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## **REPORT**

on a new framework strategy for multilingualism  
(2006/2083(INI))

Committee on Culture and Education

Rapporteur: Bernat Joan i Marí

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## MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

### on a new framework strategy for multilingualism (2006/2083(INI))

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to Article 192, second paragraph, of the EC Treaty,
  - having regard to Articles 149, 151 and 308 of the EC Treaty,
  - having regard to Articles 21 and 22 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,
  - having regard to its resolution of 14 January 2003 on preserving and promoting cultural diversity : the role of the European regions and international organisations such as UNESCO and the Council of Europe<sup>1</sup> and the reference therein to linguistic diversity in Europe,
  - having regard to Decision No 1934/200/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 July 2000 on the European Year of Languages 2001<sup>2</sup>,
  - having regard to the Council Resolution of 14 February 2002 on the promotion of linguistic diversity and language learning in the framework of the implementation of the objectives of the European Year of Languages 2001<sup>3</sup>,
  - having regard to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages of the Council of Europe, which entered into force on 1 March 1998,
  - having regard to the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, which entered into force on 1 February 1998,
  - having regard to its resolution of 4 September 2003 with recommendations to the Commission on European regional and lesser-used languages - the languages of minorities in the EU - in the context of enlargement and cultural diversity<sup>4</sup>,
  - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
  - having regard to the report of the Committee on Culture and Education (A6-0372/2006),
- A. whereas respect for linguistic and cultural diversity is a basic principle of the EU and is enshrined in the following terms in Article 22 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union: 'The Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity',

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<sup>1</sup> OC 92 E, 16.4.2004, p. 322.

<sup>2</sup> OJ L 232, 14.9.2000, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> OJ C 50, 23.2.2002, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> OC C 76 E, 25.3.2004, p. 243.

- B. whereas multilingualism is a special feature of the EU that makes it a clear example as well as a basic component of the European culture,
- C. whereas in its above-mentioned resolution of 14 January 2003, it called for the following new Article to be inserted in the EC Treaty: ‘The Community shall, within its spheres of competence, respect and promote linguistic diversity in Europe, including regional or minority languages as an expression of that diversity, by encouraging cooperation between Member States and utilising other appropriate instruments in the furtherance of this objective’,
- D. whereas the promotion of multilingualism in a pluralistic Europe is an essential factor in cultural, economic and social integration, enhancing citizens’ skills and facilitating their mobility,
- E. whereas some European languages are also spoken in a great number of non-Member States and constitute an important link between peoples and nations of different regions in the world,
- F. whereas there is a particular ability of some of the European languages to establish immediate direct communication with other parts of the world,
- G. whereas linguistic diversity can be an element of social cohesion and a source of tolerance, acceptance of differences, identification and mutual understanding among peoples,
- H. whereas multilingualism should also seek to promote respect for diversity and tolerance with a view to preventing the emergence of any active or passive conflicts between different language communities in the Member States,
- I. whereas all languages, as a pre-eminent means of access to a culture, are a distinct way of perceiving and describing reality and must therefore be able to enjoy the conditions required for their development,
- J. whereas, in order to encourage the learning of other languages and thus to meet the objective of “mother tongue +2”, it is important to be aware of the principles of learning to speak and of formulating and acquiring basic concepts in early childhood which underpin mother tongue competence,
- K. whereas regional and minority languages are a major cultural treasure and, given that they constitute a common cultural heritage, support for their preservation them should be improved,
- L. whereas Parliament and the Committee of the Regions have addressed the question of the importance of less widely used languages on many occasions and there is at present no legal provision at EU level relating to European regional and lesser-used languages,
- M. whereas particular attention should be given to promoting access to language acquisition for people in disadvantaged or difficult circumstances or those with disabilities,

