



High Level Group on Multilingualism
FINAL REPORT
Brief version

Towards a comprehensive strategy for multilingualism in the European Union

Multilingualism has been part of Community policy, legislation and practices from the time of the Treaties of Rome. In the early days, it was exclusively associated with the language regime put in place for the European institutions, including their contacts with authorities and citizens in the Member States. The very first regulation adopted by the Council of the European Economic Community (15 April 1958) confirmed the equality of the official state languages of the Member States and their status as official and working languages of the European institutions. This principle was retained at each accession; it can only be changed by a unanimous vote of the Council.

Following the Maastricht Treaty (1992), the promotion of language learning and of individual multilingualism, combined with an emphasis on linguistic diversity, became a corner stone of the EU's educational policy; whereas in the nineties Community support was focused on the learning of the official languages, the first decade of the new century has seen the introduction of an inclusive language education policy, seeking to promote the learning of all languages, including regional or minority, migrant, and major world languages.

For many years, the EU did not seek to establish a coherent and comprehensive framework for its various regulations, policies, practices and initiatives regarding multilingualism. It was the decision of President José Manuel Barroso to make "Multilingualism" part of the portfolio of one of the Commission members and to assign him responsibility for multilingualism in education, culture, interpretation, translation, and publications that set the signal for the development of a coherent and comprehensive EU language policy. The drive towards the development of such a policy gained considerable momentum when, on 1 January 2007, "Multilingualism" was made a separate portfolio, assigned to one of the new Commissioners, Mr Leonard Orban.

The fact that multilingualism has been made an EU policy area in its own right is a clear indication of a heightened awareness on the part of the Commission of the increasing importance of the multilingual challenge for the European project. As a result of enlargement, the Single Market and increased mobility within the EU, the revival of the regions, the advent of the knowledge society, migration into the EU, and globalisation, this multilingual challenge has reached a completely new dimension – in terms of size, complexity, and policy relevance. Nowhere is this more clearly visible than in interlingual and intercultural communication. Whereas this was formerly primarily seen in terms of interpersonal exchanges between people residing in different Member States, practically all EU Member States have by now become multilingual and multicultural societies themselves, requiring strategies at local / regional / Member State level for facilitating communication across language and cultural boundaries. Today, no fewer than 450 different languages are spoken and used on the territories of the Member States.

The Group regards the creation of a portfolio for multilingualism as being more than the uniting, under one Commissioner, of all Commission services dealing with multilingualism in one way or another, and also more than an acknowledgement of the interdependence of the various multilingual activities. Ultimately, it highlights the horizontal nature of the issue of multilingualism, i.e. its relevance to a wide range of policy areas, especially policy areas at the heart of the Lisbon agenda.

The remit of the High Level Group of Multilingualism (HLGM)

The HLGM, set up by Commission decision on 20 September 2006, its rationale and remit are directly related to the Commission's drive towards a new comprehensive strategy for multilingualism. Its creation was first announced in the Commission's Communication *A new framework strategy for multilingualism* (November 2005). The Group was given the general remit "to provide support and advice in developing initiatives, as well as fresh impetus and ideas for a comprehensive approach to multilingualism in the European Union". Its specific task was "to bring about an exchange of ideas, experience and good practice in the field of multilingualism and make recommendations to the Commission for actions in this domain". In line with its general and specific remits, the Group sought to develop ideas relevant to policies and practices across the Union, as well as to make recommendations for concrete actions at Community level.

This Report aligns the outcomes of the Group's reflections with Commissioner Orban's political agenda, which centres around three objectives: (i) economic competitiveness, growth, and better jobs; (ii) lifelong learning, intercultural dialogue, and; (iii) creation of a space for European political dialogue, and communication with citizens. As becomes clear from this summary, the two broad strands of multilingualism considered by the Group - language learning / multilingual competence, and language mediation (translation and interpreting in their various forms) - cut right across the three objectives, just as they are themselves closely interrelated.

