

**EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT HEARINGS****ANSWERS TO QUESTIONNAIRE FOR COMMISSIONER  
DESIGNATE****Mr Leonard ORBAN****(Multilingualism)****Part B – Specific questions*****1. Multilingualism, professional skills and the Lisbon Strategy***

- a. The EU has reshaped the Lisbon Strategy which should help to make the Union more prosperous and socially inclusive. Compared to other big economic spaces such as the US, China or Japan, the EU is not linguistically homogenous. For businesses, the existence of 21 official and around 60 indigenous languages can create additional costs. On the other hand, the need for technological innovations that help to overcome language barriers is also an opportunity for business, e.g. in the area of information technology. Do you think that the fact that multilingualism is a distinct feature of the EU plays a positive or a negative role in the economic integration and development of the Union?***

Linguistic diversity is a form of cultural diversity which we in Europe value in its own right. But it is my belief that it can also be turned to advantage in the economy. I know this is an area where the Parliament has invested its energies, highlighting the importance of languages in reaching the Lisbon goals in your initiative report on education as a cornerstone of the Lisbon strategy. Linguistic diversity does pose challenges for firms marketing products and services. But openness to learning new languages and cultures brings real benefits. It raises awareness of differences in customs and tastes. It can therefore promote awareness of the value of tailoring products and services to local tastes, gaining a competitive edge in catering for new markets. Within the EU, linguistic diversity can foster competitiveness – firms that take a multilingual approach can penetrate new 'internal' markets. If European firms manage multilingualism intelligently and develop a capacity to function better within our own internal multilingual environment, they will be better equipped to function in a worldwide environment. Information technology – for example, computer applications, including software for language learning and testing, and multilingual website development – is

indeed in my view an example of a field in which Europe, by being strong domestically, can compete better in world markets.

But there is a more fundamental issue. I am strongly of the view that people who can communicate in more than one language have their mental horizons broadened, and get used to looking at problems in different lights. Multilingualism can therefore be an important stimulus to creativity, and the creativity of the individual worker or manager strengthens both the firm and the economy. In today's global economy, Europe has to build its comparative advantage on creativity and exploit the potential of its multilingual workforce to penetrate new markets worldwide. If confirmed, I therefore want to develop a stronger presence for languages and multilingualism in the Lisbon strategy. As part of this, I wish to engage in a dialogue and partnership with stakeholders (including the social partners), with a view to identifying the contribution that multilingualism can make to the Lisbon strategy. The independent High Level Group on Multilingualism set up by the Commission to advise on multilingualism policy will indeed be looking at the question of languages for business, and will make some recommendations.

- b. *Language skills are of growing importance as a professional qualification. Workers' mobility in Europe depends to a large extent on the ability of a person to communicate in foreign languages. Which initiatives do you intend to undertake in order to promote the learning of foreign languages and to achieve the objective "mother tongue + 2" which was formulated by the Barcelona European Council in 2002? How do you intend to cooperate with Member States in order to improve quality, effectiveness and accessibility of education and training systems and what role could the European indicator of language competence play in this respect?***

Member States are responsible for setting their educational policies. However the Commission has a broad perspective which enables it to complement Member States' work, spread best practice and inject new thinking. I would aim to use this perspective to highlight a few essential themes: improving language teaching (hours of language teaching do not translate into effective mastery of languages, teacher training must be improved); strengthening the lifelong dimension of language learning (by raising adults' motivation); and promoting an environment friendly to all languages –national, regional, minority and migrant (linguistic identity can be multi-layered, just like European citizenship).

While respecting national responsibilities, I would like the Commission to communicate more actively with European citizens and other stakeholders - public bodies, the social partners - on the advantages of multilingualism. Many individuals throughout Europe are already using more than one language, even without formal training. "Mother tongue plus two" sounds ambitious: we must help people realise that they are closer to achieving it than they think. Language teaching must develop language-learning skills and build on people's existing exposure to multilingualism.

The European Indicator of language competence will play an essential role in offering a common baseline to assess student skills. It will help to measure the effectiveness of language learning in the compulsory system. We must also work towards identifying language skills in the wider population. In the short term, we could encourage people of all ages to assess their own language skills and build on these. Moreover, with increased globalisation and interconnection between societies and economies, the 'language industry' is one of the fastest growing industries in the world. I believe we should therefore support the development of highly skilled professionals for this labour market. The Commission has in the past promoted creation of a European Master of conference interpreting and now a European Master of translation. I am committed to working actively to strengthen this approach.

