



Education and Culture DG

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Outcomes of the European Commission's  
public consultation on multilingualism  
14 September – 15 November 2007







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## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Context

Greater mobility within the Union's borders, migration flows from third countries and globalisation have all brought an increasing number of languages into the everyday lives of citizens and companies. The European Commission is committed to promoting language learning and linguistic diversity, in accordance with the European Union's founding principles. Between 14 September and 15 November 2007, it carried out a public consultation to solicit citizens' views and expectations in relation to language policy. The findings of this survey, which forms part of a broad consultation process, will serve as a basis for a new Commission Communication to be published late in 2008. The purpose of that document will be to tackle the issue of the place and role of languages in an increasingly multilingual Europe.

### Methodology

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 provisions, through social, cultural and economic aspects, to the functioning of the EU institutions. The sixteen questions of the survey either called for free comments or proposed a set of pre-formulated answers. Some were a mixture of both.

This document presents the main findings of the consultation. While it was possible to compile statistics for all the closed questions, the responses to the open questions were analysed at length and clustered according to recurrent themes to establish trends and correlations. These free comments also offered an insight into the reasons behind the choice of the various options by the respondents.

### Participation

The consultation was open to any interested parties both within and beyond the boundaries of the Union. The number of finalised responses received amounted to 2,419, in all official languages of the EU.

Awareness-raising about the survey took the form of notices on various web pages of the Europa site, references in the press and in public speeches, as well as direct notification to a large number of individuals, organisations and networks that had formerly expressed their interest in European policies. As no information was gathered on how the participants had learnt about the consultation, it is difficult to estimate the proportion of respondents who were either 'spontaneous' visitors to the Europa site or readers of the European press compared with the proportion of those who had been contacted directly. It is worth bearing in mind, however, that contributions came from individuals and organisations interested in European policies in general and in the place and roles attributed to languages in the EU in particular. Despite the relatively high number of participants, the outcomes of this consultation should therefore by no means be interpreted as those of a public opinion poll, but rather as the views of citizens who have opted to enter into a dialogue with the European Commission about the way they would like to see the European Union in the future.

## An outstanding response rate

The 2,419 finalised contributions to the survey on multilingualism represent an outstanding participation rate for public consultations on European policies, which on average receive between 200 and 500 responses.

Another striking feature of the participation is the prevalence of individual respondents over people responding on behalf of their organisations. There is not one EU, EFTA or candidate country missing from the broad range of countries represented by the respondents; moreover, a significant amount of contributions were received from other continents.

The consultation was available in 22 official EU languages, but altogether the participants represented 57 mother tongues, including numerous regional and minority languages as well as those spoken in countries outside the EU.

This 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. It sets out a context calling for answers at levels other than the merely functional one, covering a much wider spectrum of languages than those enjoying official status.

### In a nutshell: what do respondents to the consultation think about languages?

- More than 96% of the respondents agree that the linguistic diversity of the EU calls for special attention from European politicians and that language skills are important both for their everyday and their professional life.
- 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 could be done for the respect of these languages especially within education and public services and would like to see the EU adopting a more protective role in this respect.
- Most respondents would like to see the media promoting an intercultural society model, valuing linguistic and cultural identity, and focussing on tolerance, not confrontation.
- The vast majority of respondents share the view that it is easier to do business abroad with knowledge of the local language and that companies have therefore 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.
- Most people find that the costs related to working in 23 official languages are justified or should even be increased.













































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