

**Resolution of the  
Bundesrat**

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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN  
PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND  
SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS****Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment****COM(2008) 566 final; Council doc. 13253/08**

In its 850th sitting on 7 November 2008, the Bundesrat adopted the following position, pursuant to §§ 3 and 5 of the Act on Cooperation between the Federation and the Länder in European Union Affairs (EUZBLG):

1. The Bundesrat shares the Commission's view that greater attention should be paid in future to promoting multilingualism in Europe and raising awareness of the value of linguistic diversity in the EU. It therefore welcomes the Commission's announcement that multilingualism is to become a horizontal issue in the EU and that, in the context of the "Education and Culture 2010" programme, the mandate of the Working Group on Languages will be broadened so that, in future, all aspects of multilingualism are covered.
2. The Bundesrat views the inventory of best practice in language learning and teaching proposed by the Commission as providing European added value which, as the main element of an enhanced exchange of information and experience in the area of multilingualism, could provide the basis for developing the policies of the Member States in this field.
3. The Bundesrat affirms its opinion on the Commission's 2005 Communication on a new strategic framework for multilingualism. (Parliamentary Paper 852/05 (Resolution)) and emphasises that the Community cannot prescribe the structure and content of Member States' education systems. Nevertheless, although the Community does not have the power to oblige the Member States to take certain measures in the area of education policy, the Bundesrat still considers it desirable for citizens of the EU to have a command of two Community

languages other than their mother tongue. However, it has considerable doubts about the feasibility of widely introducing, over the medium or long term, the idea of a 'personal adoptive language' for large segments of the population in the Member States, as the intrinsic motivation and occupational requirement to communicate in several foreign languages is not the same for all EU citizens.

4. For this reason, the Bundesrat recognises the need for further training measures in the field of adult education for those who need to improve their foreign language skills or learn new languages for their work or to improve their career prospects, but cannot agree with the implicit call from the Commission to urge all citizens to undertake further training in foreign languages.
5. Regarding the European-level measures proposed by the Commission, the Bundesrat would like to know the current state of play concerning the Commission's plan, currently being examined by the Member States, to create a European language indicator and would like to express its scepticism regarding the Commission's proposal to monitor citizens' language skills through language indicators (see point 4.2), which would go far beyond the target population originally considered for the future European language indicator (pupils at the upper level of secondary school). In this connection, the Bundesrat emphasises its rejection of the creation of new European benchmarks in education and would like to express its opposition in advance to the creation of European foreign language benchmarks.
6. Although the Bundesrat welcomes in principle the Commission's plans to reinforce mobility and teaching in a greater number of foreign languages in the Community programmes, it regrets that the Commission has not made any specific proposals as to how to implement these goals or commented on any associated financial implications.
7. In this context, the Bundesrat has a clear preference for measures with a direct benefit for European citizens. It is therefore critical of the Commission's announcement that an EU language conference will be held every second year (see point 9(4)), and would prefer that regular situation reports be made by way of Commission communications.
8. The Bundesrat notes that the Commission considers certain specific proposals it

made previously regarding strategic goals and priorities to teach a wide range of languages effectively as definite and evidently assumes that they are "valid" for the Member States (see point 6.1). The Bundesrat would emphasise that, in accordance with the Community's competences in the area of general and vocational education set out in detail in Articles 149 and 150 of the EC Treaty, the Community is not empowered to decree obligatory measures to be implemented by the Member States. This applies, in specific cases, to any priorities regarding certain foreign languages, the number of foreign languages offered or the foreign languages taught in vocational and higher education. In this context, the Bundesrat cannot understand the Commission's comment that the organisational challenges involved in widening the choice of languages could be met by using new technologies and networking (see point 6.1). The claim that untrained staff are often used to teach lesser-used languages (see point 6.2) is categorically rejected by the Bundesrat on behalf of the education authorities of the *Länder*.

9. The Bundesrat does not see the added value of an additional structure in the area of multilingualism to complement the Working Group on Languages in the form of a platform (see point 9 (2)) and emphasises the leadership role of the Council's Education Committee and the Council of Education Ministers, which should not be called into question by the creation of further structures.
10. Promoting multilingualism in the EU may not be used as an argument to restrict the use of the individual official languages. The Bundesrat would like to see detailed descriptions of the multilingualism situation in the EU institutions and in the relations between the Commission and the other institutions and with citizens. It takes the view that the Union needs to better demonstrate its commitment to language policy. Of particular relevance are its websites, publications and the translations of important documents for decision-making, as well as contacts with companies, in particular in the area of tenders.
11. The Bundesrat notes with regret that the Commission in its communication urges the Member States to make a greater commitment to multilingualism but is itself using English increasingly as a *lingua franca*. The Commission is thereby not acting as a role model for multilingualism in Europe. As ever, it displays little readiness to ensure a uniform approach by its departments to multilingualism, especially when it comes to information on its websites. The

Commission's Internet communication strategy, adopted in 2007, has done nothing to change the situation.