The multilingual challenge in Europe has evoked diverse responses, and contradictory trends in thought and behaviour. Many of these opposing responses and trends can be explained by the fact that languages have different roles and perform different functions. Languages are a means of communication, but they are also an important aspect of personal, social, and cultural identity – and different people and groups attach greater importance to one specific function than to others. However, although these different functions are interrelated, it is important not to get them mixed up when dealing with concrete policy issues.

Lifelong language learning – raising awareness and motivation

Raising awareness of the benefits of language learning and multilingual competence

The recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on key competences for lifelong learning of December 2006 identifies "communication in foreign languages" as one of eight key competences "necessary for personal fulfilment, active citizenship, social cohesion and employability in a knowledge society". In addition, the HLGM would like to draw attention to the intercultural value of and the cognitive benefits attached to language learning. Language learning supports attention, perception, memory, concentration, concept formation, critical thinking, problem solving, and the ability to work in teams. Moreover, these benefits for the individual are of major importance for the wellbeing of society at all levels.

While these arguments in favour of language learning are not new, they are not sufficiently well known among parents, young people, organisations active in the fields of education and culture, decision-makers and policy-makers. It is, therefore, important to launch information campaigns among these groups, especially at local, regional and Member State level. The Commission should take the initiative and consult with Member States and stakeholder groups at all levels about the best ways forward.

As regards language learning in formal educational settings, it is important that education systems in Member States should ensure the teaching / learning of two languages in addition to the primary language of instruction from primary to the end of secondary education, including vocational training, and that language learning should be encouraged in tertiary and adult education.

Enhancing motivation

Motivation is a key, if not the key, to successful language learning. Enhancing learner motivation is *the* crucial element in achieving the desired breakthrough in language learning across Europe. It is here that schools and teachers play a role of paramount importance. Positive experience in language learning at school is likely to encourage people to take up and continue language learning at a later stage. However, there is a limit as to what can be expected of formal education, and because of this additional learning opportunities should be created and made available.

- Language learning should be made part of leisure activities, such as sports.
- Regarding children and young people at school age, language learning should also become a matter of extracurricular and out-of-school activities. School partnerships, email tandems, and language weekends are just a few activities known to be effective in this respect. Moreover, the range of languages offered can be extended this way. The potential for language learning of virtual border-transcending communities (“chats”) should be further explored.
- Efforts have to be made to target adult learners, especially in the wider society. This is all the more important as the family – including grand-parents – is known to be a major factor in motivating children to learn languages.
- As a Finnish experience shows, the media can motivate people on a large scale to learn languages in ways that are beyond the methods of formal education (“edutainment”). The Finnish experience also indicates the different roles that different media can play in language learning outside formal educational settings. While TV programmes and series may stir up interest in other cultures as well as motivation to learn languages or to take up previously learnt languages again, the Internet can provide support for language learning through websites featuring learning materials, webquest activities, activity books, educational portals etc.
- TV programmes with sub-titles can be effective tools for language learning, in that they can promote functional literacy and receptive multilingualism, especially as they present viewers / listeners with a given language as used by speakers of that language. Because of that, TV companies which normally use dubbing should be encouraged to offer sub-titling in addition to traditional dubbing, so that viewers have a choice.
- The remarkable revival of regional languages in Europe provides evidence of the fact that people are willing to learn languages when there is clear motivation. Research should be undertaken into language learning in regions of this kind to explore ways in which successful practice in these regions can be brought to bear on other learning environments.

Two aspects of learner motivation deserve special attention. (i) A distinction should be made between initiating motivation and sustaining motivation, the latter being particularly important for the lifelong learning paradigm. (ii) The emphasis should be on motivating people to learn languages rather than one language, and people should be encouraged to develop their own individual language profiles.