### *Specific Comments on the Framework Strategy*

1. Welcomes the Commission's commitment, and particularly the new Framework Strategy, to foster the knowledge of languages and take cultural and socio-economic advantage of it;
2. Considers that, in order to achieve the objectives set by the Lisbon strategy, it is essential to improve the quality, effectiveness and accessibility of the education and training systems in the European Union by promoting foreign language learning;
3. Acknowledges the strategic importance of European World Languages as a communication vehicle and as a means of solidarity, cooperation, and economic investment and, therefore, as one of the main political guidelines of European policy on multilingualism;
4. Welcomes the Commission's long-term objective to improve individual language skills, referring to the target set in 2002 in the Barcelona European Council whereby citizens should learn at least two foreign languages in addition to their mother tongue;
5. Reminds the EU Member States, to that end, that it is necessary to take appropriate measures to promote a genuine policy of learning foreign language skills ; furthermore, re-affirms that the early learning of languages is of considerable importance, and should be based on effective methods according to the best available techniques;
6. Considers that there is a lack of detailed and reliable data and appropriate indicators related to the current situation of foreign language competence in the Member States and therefore welcomes the proposal for a European Indicator of Language Competence; that indicator should include all official EU languages and could, if feasible from a procedural point of view, be extended beyond the five widely-spoken languages to include the other EU languages, in order to gain a true picture of language competence;
7. Believes that proposals for multilingualism should not be limited to the main official/ Member State languages;
8. Welcomes the Commission's commitment to give citizens access to EU legislation, procedures and information in their own languages; however this should include as many as possible of the languages of Member States used by EU citizens; in this way the Commission's statement to the effect that citizens have a right to access the EU in their own language without any barriers would become a reality; this would be an important step in closing the gap between the EU and many of its citizens, which is the main aim of Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate;
9. Considers that in accordance with the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament concerning languages used for informing consumers in the Community (COM(1993)0456), the EU must respect the principle of subsidiarity in language policy, by which the EU, through the implementation of its own language regime or in the way of his sectoral law, shall not modify the language legislation existing in every Member State on all or part of its territory;

10. Calls on the Commission and the other European institutions to make the best possible use of new digital and technological translation tools on their Internet sites so as to enable European citizens to have access to, and obtain from the Internet, information about Europe in their own languages;
11. Considers that the widest opportunities should be provided for migrants to learn the language or languages of host countries, as defined by the legislation of those countries, with a view to their social and cultural integration in so far as this is necessary, using methods which have proved effective in language learning and for the integration of migrant citizens and to enable them to be taught in their mother tongue as a way of preserving their ties with their country of origin;
12. Welcomes the idea of encouraging Member States to establish National Plans, because it recognises the need for language planning at Member State level; this will act to enhance many of the less widely used languages and raise awareness of the importance of linguistic diversity; suggests that Member State Plans should include the lesser-used languages within each Member State and examine the possibility for interested adults to learn these languages, and include these projects as examples of best practice;
13. Supports action for better teacher training, also for non-language and vocational teachers, and adds that the number of languages taught both within and outside school should be broadened to enable future teachers to learn, and subsequently teach, a greater diversity of languages under the same conditions, providing that there is an expression of interest in this direction; recalls, in this connection, that language training is essential to promote and facilitate mobility not only for students but also for all workers seeking to carry on an occupation in one of the Member States;
14. Urges that particular attention be given to promoting language learning for people in disadvantaged and difficult circumstances and for people with disabilities;
15. Welcomes the greater use of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), where pupils learn a subject through the medium of a foreign language, and calls on the Member States to form a network of best practices, in particular by analysing the results obtained from immersion courses in multilingual countries;
16. Welcomes the fact that higher education institutions play a more active role in promoting multilingualism not only amongst students and staff, but also amongst the wider local community, and therefore believes that linkages should be encouraged between universities and national, local and regional authorities ;
17. Considers that the language used in Erasmus courses should be the official language of the host country's or region's educational system, and that it should be ensured that Erasmus students attain a level of proficiency in that language which enables them to properly follow courses provided in that language;
18. Welcomes the focus on research and technological development activities on language-related information technologies within the 7th Framework Research Programme in order to enhance multilingualism through new IT;