12. The Bundesrat is aware that communication within the EU institutions also depends, for practical reasons, on the language skills of its employees. It would refer in this context to the running of intensive German language courses for EU officials by the Foreign Ministry in cooperation with the *Länder*. These represent an important incentive to use German in the institutions' internal work.
13. The Bundesrat takes the view that using one's own language is vital in order to reinforce Europe's democratic legitimacy, as provided for in the Lisbon Treaty. It is also essential for the work of the national parliaments, in particular for the new procedural rights in the context of the subsidiarity early warning system pursuant to the Lisbon Treaty. In particular with regard to participation in the forthcoming European elections in June 2009, the Bundesrat believes that the success of a European policy which is close to citizens and comprehensible depends quite fundamentally on its being available in the relevant language and at the appropriate time.
14. The Bundesrat disapproves of the Commission reneging on its undertaking to the Bundesrat and the German Bundestag and steadfastly refusing to adapt the principles for its internal translations and communication with other EU bodies and institutions and with the Member States and citizens (the "translation strategy") to practical requirements. Contrary to the Commission's view (E-1359/08EN, Answer by Commissioner Orban on behalf of the Commission of 11 June 2008), there are, in our view, serious problems concerning the need for translations into German and their timely provision. The Bundesrat therefore renews its criticism of the Commission's practice of restricting translations to "core documents", whilst describing other documents which are also important for evaluating legislative acts and political processes as annexes or Commission working documents and providing them, in principle, in the original language only. Important information relevant to decision-making is thus provided only in English or French (see the Bundesrat's Resolution of 21 September and Position of 9 November 2007, Parliamentary Papers 472/07 (Resolution) and 390/07 (Resolution)).

15. EU documents required for consultation and decision-making, if made available in German, are frequently translated only in part or provided late. For example, the Commission's work programme for 2008 was not translated into all the official languages, including German, until almost three weeks after its initial publication. The Commission's 2007 progress reports on the candidate countries and potential accession candidates in the western Balkans were not translated into German. Informal translations of the reports on Croatia and Turkey were not available in German until weeks later, following pressure from the Bundesrat and the Federal Government. The Bundesrat does not consider the use of 'informal' translations by the Commission to be an acceptable alternative, especially as, according to its own rules of procedure, German is one of the working languages it has chosen.
16. In this context, the Commission is therefore requested to provide the progress reports announced for 5 November 2008 in German too right from the start. If the Commission does not comply with this request, as already announced, the Bundesrat will recommend that the Federal Government does not debate the content of these documents until the Commission provides an official German version.
17. Irrespective of the above, the Bundesrat calls on the Commission once again to honour its 2007 undertaking and to carry out a root-and-branch reform of its deficient translation practice. The national parliaments should be involved in a transparent procedure.
18. In the context of interpretation practice, too, the Bundesrat notes with concern certain trends relating to the use of relay languages. It calls on the EU institutions not to allow any changes to the detriment of German as an EU working language.
19. The Bundesrat objects to the Commission's portrayal of the situation, according to which limited personnel and financial resources prevent it from improving its current translation practice. As long as the Commission refuses to provide meaningful data on the current use of resources for translation, so that supply, demand and translation performance can be better evaluated, the claim that more staff and funding are required cannot be credibly substantiated.

20. The Bundesrat repeats its request that the Federal Government should not give its assent to the plan for the Commission in the budget procedure for 2009 until the latter provides an exact breakdown of its current expenditure on translation and, if relevant, an estimate of the extra appropriations required for translation (Position of the Bundesrat of 14 March 2008, Parliament Paper 134/08 (Resolution)).
21. However, the Bundesrat would already point out that any additional resources required for translation can be covered only through a reallocation of funding under Heading 5 of the EU budget which does not have any effect on expenditure.
22. The Bundesrat appreciates that the significant growth in the number of official languages since the accession in May 2004 of twelve new Member States has also led to greater demand for translations. It calls on the Federal Government in this context to work towards effective solutions to this problem before any more official languages are added to the current total of 23. Otherwise, the EU will be faced with far greater staffing, financial and organisational difficulties in the translation field.
23. The Bundesrat supports the promotion and preservation of minority and regional languages in the EU countries. However, it has misgivings about the institutional recognition of minority languages at European level, as called for by the Committee of the Regions at its meeting on 18/19 June 2008 (Committee of the Regions 6/2008 final, No 37).

Conciliatory arrangements should be sought. For instance, the conclusion of administrative agreements between individual Member States and the European institutions, such as the recent one between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Council of June 2008 (Council document 10887/08), can help to facilitate the official use of languages not falling within the scope of Regulation (EEC) No 1/1958 in individual EU institutions, with the costs being borne by the Member State making the request.
24. The Bundesrat acknowledges that certain EU official languages are used around the world. However, this should not lead to these languages being given priority in publications and in the institutions and bodies of the Community. The principle of the equality of all the official languages should not be watered

down.

25. The Bundesrat communicates this position directly to the Commission.