

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2916/05

by Marco Pannella (ALDE) and Emma Bonino (ALDE)  
to the Commission

Subject: Language teaching in Italy - infringement of free competition

In a report on the proposed Law 5714, Mr Licastro Scardino MP (a member of the Culture Committee) has written that 'the introduction of Esperanto as part of the teaching of foreign languages and literatures in primary schools would require an amendment to be made to Law 53 of 2003, which provides for the teaching in primary schools of literary in at least one EU language and the introduction of a second Community language in secondary schools. Subsequently, the first implementing decree identified English as the first Community language to be taught in primary schools'. This means that in Italy there is no possibility (even for Parliament) of introducing a first foreign language other than English, unless Decree 59 of 2004 is amended.

According to a report by Professor Grin (Director of the SRED in Geneva) which was commissioned in France by the HCEE, the United Kingdom earns a net amount of up to EUR 18 billion per year, thanks to the English language.

In view of the above, would the Commission answer the following questions?

- Does the Commission not think that, in view of the many EU programmes which are designed to facilitate the study of languages in loco and to provide financial support for student and teacher mobility, Italy's Decree-based identification of English as the first foreign language constitutes a surreptitious form of public funding for the economies of two or three Member States and in particular for their tourist industries?
- What is the total value of the funding allocated over the last two years by the EU in order to enable Italian students and teachers to travel for the purpose of studying English? How much funding has been allocated to the teaching or learning of each European language? What percentage of the total amount of EU funding earmarked for language study has been allocated to each of Europe's languages?
- Does the Commission not think that, in view of the spin-off from the market in languages (which feeds the markets in tourism, the media and multimedia, publishing and in particular educational publishing, and so on), Decree 59/2004 constitutes market distortion? What action does it intend to take in order to ensure that Italy abides by the rules on free competition?