19. Supports the proposals for multilingualism in the information society and the creation and circulation of multilingual content and knowledge; there is an increasing array of technologies that will help a greater use of all languages, including those less widely used; technology offers the greatest potential for ensuring social linguistic space for all of Europe's languages;
20. Supports the proposals to develop language-related professions and industries; all European languages will need new technologies such as speech processing, voice recognition and so on, as well work on terminology, developing language teaching, certification and testing; otherwise lesser-used languages will be left behind with their linguistic social space taken over by the more widely spoken languages - especially English;
21. Supports a European Standard for Translation Services and believes that there should be a proactive policy for developing translation services for less widely used languages;
22. Welcomes the proposal for greater transparency in language teaching, testing and certification by publishing an inventory of the systems currently available;

***Proposed Measures***

23. Calls on the European institutions and bodies to improve their communication with citizens in their own national language, regardless of whether the language in question has official status at Member State or EU level;
24. Calls for a clear, coherent EU language plan and EU language legislation; there is a need for an EU language act to give a legal base to language rights both collectively and individually; on the basis of such legislation an EU language plan could be drawn up to ensure linguistic diversity and language rights;
25. Encourages the Commission to continue implementing the proposals set out in the Ebner Report in so far as they are feasible, and to notify Parliament regularly of the results;
26. Calls on the Commission to facilitate and promote access to information and funding for applicant bodies seeking to promote multilingualism through networks and/or projects funded by the Commission from 2007 onwards;

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27. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission, the Council and the Member States.

## EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

### Summary of the Communication

The Communication reaffirms the Commission's commitment to multilingualism and proposes specific actions. They note that the EU is founded on 'unity in diversity' and that besides the 21 'official' languages of the EU there are around 60 indigenous languages plus migrant languages. This diversity is considered a 'source of wealth' leading to 'greater solidarity' and 'mutual understanding'.

Referring to their definition of multilingualism which includes 'the co-existence of different language communities in one geographical area' they propose policies which seek to 'promote a climate that is conducive to the full expression of all languages, in which the teaching and learning of a variety of languages can flourish.'

Referring to lesser-used languages, the Commission notes that it has been the main financial support for the European Bureau for Lesser-Used Languages (EBLUL) and the Mercator network. It notes the study conducted for an Agency for Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity, this had the full support of the EP, but the Commission has opted for a Network of Language Diversity Centres for which it will, somewhat unconvincingly, 'examine the possibility of financing on a multi-annual basis through the proposed Lifelong Learning programme'.<sup>1</sup>

Amongst the proposals they outline that 'national plans' will be needed to promote multilingualism and rather half-heartedly that 'the teaching of regional or minority languages should also be taken into account as appropriate'.

In addition, they list a number of welcome measures including the use of new technologies, a new EU Indicator of Language competence, a best practice study, research, and the greater usage of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).

Section III turns to the multilingual economy and how language skills make the EU more competitive and recognising that speaking your customer's language is good for business. The text appears to be aimed at 'official languages only'.

Section IV highlights multilingualism in the Commission's relations with citizens. Because the EU adopts legislation that is directly binding on its citizens, it is therefore pre-requisite for the Unions' legitimacy and transparency that citizens should be able to communicate with its institutions and read EU law in their own, what they term, 'national' language, and be able to take part in the European project 'without encountering any language barriers.' However, while commendable, this appears to only include 'official' languages. It is mistake when they say that all citizens have universal access to the EU project when stateless and regional languages, some of which have more speakers than member state languages, are in fact

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<sup>1</sup> However, Mr Figel's speech at the recent conference on RMLs in education suggested that this was now more likely to go ahead.



excluded. It is incredible that when the EU is seeking to get closer to its citizens it excludes to exclude 10%<sup>1</sup> of them at the outset because of the lack of an inclusive language policy.

Otherwise the proposals outlined are welcome, but only if they include 'Regional' or Minority Language (RMLs).

### **Considerations on real multilingualism**

Linguistic diversity in Europe is now officially recognised (e.g. in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, the draft constitution) and supported (e.g. the 1993 Copenhagen criteria), but on the ground there are many languages losing speakers, a breakdown in inter-generational transmission, lack of language medium education and many speakers with no rights at all to use their language in any official capacity.

