



LANGUAGE POLICY

As part of its efforts to promote mobility and intercultural understanding, the EU has designated language learning as an important priority, and funds numerous programmes and projects in this area. Multilingualism, in the EU's view, is an important element in Europe's competitiveness. One of the objectives of the EU's language policy is therefore that every European citizen should master two other languages in addition to their mother tongue.

LEGAL BASIS

In Europe, linguistic diversity is a fact of life. Languages are an integral part of the European identity and the most direct expression of culture. In an EU founded on the motto 'United in diversity', the ability to communicate in several languages is an important asset for individuals, organisations and companies. Languages not only play a key role in the everyday life of the European Union, but are also fundamental for respecting cultural and linguistic diversity in the EU.

Respect for linguistic diversity is a fundamental value of the EU, as are respect for the person and openness towards other cultures. This is incorporated into the preamble to the Treaty on European Union, which refers to 'drawing inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe' and 'confirming [the] attachment to the principles of liberty, democracy and respect for human rights'. In Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) great importance is given to respect for human rights and non-discrimination, while Article 3 states that the EU 'shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity'. Article 165(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) emphasises that 'Union action shall be aimed at developing the European dimension in education, particularly through the teaching and dissemination of the languages of the Member States', while fully respecting cultural and linguistic diversity (Article 165(1) TFEU).

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, adopted in 2000 and made legally binding by the Treaty of Lisbon, prohibits discrimination on grounds of language (Article 21) and places an obligation on the Union to respect linguistic diversity (Article 22).

The first regulation, dating from 1958, determining the languages to be used by the former European Economic Community^[1] has been amended following subsequent accessions to the EU, and defines the Union's official languages^[2], together with Article 55(1) TEU. Every citizen of the EU has the right to write to any of the institutions or bodies of the EU in one of those languages and to receive an answer in the same language, pursuant to Article 24 TFEU.

[1]OJ L 17, 6.10.1958, p. 385.

[2]The 24 official languages of the EU are: Bulgarian, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Irish, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish and Swedish.

OBJECTIVES

EU language policy is based on respect for linguistic diversity in all Member States and on the creation of an intercultural dialogue throughout the EU. In order to put mutual respect into practice, the EU promotes the teaching and learning of foreign languages and the mobility of every citizen through dedicated programmes for education and vocational training. Foreign language competence is regarded as one of the basic skills that all EU citizens need to acquire in order to improve their educational and employment opportunities. The EU therefore supports the idea that every citizen should master two foreign languages in addition to his or her mother tongue ([COM\(2008\) 0566](#)). The EU also works with Member States to protect minorities, on the basis of the Council of Europe's European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

The 'Education and Training 2020' strategic framework considers languages as one of the basic skills in education, following the Council conclusions of 20 May 2014 on multilingualism and the development of language competences^[3].

Moreover, 26 September has been celebrated as the European Day of Languages since 2001, to raise awareness of the wide variety of languages in Europe.

The European Parliament has adopted a full multilingual language policy, meaning that all EU languages are equally important. All parliamentary documents are translated into all the official languages and every Member of the European Parliament has the right to speak in the language of his or her choice.

ACHIEVEMENTS

A. Policy developments and support for research on languages

1. Protection of minority languages

In 2013 Parliament adopted a resolution on endangered European languages and linguistic diversity in the European Union^[4], calling on the Member States to be more attentive to endangered European languages and to commit to the protection and promotion of the diversity of the Union's linguistic and cultural heritage. This resolution was a follow-up to a resolution of Parliament on regional and lesser-used European languages^[5] and to a relevant Council resolution on the promotion of linguistic diversity and language learning^[6], followed by several action plans and framework strategies established by the Commission for the promotion of language learning and linguistic diversity ([COM\(2003\) 0449](#); [COM\(2005\) 0596](#)).

2. Comparability of data on language competence

In 2005, the Commission published a communication to the European Parliament and the Council on the European Indicator of Language Competence ([COM\(2005\) 0356](#)), an instrument to measure overall language competence in all Member States. The framework for this was set out in a Commission communication adopted on 13 April 2007 ([COM\(2007\) 0184](#)). As the Commission communication of 2005 says, 'the purpose of the indicator is to measure overall foreign language competence in each Member State'. This indicator will also help establish whether the measures taken to achieve the 'mother tongue + two' formula work, thanks to comparable data on language competence in all Member States. An advisory board was

[3]OJ C 183, 14.6.2014, p. 26.

[4]OJ C 93, 9.3.2016, p. 52.

[5]OJ C 76 E, 25.3.2004, p. 374.

[6]OJ C 50, 23.2.2002, p. 1.

constituted and delivered the results of a first survey in 2011, showing the need for a better-implemented strategy for language learning in schools.

