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## **DRAFT REPORT**

on measures to promote multilingualism and language learning in the European Union: European Indicator of Language Competence (2005/2213(INI))

Committee on Culture and Education

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## MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

### **on measures to promote multilingualism and language learning in the European Union: European Indicator of Language Competence (2005/2213(INI))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the communication from the Commission concerning a 'European Indicator of Language Competence (COM(2005)0356),
  - having regard to the communication from the Commission concerning 'A New Framework Strategy for Multilingualism' (COM(2005)0596),
  - having regard to the communication from the Commission on 'Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity: an Action Plan 2004-2006' (COM(2003)0449),
  - having regard to the programme for 'Education and Training 2010: the success of the Lisbon Strategy hinges on urgent reforms' (Council document 6905/04 EDUC 43),
  - having regard to the communication from the Commission entitled 'Draft 2006 Joint Progress Report of the Council and the Commission on the Implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme' (COM(2005)0549),
  - having regard to the conclusions reached by the European Council Presidency in Barcelona on 15 and 16 March 2002,
  - having regard to the conclusions reached by the Council of Ministers for Education, Youth and Culture of 24 May 2005 concerning new education and training indicators,
  - having regard to the report of the Committee on Culture and Education (A6-0000/2006),
- A. whereas the linguistic diversity of the European Union coupled with effective communication and better mutual understanding thanks to multilingualism is now integral to European identity,
- B. whereas it is essential for the achievement of a People's Europe and a knowledge-based society for every citizen to have a practical grasp of at least two languages other than his own, the acquisition of just one common language of communication (*lingua franca*) not being sufficient,
- C. whereas the ability to understand and communicate in foreign languages and higher standards of linguistic proficiency are of major importance for the more effective deployment of manpower in Europe, language skills being a fundamental requirement for all European citizens with a view to promoting mobility within the European Union and creating a genuine European employment market,
- D. whereas greater and more widespread linguistic proficiency is a yardstick for measuring the quality of European education and training systems and one of the criteria for assessing progress towards the objective of making the European Union the most dynamic knowledge-driven economy in the world,

- E. whereas in March 2002 the Barcelona European Council called for the introduction of a linguistic proficiency indicator to bridge the current information gap regarding the actual language and communication skills of European Union citizens,
  - F. whereas language proficiency certificates within the European Union are many and varied making it difficult to compare the standards achieved by their respective holders, thereby hindering the free movement of workers and students within the European Union,
  - G. whereas a set of reliable indicators regarding individual levels of linguistic proficiency particularly among young people must be established, so as to introduce policies designed to offer a wider range of languages and ensure more effective teaching methods,
  - H. whereas the 'Eurobarometer' survey of September 2005 revealed that on average 50% of European Union citizens claim to be able to hold a conversation in a language other than their mother tongue, with enormous differences, however, between individual Member States,
  - I. whereas, according to the Commission's information, the average number of foreign languages taught at secondary school level falls far short of the target set at the Barcelona European Council, this being the teaching of two languages from a very young age,
1. Welcomes the Commission proposal concerning the inclusion of a European Indicator of Language Competence among the criteria used by Member States under the 'Education and Training 2010' programme;
  2. Takes this opportunity to stress the importance of European indicators in assessing progress towards achieving common objectives under the Lisbon Strategy in the field of education and training and the importance of the 'Education and Training 2010' Programme for the formulation of national policies and the introduction of a European strategic framework for the transition to a knowledge-driven economy;
  3. Notes that the indicator in question seeks to establish accurately, reliably and at regular intervals on the basis of objective tests overall foreign language proficiency standards in all the Member States;
  4. Shares the Commission's view that in the initial phase this indicator should be used to assess education and training systems in terms of first and second language proficiency standards and that knowledge of the five most widely taught languages within the Union (English, French, German, Spanish and Italian) should be tested; calls on the Commission and Council, however, to proceed to the next stage as soon as possible by taking the necessary measures to extend these tests to a wider range of European languages;
  5. Believes that the existence of objective criteria to establish levels of language proficiency and the introduction of a common reference framework in no way restrict the freedom of choice or the organisational methods of the various national educational systems and accordingly endorses the Commission recommendation regarding use of the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages for the purposes of the European Indicator;
  6. Calls on the Member States to participate actively in the implementation and development

of the Indicator and give fresh impetus to language teaching;

7. Urges the Member States to promote multilingualism, by adopting policies seeking to widen the present range of languages taught, giving priority to the common objectives established under the Lisbon Strategy;
8. Calls on the Commission actively to encourage the dissemination of information concerning the advantages of language learning from an early age, taking the view that initiatives to inform the public of the advantages of foreign language proficiency, such as European Day of Languages (26 September), a Council of Europe initiative, and the European Language Label, an EU initiative, contribute substantially to increasing multilingualism;
9. Endorses the Commission proposal regarding participation by the Member States in developing the Indicator to the full, to set up a body consisting of Member State representatives to advise the Commission on policy issues and technical matters and monitor progress regarding the practical use of the Indicator in the Member States;
10. Points out that the Indicator proposed by the Commission does not involve additional EU budget outlay, the estimated operating expenditure being met by the existing Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci programmes pending the implementation of the new integrated Lifelong Learning programme;
11. Calls on the Commission and Council accordingly to ensure that the Lifelong Learning programme is endowed with the necessary resources for the promotion of language learning;
12. Calls on the Council and Commission to ensure that the next financial perspectives include sufficient funding for measures to make full use of the Indicator;
13. Calls on the Council to concur with the approach, parameters and timescales adopted by the Commission regarding the establishment and implementation of the European Indicator of Language Competence so as to complete the preparatory phase as soon as possible and speed up its implementation, given its particular importance as a policy-making instrument;
14. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and Commission, and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.

## EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

### I. Introduction

The European Union is founded on the co-existence of peoples with diverse histories and a common future and has as its ultimate objective the creation of a single community of around 460 million European citizens living together in harmony while maintaining their individuality and diversity.

In the enlarged Europe of today it is more important than ever for European citizens to possess the necessary knowledge and skills to communicate effectively, thereby facilitating mutual comprehension.

The learning of a single common language for the purposes of communication (*lingua franca*) is insufficient and fails to reflect Europe's true identity. In the light of Europe's linguistic and cultural diversity, knowledge of a number of foreign languages facilitates communication while encouraging us to be more open towards others, their cultures and their outlooks.

Furthermore, the free movement of persons, goods and services is one of the cornerstones of the European Union. An individual with a sound grasp of foreign languages has more opportunities of benefiting from the freedom to work and study in another Member State. Hence the creation of a genuinely multilingual European Community in which each citizen has a practical grasp of at least two languages in addition to his own is of major importance in achieving a People's Europe and, in particular, increasing mobility.

Finally, greater foreign language proficiency is one of the yardsticks for measuring the quality of European educational and training systems with a view to competing effectively at international level.

### II. Commission proposal

#### *European Indicator of Language Competence*

This proposal by the Commission follows on from the course of action decided by the European Council in Barcelona of March 2002, where the Heads of State and Government called for improvements in the teaching of basic skills, including at least two foreign languages, from a very early age and the introduction of a linguistic competence indicator.

At present, the European Union does not have enough information to assess accurately the language skills of its citizens, making it necessary to introduce reliable systems to measure progress towards achievement of the objective set by the Barcelona European Council of making European educational and training systems a world quality reference by the year 2010.

The education and training systems of the 25 Member States differ widely concerning the way in which language knowledge and ability is tested and certificates issued, making comparisons difficult and reducing the scope for mutual recognition of foreign language qualifications, which may adversely affect the free movement of workers and students within the EU.

The Commission proposes the introduction of a European Indicator of Language Competence common to all the Member States to provide an accurate, reliable and comprehensive yardstick for assessing foreign language proficiency, on the basis of specially designed objective tests done by a sample of the population designed to assess linguistic proficiency in four areas: reading, comprehension, speaking and writing, commencing, for practical reasons, with written tests, the relevant data being collected at regular intervals, every three years for example.

The Indicator should record the proficiency of the sample at each of the six levels on the scales of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe). This reference framework has gained wide acceptance and is already used in many of the Member States.

The Commission proposes that, at an initial phase, linguistic proficiency be tested in the five most widely taught languages in the European Union (English, French, German, Spanish and Italian), possibly adding in further languages at a subsequent stage.

According to the Eurobarometer poll of September 2005, the above foreign languages are the ones which most EU citizens choose to learn. It is worth noting however, that, according to recent statistics, while the percentage of primary school pupils being taught a foreign language is increasing, the diversity of languages on offer is decreasing. In many countries foreign language learning tends to mean simply learning English.

While your rapporteur endorses the progressive approach adopted by the Commission, he would stress the need to introduce as quickly as possible measures to assess knowledge and proficiency in a larger number of languages with a view to promoting multilingualism. He agrees with the Commission's general approach and the overall indicator parameters, bearing in mind the practical and methodological difficulties in implementing each and the overall complexity of the system. He stresses, however, the need to use the indicator properly for the formulation of conclusions at European and at national level regarding policy options.

#### *Proposed European Indicator of Language Competence Advisory Board*

The rapporteur agrees with the Commission proposal regarding the active participation of the Member States in the implementation and development of the Indicator in particular regarding relevant background information in respect of linguistic proficiency (languages on television, and in the family environment, number of hours of language teaching, experience of teachers, etc.).

The Commission proposes the creation of a board of Member State representatives to advise the Commission on the technical aspects and ensure that the Indicator is implemented properly. The Commission will be responsible for central coordination and analysis of data with the help of external tenderers selected in accordance with the usual procurement procedures.

The rapporteur acknowledges the value of coordinating the technical and policy-making know-how of the Member States and the importance of the task fulfilled by this body in securing progress by the Member States in making use of the Indicator and in monitoring the results obtained. He also considers it important for this body to encourage convergence

between the Member States so that policies to achieve multilingualism can be formulated.

### **III. Conclusions**

The European Indicator of Language Competence is considered to be an extremely valuable instrument for obtaining reliable information concerning the linguistic proficiency of European citizens, in particular young people, enabling comparisons to be drawn between Member State policies in this area, and facilitating consultation regarding best practices, thereby giving fresh impetus to language teaching.

Proficiency in at least two foreign languages should form part of the basic set of skills of a typical European citizen living, studying, working and generally circulating in the European Union.

Within a wider framework, initiatives by the Council of Europe such as European Day of Languages Day (26 September) and the EU, such as the European Language Label (innovatory programmes for the teaching and learning of foreign languages in the EU<sup>1</sup>) are frequently of particular importance in ensuring that better advantage is taken of language learning opportunities.

The rapporteur considers it necessary for both Council and Commission to propose further initiatives leading towards a genuinely multilingual European Community.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/language/label/index.cfm#Search>