Furthermore, the failure of the EU Constitution, which contained several clauses ensuring support for Lesser-Used Language (LUL), has not been sufficiently recognised for its impact on the promotion of LUL languages and achieving rights for those languages. It is now time to reassess tactics without the draft constitution, a scenario which has left LUL without any proper legal base for campaigning or for funding. It means that NGOs such as EBLUL now has to focus on new ways to ensure meaningful linguistic diversity.

What is needed above and beyond existing international treaties such as the Council of Europe European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, is binding legislation that enshrines the rights LUL speakers, both individually and collectively, to conduct their lives in their language, the right to receive education in their language and the right to protection from hostile member states who's policies threaten LULs and act to assimilate the stateless nation and/or national minority.

Recent research illustrates that having a RML in a state is economically beneficial to that state. Based on the advantages of LUL / official language bilingualism, the research shows how bilingual people have greater cognitive abilities and give a population with enhanced skills. Investing in bilingualism and multilingualism is therefore a social capital investment.

The Communication, while well meaning and with several welcome innovative proposals, **remains ambiguous on the issue of non-official languages at best and at worst neglects the plight of several European languages that are endangered.** In addition, from the point of view of language planning and development it fails to make any clear progress on the matter of establishing meaningful linguistic diversity which, as a core EU value, is essential if the EU is aiming to achieve **real multilingualism.**

**The actual rules to gain EU funding act to exclude smaller language groups, member state or otherwise.** Following from the Action Plan, the Communication on Multilingualism signals a final clean break with any notion of ring-fenced funding for lesser-used language projects, a scenario that will effectively further marginalise lesser-used languages, especially

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<sup>1</sup> There are around 46 million RML speakers in Europe, making up some 10% of the EU population.

those most endangered. The Commission's proposals signal a paradigm shift away from earlier pre-2000 EU policy of direct support for lesser-used languages (with the B-line budget) to one where minoritised language communities have to compete on the 'open market' with the big languages. How they are meant to achieve this remains unclear. Larger languages have substantial organisations with large budgets, e.g. the British Council had 750 million euros in 2005 to promote English-far more than the budget for the Estonian, Swedish, Welsh or Scottish Gaelic.

There needs to be administrative simplification over grant applications proportionate to grant size, a proactive policy in favour of LULs in the allocation of funds and the return of ring-fenced, direct funding (including pre-funding) without co-financing. In addition, with IT developments, all Less Widely Used Language (LWULs) miss out on funding because of the emphasis on the more widely spoken languages.

If 'language make us human' as Commissioner Figel states, LULs and their speakers need the status that goes with that statement. If the EU believes in the slogans Unity in Diversity and that all languages are equal then **there is a need for a coherent, meaningful EU language policy and legislation** enshrined language rights to ensure all European languages are protected and are given the social linguistic space in which to thrive. While there are language rules and regulations there is to date no coherent legally binding language policy for the EU either at the level of the institutions or in member states.

Human language rights provision is uneven across the EU. This anomaly is further enhanced in the way that the accession states have to satisfy minimal lesser used language rights and national minority criteria. Yet, there are 'old' member states who, if they were in the process of applying for the EU today, would completely fail to meet these criteria. It is an anomaly that is unfair to the new member states and unfair to RML communities plus it illustrates EU double standards.

For greater multilingualism is that there **are proactive policies in favour of Europe's less widely used languages** including Member State languages such as Estonian and Danish, as well as national languages such as Basque and Welsh.

It's not much use, as the Commission recognises that more people are multilingual but when their second or third language is English. This will lead to an even greater pre-dominance and reinforcement of the use of English as the EU's *lingua franca*. What it should be encouraging, for example, is where people are able learn languages from outside their language group such as Welsh speakers learning Polish. English language learning is its own dynamic, profit-making industry, English mother tongue states, (e.g. UK-England, USA) already profit from this, it does not need further EU support.

In addition, **an endangered European language list needs to be established** so that the languages most in need can be identified and, with proactive policies, receive the most help.