3. ECML and Mercator

The EU supports two centres for research on languages, the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) and the European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning (Mercator). The ECML encourages excellence and innovation in language teaching and helps Europeans learn languages more efficiently. The ECML's main aims are to help Member States implement effective language teaching policies by focusing on the learning and teaching of languages, promoting dialogue and exchange of best practices, and supporting programme-related networks and research projects. Mercator is part of a network of five research and documentation centres and is specialised in regional and minority languages within the European Union.

4. European Master's in Translation

The European Master's in Translation (EMT) is a quality label for university translation programmes that meet agreed professional standards and market demands. The main goal of EMT is to improve the quality of translator training and to get highly skilled people to work as translators in the EU. The EMT seeks to enhance the status of the translation profession in the EU.

5. MT@EC, the machine translation service

The Commission's machine translation service enables rapid checking of the general meaning of the text inserted. MT@EC can handle and translate texts and documents related to EU policy in the 24 official EU languages. The service is available free of charge to public administration officials in the EU Member States and the EEA countries.

B. Action programmes

1. Erasmus+ Programme

Erasmus+, which started in January 2014, is the EU programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport for 2014-2020. The promotion of language learning and linguistic diversity is one of the programme's specific objectives. The Erasmus+ Programme Guide states that 'the opportunities put in place to offer linguistic support are aimed to make mobility more efficient and effective, to improve learning performance and therefore contribute to the specific objective of the Programme' (p. 11). Linguistic support is offered via Erasmus+ Online Linguistic Support for participants in mobility actions in order to learn the language of the host country. Erasmus + also encourages cooperation for innovation and exchange of good practices through strategic partnerships in the area of language teaching and learning. Furthermore, funding for linguistic support can be provided where necessary to beneficiaries of strategic partnerships who organise long-term training and teaching activities for staff, youth workers and learners. The Erasmus + programme also funds numerous projects every year to support the teaching and learning of sign languages, and to promote linguistic diversity awareness and the protection of minority languages.

2. Creative Europe Programme

In the framework of the Creative Europe Programme, support is provided for the translation of books and manuscripts under the [Culture sub-programme](#).

3. European Day of Languages

Encouraged by the huge success of the European Year of Languages in 2001, the EU and the Council of Europe decided to celebrate the European Day of Languages every year on

26 September, with all sorts of events to promote language learning throughout the EU. This action is designed to raise awareness among citizens of the many languages spoken in Europe and to encourage them to learn languages.

C. Prizes

1. European Language Label

The European Language Label is an award by the Commission designed to encourage new initiatives in language teaching and learning, to reward new language teaching methods, and to raise awareness of regional and minority languages. The award is presented to projects from participating countries for the most innovative language learning project, the person who has made the most progress in learning foreign languages, and the best language teacher.

2. Juvenes Translatores

Every year, the Commission awards a prize to the best translation done by a 17-year-old student in the Member States. Students can choose to translate from and into any official language of the European Union.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

On 19 November 2013 Parliament adopted the Erasmus+ and Creative Europe programmes. Parliament added a specific provision on funding for the subtitling, dubbing and audio description of European films, which should facilitate access to, and the circulation of, European works across borders. As co-legislator, Parliament can draw up own-initiative reports to give fresh impetus to the development of language policy in Europe. In its resolution of 24 March 2009 on ‘Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment’^[7], Parliament reiterated its support for EU policies in the field of multilingualism and called on the Commission to draw up measures aimed at recognising the importance of and promoting linguistic diversity. Its resolution on endangered European languages and linguistic diversity^[8] appealed to the Commission and the Member States to support endangered languages.

On 23 November 2016 Parliament adopted a resolution on sign languages and professional sign language interpreters^[9] in order to stress that deaf, deaf-blind and hard-of-hearing citizens must have access to the same information and communication as their peers in the form of sign language interpretation, subtitling, speech-to-text and/or alternative forms of communication, including oral interpreters. The resolution also recognised that EU institutions are already providing for the accessibility of public events and committee meetings.

A study on ‘Minority Languages and Education: Best Practices and Pitfalls’, commissioned on behalf of Parliament’s Committee on Culture and Education and published in early 2017, investigates the situation of minority languages in education in 13 case studies.

In the second half of 2017 and early 2018, the EP’s Committee on Culture and Education will work on an own-initiative report on ‘Language equality in the digital age – towards a Human Language project’, based on a [study](#) with the same title drawn up at the request of Parliament’s Science and Technology Options Assessment Panel.

[Michaela Franke](#)
09/2017

[7]OJ C 117 E, 6.5.2010, p. 59.

[8]OJ C 93, 9.3.2016, p. 52.

[9]Texts adopted, [P8_TA\(2016\)0442](#).