2. **Regional and minority languages, less widely used languages and minority rights**

- a. **Linguistic diversity is a distinct feature of the EU which has become even more prominent after enlargement (as was also recognized by the Ebner report of the EP). It is officially recognised and protected by the EU, e.g. through article 22 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights. Also, the Council of Europe has adopted several conventions and texts. Many of those establish a link between the preservation of linguistic diversity and the protection of minorities. For example in Romania, the Commission reported in May 2006, there is still further progress to be made in the protection of minorities. How important do you think the aspect of languages is as regards the protection and social inclusion of ethnic minorities? Do you believe that minority and regional languages should be included in the EU programmes for promotion of multilingualism and what will be the benefit from that in EU level?**

The respect for and the protection of the rights of persons belonging to minorities, including linguistic ones, are among the principles on which the European Union is founded. Coming from a country which has achieved significant progress in this regard, I am fully aware of the importance of the promotion of this key value of the EU as a whole. In this context, the EU has made progress in promoting the rights of Roma. Member States have adopted two directives on anti-discrimination based on Article 13 of the Treaty, which are extremely important. Furthermore, a number of EU support measures, including the structural funds, education, youth and culture programmes, have a potentially important contribution to make. I personally share the strong commitment of the Commission to work towards the full participation of Roma in social, economic and political life.

Languages have a crucial role in promoting social cohesion and integration without discrimination. Learning other languages helps to foster tolerance, cultural awareness and mutual understanding, contributing at the same time to the reinforcement of a sense of individual identity and of European citizenship. In its

2005 Communication “ A new framework strategy for multilingualism”, the Commission recommends that Member States set up national plans establishing clear objectives for language teaching at the various stages of education, taking into account regional and minority languages and the need for migrants to learn the language of the host country while preserving their mother tongue. I consider this essential both for helping individuals maintain and enrich their linguistic skills, and for promoting social cohesion.

I subscribe fully to the inclusive approach towards all languages present in the European Union that the Commission put forward in its two recent Communications on Multilingualism. This holistic approach includes the EU official languages and regional, minority and migrant languages. Indeed, all these languages are already eligible for the Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013 that has, as a specific objective, the promotion of language learning and linguistic diversity. I welcome the priority given to projects in this field in the first call for proposals in 2007: projects addressing regional and minority languages, and networks linking institutions that promote language learning and linguistic diversity at national or regional level. These will provide visible support to, and raise awareness of, the Union's rich linguistic diversity.

**b. The Commission itself, in its Framework Strategy on multilingualism, remains somewhat ambiguous about the role and importance of non-official languages. Do you think that any kind of proposal from the Commission regarding multilingualism should be limited to the official and Member States languages or do you see the need to include other languages, such as regional and minority languages and less widely used languages?**

EU competences in this field are limited by the Treaty. While Member States have sole responsibility for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity, the EU encourages co-operation between Member States and, if necessary, supports and supplements their activities.

I support the Commission's inclusive approach to linguistic diversity, of which regional and minority languages are an integral part. Commission policy should continue to promote a climate conducive to the full expression of all languages, helping to give substance to the Union's motto, “unity in diversity”. In practical terms, this policy is reflected in the EU programmes for the period 2007-2013. As I mentioned, all languages, including regional and minority languages, are eligible for the programme.

### 3. UNESCO Convention

*In October 2005 the UNESCO Convention on the protection and promotion of diversity of cultural expressions was adopted. This convention, which stresses that "linguistic diversity is a fundamental element of cultural diversity", has as objective the promotion and the protection of the diversity of cultural contents and expressions and aims to facilitate the development and the adoption of cultural policies and appropriate measures for the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions. What does this document mean for European linguistic diversity? Should it be made a priority for your work to push for a swift ratification of the convention by the Member States?*

I should say that I am very satisfied that the Community played such a prominent role in negotiating the UNESCO convention. This is a clear signal that the Community attaches great importance to cultural diversity, including its language aspects. It bodes well for our future work in this sphere. The UNESCO Convention on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions does indeed recall, in its preamble, that "linguistic diversity is a fundamental element of cultural diversity". In this respect, it echoes the European Union's commitment to maintaining its rich linguistic diversity. The Convention sets objectives, guiding principles, rights and obligations for the Parties on protecting and promoting the diversity of cultural expressions. Languages are tools *par excellence* for cultural expression but are not the object as such of the Convention. Nonetheless, regarding languages and linguistic diversity, the Convention provides that, among the measures that Parties may adopt in order to promote cultural diversity, are measures "which provide opportunities for domestic cultural activities, goods and services (...) including provisions relating to the language used for such activities, goods and services".

The Community and the Member States will jointly ratify the Convention on 19 December 2006 at the latest. I consider that it is indeed a priority for the Community to ratify this Convention and ensure its rapid entry into force and effective implementation, in order for cultural diversity to be promoted worldwide. Ratification will not only give immediate substance to the Convention, I believe it will provide an excellent example to other countries, encouraging a greater number of ratifying parties.