**There is a need for a EU Language Ombudsman** to follow the Canadian Language Commissioner model. In Canada the Commissioner of Official Languages promotes and supports the objectives of the Canadian Official Languages Act; investigates complaints about language rights; audits federal government institutions to ensure their compliance with the

Official Languages Act; ensures that language rights remain a primary concern of government leaders; and promotes the use of both official languages in the federal government and in Canadian society.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the Commission's dismissal of the **Agency on Linguistic Diversity and Language Learning**, it is worth insisting again in its creation, retitled as an **Agency for Multilingualism**. Part of its remit would include the setting up of a **network on centres specialised in research and promotion of linguistic diversity**.

**All European languages should be made official in the EU.** This would be part of an EU language plan and may be achieved by reducing the number of full working languages in the EU as is *de facto* already the situation. Simply having member state languages only is not acceptable. Official status for one's language sends out a clear message to all EU citizens that they are to be treated equally and can only act to better connect the EU with its citizens. Some 10% (46 million) of the EU's population, the EU's RML language speakers, are compelled to use their Member State language and not their mother-tongue when dealing with the EU.

The Communication stipulates that citizens should be able to communicate to the EU 'in their own national language' and take part in the EU project 'without encountering any language barriers', yet it immediately contradicts itself by restricting these languages to official<sup>2</sup> member state languages only. It excludes some 10% of the EU population at a stroke. Welsh is the national language of Wales, Basque the language of the Basque nation, but they cannot be used. To achieve democratic legitimacy and transparency the EU must be accessible to its all of its citizens in all European languages. This statement raises huge questions about what exactly the Commission define as 'multilingualism', are they talking only of official languages? If so, this definition is unacceptable.

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<sup>1</sup> See [http://www.ocol-clo.gc.ca/rights\\_droits.asp?Lang=English](http://www.ocol-clo.gc.ca/rights_droits.asp?Lang=English),  
<http://canadaonline.about.com/cs/bilingualism/g/commol.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Languages to be used in the EU are currently determined by rule No. 1 of the 1958 EEC Treaty.

## PROCEDURE

<b>Title</b>	New framework strategy for multilingualism	
<b>Procedure number</b>	2006/2083(INI)	
<b>Committee responsible</b> Date authorisation announced in plenary	CULT 6.4.2006	
<b>Committee(s) asked for opinion(s)</b> Date announced in plenary	ITRE 6.4.2006	EMPL 6.4.2006
<b>Not delivering opinion(s)</b> Date of decision	ITRE 25.4.2006	EMPL 14.12.2005
<b>Enhanced cooperation</b> Date announced in plenary		
<b>Rapporteur(s)</b> Date appointed	Bernat Joan i Mari 23.1.2006	
<b>Previous rapporteur(s)</b>		
<b>Discussed in committee</b>	20.6.2006	
<b>Date adopted</b>	9.10.2006	
<b>Result of final vote</b>	+ 26 - 3 0 0	
<b>Members present for the final vote</b>	Maria Badia I Cutchet, Ivo Belet, Guy Bono, Marielle De Sarnez, Marie-Hélène Descamps, Jolanta Dičkutė, Hanna Foltyn-Kubicka, Milan Gaľa, Vasco Graça Moura, Lissy Gröner, Luis Herrero-Tejedor, Ruth Hieronymi, Bernat Joan i Mari, Manolis Mavrommatis, Ljudmila Novak, Doris Pack, Zdzisław Zbigniew Podkański, Pál Schmitt, Nikolaos Sifunakis, Thomas Wise	
<b>Substitute(s) present for the final vote</b>	Ignasi Guardans Cambó, Gyula Hegyi, Reino Paasilinna, Sérgio Sousa Pinto, Grażyna Staniszevska, Catherine Trautmann, Alejo Vidal-Quadras Roca	
<b>Substitute(s) under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote</b>	Harald Ettl, Gérard Onesta	
<b>Date tabled</b>	23.10.2006	
<b>Comments</b> (available in one language only)		