translation, etc. We nevertheless think that generally speaking this assistance should be phased down once the system is run in, gets up to speed and becomes self-sustaining.

The implications

We have not in this report sought to list the measures to be taken to implement the approach we advocate. At this stage, the point was to map out a direction and try to convince our fellow citizens and our leaders of its relevance.

We nevertheless deemed it necessary to devote much of our work to the practical implications of our recommendations, in order to be sure that, while setting out to be ambitious and innovative, they remain perfectly rational and realistic; that it would be possible to put them into practice without major problems, without substantial delay and without undue cost; and that they would clearly work to the advantage of every country, every culture, and every citizen, irrespective of their language, and whatever their expectations concerning the future of Europe. This prompts us to make the following comments:

A There is no doubt that by wanting everyone to be encouraged to freely choose their personal adoptive language we are asserting a principle which cannot be followed up instantaneously in every town, every village and for every language. As always with such principles, the point of ours is to mark out a path, to set an objective towards which we work as best we can. The important idea here is that it is not only “at the top” that the two or three foreign languages a person might have the opportunity of learning should be determined; this decision should be taken at “grassroots” level, i.e. in schools and also, increasingly, by the citizens themselves.

B One of the advantages of our approach is that it does not, in order to be put into practice, need to wait for the national or Community decision makers to decide. Everyone can decide to choose their personal adoptive language; every country, every town, every municipality, every company, every teaching establishment, can take appropriate initiatives.

A school, for instance, could decide to introduce into its syllabus an “unexpected” language, which is distinctive and is not among those usually taught. This could be done as part of an exchange with a school in the country of the language chosen. The venture need not be extensive or spectacular. Take, for example, the case of a Swedish town twinned with a Portuguese town, or that of an Italian town twinned with a Polish town. The municipal authorities could support the creation of two parallel school connections, each adopting the language of the other. The classes are twinned and could thus undertake protracted stays, year after year, in the corresponding country, take part in joint activities, build up relationships. These experiences might involve only a few dozen pupils at a time, but if they were to be more widespread, if there were hundreds and thousands of initiatives of this kind - between countries, regions, towns, districts, institutions, companies, associations, etc. - very considerable momentum would quickly build up.

C Having said that, we remain convinced that our approach to the language issue could never have the full impact desired without firm commitment from Europe’s leaders.

As the point is to map out a route, determine the overall strategy within which the range of initiatives would emerge, it is important for a decision to be taken at the highest level, and ideally in 2008, which is the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue.

The European Union has already committed itself to building up a knowledge-based society, which is diverse and harmonious, competitive and internationally outward-looking, and to promote the knowledge of languages; it has amongst other things expressed the wish that two foreign languages be taught in every country at as early an age as possible. Within this perspective, our reflection group aimed at an approach which would take account of the complexity of the language issue at the start of the 21st century, in the hope of paving the way for the achievement of these aims, to enhance their positive impact for every citizen and every community, and to sustainably anchor linguistic diversity as an emblematic and practical platform for European integration.

D The teaching of a wide range of foreign languages in countries which have no tradition of doing so can of course raise logistic, financial and human problems, particularly in terms of training up a sufficient number of teachers to an appropriate level, adapting schools to the new requirements, and the organisation of time. These obstacles are nevertheless far easier to overcome with modern technological resources. It is not therefore unrealistic to imagine courses online given by a single teacher to pupils located in different places, offering the possibility for pupils to ask that teacher questions directly on their screens. In technical terms, it is something that is perfectly feasible today and it could even multiply contacts between the speakers of any given personal adoptive language much better than could be achieved through a traditional language course.

It no doubt presupposes standardisation of timetables so that the same segments can be devoted to language learning in several countries at the same time. Within these timetables, every European student would connect to his own course in Greek, Dutch, Romanian, Estonian, etc. We are convinced that these common timetables would themselves generate their own eminently advantageous dynamic in terms of knowledge, individual fulfilment, and citizenship, particularly if they gradually spread across the whole of Europe. Indeed, as we see it, this is a striking example of how Community decisions in this area could make it easier to put in place the new approach; equally, it is an illustration of the impact that a new language strategy could have on consolidating the European project in the general mindset.

E There is no doubt that the free choice of a personal adoptive language cannot always be made on a once-and-for-all basis. It will generally be made, in the case of young children, by parents and school rather than by the pupils themselves; and sometimes this choice will be called into question at some other stage in life. But the benefit accrued during the early years will remain and will often have paved the way in the mindset for the learning of another language. Moreover, the personal adoptive language need not always be chosen during childhood. The choice can be taken at any age, including retirement, which today offers tens of millions of Europeans the prospect of a long period of free time which they could usefully fill with enthusiastic engagement with another language, another country, another people, another culture.

If the approach we advocate were to be adopted, we would obviously have to go into the details of how to implement it in the coming years. This process will be doubly pedagogical, entailing the need to patiently get the message across concerning the bilateral approach to language relations and the concept of personal adoptive language, and thereafter to get to grips with the practicalities of what it implies, particularly in the area of teaching.

This would be a major project for Europe but we are convinced that it is essential to commit ourselves to it without delay and that its material and moral outcomes will amply justify the efforts made. To come back specifically to questions put to our reflexion group, our response is clear: judicious and imaginative management of linguistic diversity can indeed boost European integration, promote citizenship and the feeling of belonging to the European Union. It can also contribute significantly to the dialogue between cultures and their harmonious coexistence, both in relation to the rest of the world and within our own societies. It could even give European integration fresh impetus and a new lease of life.

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