### 4. 2008 Year of intercultural dialogue

*2008 will be the European year of intercultural dialogue. Intercultural dialogue is intimately linked to the ambition underlying the construction of Europe to bring together the peoples of Europe, in a Europe which is enriched by increasing variation and by the changes and additions brought about by globalisation. Moreover, intercultural dialogue is an instrument which could facilitate the implementation of a series of*

**strategic priorities for the Union, such as: promoting cultural diversity in Europe; enhancing the renewed Lisbon strategy and a knowledge-based economy; promoting greater cohesion. What could be the contributions from your area to this year?**

I am convinced that a well structured multilingualism policy, and the appropriate means to implement it, can provide a clear impetus to intercultural dialogue. Languages help us develop sensitivity towards cultural differences and understand the ways in which different cultures interact with each other. By cultivating an appreciation of other values, beliefs and behaviour, the teaching and learning of languages can make a substantial contribution to developing effective intercultural dialogue. Languages can thus be a decisive factor in reinforcing the perception that cultural diversity does not lead to problems and tensions in daily life but that it is an asset for Europe.

Linguistic and cultural diversity foster the creativity that will permit Europe to face current and future challenges. In a Europe coping with the changes brought about by globalisation, an active multilingualism policy must also help to ensure that European citizens and companies have both the intercultural and linguistic skills necessary to operate effectively in a globalised environment. This contributes directly to the three main objectives of the Barroso Commission: prosperity, solidarity and security. Clearly, there are many positive links between multilingualism and intercultural dialogue, and the Commission will certainly make sure that these links are a cornerstone of the 2008 Year of Intercultural Dialogue.

**5. Communication**

**The Commission has launched in 2005 its Action Plan and the Plan D for Debate and Dialogue on the future of Europe. Also, it has put forward a White Paper on a European communication strategy. The EP considers it as important that citizens should have access to EU legislation, procedures and information on the EU in their own languages. What could be done to improve those elements of the EU institutions' communication which relate to languages? How do you see the general link between multilingualism and the EU's communication efforts?**

I fully subscribe to the statement in the White Paper on European Communication Policy: "multilingualism is an integral aspect of the legitimacy, transparency and democracy of the European project". Clearly, the rich cultural and linguistic diversity of the European Union raises particular challenges for the Commission's communication about Europe. The Commission has therefore committed itself to participating actively in implementing its new communication strategy, based on three pillars: the Action Plan to first focus on action inside the Commission; Plan "D" to relaunch the debate on the future of Europe, and the White Paper on a European

Communication Policy inviting key actors to put forward their ideas on how best we can work together to close the communication gap between the EU and its citizens.

We have the unique strength of having the world's largest and probably most highly skilled translation and interpretation services at our disposal. Beyond their core competences, they are full partners in bringing EU messages to citizens and in bringing back awareness of local and cultural sensitivities, thus positively influencing our communication efforts. At the same time the Union is a major driving force behind the technical development of translation tools and multilingual publication methods. As part of our commitment to giving the citizens access to the EU in their own languages, this includes, for example, the simultaneous publication, on a daily basis, of all EU legislation and jurisprudence in all official languages, both on paper and online, as well as the development of novel configurations of conference technologies with interpretation (video-conferencing, webstreaming, multilingual internet chats).

It is my vision that we should maximise the synergies in all these elements in the service of Europe's citizens. I am determined to work for this in every possible way. Our translators will contribute to building bridges with our local audiences. “Going local” and “connecting with the citizen” are two key principles of the Commission’s new communication strategy and intrinsically linked to multilingualism. With your help, I intend to work for the creation of an up-to-date conference centre for the Commission, which would allow all necessary languages to be used in the Commission's communication with Member State representatives and civil society at large. A new Community programme is being prepared aimed at promoting the training of conference interpreters. We shall pursue the work in the Internal Multilingualism Network, which aims to improve the Commission's use of multilingualism in its public communications.

I know the Parliament has a deep interest in the communication aspects of multilingualism which are to the forefront in Mr Joan I Mari's report adopted on 15 November. By employing our resources appropriately, we should be able together to make a considerable contribution to the creation of a genuine European public sphere.

## **6. Multilingualism and the constitutional process**

### **What are, in your view, the perspectives of multilingualism in the further development of the constitutional process of the European Union?**

Multilingualism is at the heart of the European project. Therefore, it is my belief that multilingualism is directly linked to the development of the European project. The Treaty establishing the European Communities lays down that the Community shall contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and, at the same time, bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore (Art. 151). The prospects for multilingualism are good – there is widespread consensus that this is a core concern for the Union. This was confirmed when the Constitutional Treaty gave a leading place to respect for the Union's rich cultural and linguistic diversity and ensuring that Europe's cultural heritage is

safeguarded and enhanced (Art. I-3). This was reinforced by the inclusion of the right to linguistic diversity in the Charter of Fundamental Rights (Art 22).

It should be noted that Art 290 of the Treaty establishing the European Communities provides that the rules governing the languages of the institutions of the Community will be determined by the Council, acting unanimously. These rules are set in Council Regulation 1/58 of 15 April 1958. I consider that the principle of linguistic parity, as laid down in the aforementioned Regulation, is of paramount importance for interinstitutional relations as well for the good relations of the institutions with individual citizens. I will make every effort to ensure it is preserved: only in this way can the Community's motto "Unity in diversity" be fully fleshed out.