Recommendations

- 1) Community action programmes such as the Youth in Action Programme, the Europe for Citizens Programme, the Culture Programme and exchanges under Lifelong Learning Programme should be further developed with a view to expanding contact with, and extracurricular learning of other languages.
- 2) The Commission should encourage the creation of local / regional language learning networks in Member States, comprised of a variety of providers, and support their collaboration at European level.
- 3) The Commission should support projects designed to make successful strategies for initiating and sustaining learner motivation known to stakeholders across Europe, and to promote the development of innovative strategies.
- 4) The Commission and Member States should explore the possibility of providing incentives for the production of so-called edutainment programmes designed to arouse interest in other languages and cultures. One such possibility would be an annual award for film/media students for ideas which raise awareness of the value of multilingualism.

Languages for intercultural dialogue and social cohesion

Learning other languages has an intercultural value. In addition to promoting openness to other people's cultures and attitudes, language education can raise awareness of one's own culture and values, and stimulate the willingness and enhance the ability to communicate and co-operate with people across cultural boundaries.

The Group reflected on the challenges and opportunities resulting from the presence of an increasing number of different languages and cultures within each Member State in a number of contexts.

Language learning in the context of migration

The Finnish edutainment experience illustrates why the media could and should play a major role in pulling down barriers between different communities living in our societies, and this in both directions. Migrants outside education might be encouraged to set aside stereotypes and learn the language of the host country, while citizens of the host country could be brought to appreciate the culture of a given migrant community to the extent that they become motivated to learn the language of that community.

All too often, migrants are only seen as a problem – migrant children underperforming at school or adult migrants with only a minimal command of the language of the host country. What is often overlooked is the fact that migrants constitute a valuable language resource. By giving value to migrant languages in our midst, we may well enhance migrants' motivation to learn the language of the host community, and – indeed – other languages, and enable them to become competent mediators between different cultures.

Very often, young second- and third-generation migrants possess well-developed aural/oral skills in their heritage or community languages, but cannot read and write them. Many of them are highly motivated to become literate in these languages. Schools, higher and adult education institutions should make it their business to provide special learning opportunities for these target groups. This would be sound investment, as these people could help to establish economic contacts in their countries of origin, and could be brought to play an active role in intercultural dialogue and integration programmes for newly arrived immigrants.

Community and legal / court translation and interpreting

As a result of increased trans-European mobility and migration into the Union, there has been a sharp rise in demand for legal and court interpreting and translation as well as for community / public service interpreting and translation, particularly at local and regional level. Member States and authorities at local and regional level have to live up to their responsibilities in this respect.

Literary translation

Appreciation, on the part the citizen, of the wealth of Europe's culture, of its diversity and commonality is of direct relevance to the European project. The Group welcomed the fact that the European Commission is continuing to fund the translation of European literary works in the Culture 2007 Programme. Further initiatives undertaken by public, non-governmental, and private organisations would be welcome.

Recommendations

- (1) European projects designed to promote intercultural dialogue should, whenever possible, give proper weight to aspects of multilingualism.
- (2) The European Commission should encourage the launch of European projects for the joint development of higher education programmes in legal / court translation / interpretation and community translation / interpretation. Projects should focus on the identification of the competences required in carrying out the respective professions.
- (3) The Council of Europe has made the integration of migrants - both schoolchildren and adults - a priority of its activities in the field of languages in education. Building on existing consultation and contacts with the Council of Europe, the Commission should explore the possibility of the launch of a joint initiative aimed at raising awareness among policy- and decision-makers on issues linked to the linguistic integration of migrants.
- (4) The EU should establish a translation award for outstanding achievements in literary and non-literary translation.
- (5) In the spirit of the Open Method of Coordination, the European Commission should invite authorities in the Member States and other stakeholders to identify and exchange examples of successful practice of integration and intercultural dialogue resulting from the learning and use of migrant languages by members of host societies.
- (6) Research should be conducted on the impact on integration and intercultural dialogue of the learning by first-generation migrants of the language of the host society, by second- and third generation migrants of their heritage languages, and by members of the host society of migrant languages.

Languages for economic competitiveness, growth, and better jobs

Considerations evoked by a discussion of the ELAN study

In its Communication of 2005, the Commission, in line with the Lisbon strategy, confirmed its conviction that skills in several languages are important for the performance of the EU's economy as a whole, the competitiveness of individual companies, and the employment prospects of individual workers. Also in late 2005, the Commission commissioned a study on the impact on the European economy of shortages of language skills - *ELAN: Effects on the European Economy of Shortages of Foreign Language Skills in Enterprise*. The Europe-wide

study, which confirmed the relevance of language and intercultural skills to success in export, was the point of departure of the Group's discussion about languages for business.

The following points were regarded as being particularly relevant to future policy development and action.

- The ELAN study should be complemented by more specific surveys at national or regional level, designed to produce facts and figures that will impress and convince both business associations and public authorities.
- In many parts of the EU, education institutions are now engaged in regular and structured dialogue with enterprises and business organisations. Such dialogue should include the issue of language and intercultural skills, so that education institutions can adjust their offerings to the requirements of enterprise, while at the same time assisting enterprises in gaining a clearer understanding of their requirements. In assessing the language needs of enterprise, one should not only address the question as to which languages are required, but also for which communicative situations a given language is typically needed.
- Higher education institutions and other organisations which undertake career tracking surveys should include questions on languages and language-related skills in their questionnaires.
- There is a growing demand for major world languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Japanese and Russian, which is currently not matched by provision. This calls for two types of action: (i) Education systems and institutions need to diversify their offerings. (ii) The training in these languages needs to be professionalized, which includes the development of pan-European benchmarks.
- The presence of an increasing number of speakers of other languages in Member State societies represents considerable economic potential, which needs to be fully exploited and further developed. Many migrants belong to international networks and are, therefore, able to establish business contacts abroad and overseas.
- The relevance of language skills to the economy and the individual worker makes it necessary that reporting instruments such as Europass and the Diploma Supplement are properly applied.
- In order to give impetus to language learning in a vocational context, vocationally contextualised multi-lingual resources need to be developed for use in vocational training institutions.
- Resources need to be developed for career advisors which highlight the added value of language skills in enhancing employability.
- The rapidly expanding and diversifying language industry is a major factor in the European economy, with new job profiles and new employment opportunities. It is important that higher education institutions and other training organisations prepare students for this new sector of the employment market.

Recommendations

- 1) The European Commission should encourage the establishment of regional education-enterprise networks or platforms and their linking at European level. To this end, a project or projects should be launched designed to address issues such as aims and objectives of regional networks, ways of establishing them, membership, and working modes. The added value of European collaboration, incl. aims and activities, should be given special attention.

- 2) The European Commission should support research into or a study on ways in which the linguistic resource available in migrant communities can be exploited and further developed with the specific aim of assisting the export effort of enterprise.
- 3) The European Commission should explore further opportunities for using the European Social Fund and the Structural and Cohesion Funds for supporting language learning with a view to enhancing employability and economic performance.
- 4) The European Commission, if possible in cooperation with the Parliament and Council, should develop a European label to be awarded to SMEs which achieved export success through exemplary language and culture management, including effective staff development.
- 5) Research should be undertaken into the relationship between multilingual competence and creativity.

Creation of a European space for political dialogue and communication with the citizen

The language regime put in place by the founders of the Community has resulted in the creation of translation and interpretation services of unparalleled size and quality. The services are currently facing unprecedented challenges as a result of developments in the Union and beyond.

New developments in communication between the Commission and citizens

The Group reviewed recent efforts made by the Commission to reach out to citizens through novel means, such as multilingual internet chats, multilingual web-streaming of European events and web translation. It also considered the strategies applied by the Directorates-General for Interpretation and Translation for coping with increased demand for their services resulting from recent enlargements. The following priority areas were identified.

- Changes in management of translation and interpretation introduced in response to the increase in the number of official languages – relay, retour, an increased use of freelancers, remote interpreting etc. – must not result in a decline in quality. It must be clear to all concerned that quality has its price.
- The translation of EU legislation into all the official languages has to have absolute priority.
- Improvements in communication with citizens are not just a matter of successfully coping with multilingualism or of employing novel forms of communications technology, but also of speaking a language that citizens can understand. This would seem to call for experts in multilingual communication.
- In spite of the fact that translation and interpretation are and will remain essentially human activities, the EU's language services should continue to take a lead in the development of new technological tools.
- Whereas for a long time, the political dimension of translation and interpretation was primarily associated with communication at Community and international level, in the past ten years the importance of translation and interpretation for the functioning of multilingual societies at Member State, regional and local level and hence for further progress of the European project has come to be widely recognised (cf. Commissioner Orban's address at the 11th SCIC-Universities Conference, 11/05/2007).

Recommendations

- 1) Following the success of the European Master in Conference Interpreting, the European Commission should encourage and support the development of European / international degree programmes in interpretation and translation that would help to

meet current and anticipated future shortage in specific language combinations. The European Master in Translation (EMT) project is a good example of what needs to be done. It could be expected that these international programmes would exploit opportunities provided by distance learning.

- 2) The European Commission should consider the possibility of supporting a European project or projects for the joint development of higher education programmes for the training of specialists in multilingual communication. Likewise, the Commission should encourage the launch of a project or projects for the joint development of continuing education modules / courses for the acquisition of new professional competences and knowledge (cf. use of technological tools).
- 3) The European Commission should call a meeting of leading experts from higher education, pertinent institutions and organisations, and Member State authorities to consider what issues regarding translation, interpretation and multilingual communication need to be addressed at European level and how this could best be done.

Towards the creation of a European public sphere

The fact that the Commission and Members of the European Parliament find it difficult to command public attention in the Member States is largely due to the fact that opinions in Europe are shaped within separate national frameworks. Europeans are hardly aware of the EU's political agenda, and of the political agendas in other Member States, for that matter. The "democratic deficit" and the lack of a European identity are major obstacles to further progress of the European project. Among the measures considered by the Group with a view to overcoming the current state of affairs were the following: the creation of European journals, owned by European companies and run by European editors; the creation of multilingual websites featuring articles from magazines and journals published in different Member States; the launch of a multilingual TV channel broadcasting programmes that could be expected to attract a substantial percentage of residents in all the Member States, including programmes likely to arouse interest in the Union's activities and policies. Of course, these and similar suggestions do not lend themselves to short-term implementation, but will require the preparation and launch of new initiatives in the European institutions and beyond.

Concluding remarks

The Group believes that it managed to make considerable progress in identifying and defining relatively new aspects of the multilingual challenge the Union is confronted with and to develop a number of ideas as to how these aspects could be addressed. The Group hopes that these ideas will be taken up by the Commission and other stakeholders.

The Group also came to realise that in a number of areas new knowledge is needed, and it identified a substantial number of topics that call for a European research effort, for example under the auspices of the 7th Framework Programme. The topics identified relate to issues such as changing patterns in multilingualism among children and young people as a result of trans-European mobility and migration into the Union; the potential of language technology for non-specialist users of other languages; opportunities and limitations of the use of English as a lingua franca; European linguistic diversity and its impact on knowledge production, transfer and application; the relevance of multilingual competence to the employability and mobility of European workers; new language mediation needs; success factors in language learning outside formal educational settings; language learning at older age; multilingualism as a means of comprehensive integration.



Members of the HLGGM would hope that their deliberations and findings are of the kind that policy-makers and decision-makers will find of use in planning the way forward. In particular, they hope that the outcomes of their reflections can inform the ministerial conference envisaged for early 2008 and provide input for the Commission's Communication on a new strategy on multilingualism due to be presented in the second half of 2008.