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Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment

European Parliament resolution of 24 March 2009 on Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment (2008/2225(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Articles 149 and 151 of the EC Treaty,
- having regard to Articles 21 and 22 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,
- having regard to the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage,
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 18 September 2008 entitled Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment (COM(2008)0566) and to the accompanying Commission staff working document (SEC(2008)2443, SEC(2008)2444, SEC(2008)2445),
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 13 April 2007 entitled Framework for the European survey on language competences (COM(2007)0184),
- having regard to the Commission working document of 15 November 2007 entitled Report on the implementation of the Action Plan "Promoting language learning and linguistic diversity"(COM(2007)0554), and to the accompanying staff working document (SEC(2007)1222),
- having regard to its resolution of 10 April 2008 on a European agenda for culture in a globalising world¹,
- having regard to its resolution of 15 November 2006 on a new framework strategy for multilingualism²,
- having regard to its resolution of 27 April 2006 on measures to promote multilingualism and language learning in the European Union: European Indicator of Language Competence³,
- 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 diversity⁴,
- having regard to Decision No 1934/2000/EC of the European Parliament and of the

¹ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2008)0124.

² OJ C 314 E, 21.12.2006, p. 207.

³ OJ C 296 E, 6.12.2006, p. 271.

⁴ OJ C 76 E, 25.3.2004, p. 374.

Council of 17 July 2000 on the European Year of Languages 2001¹,

- having regard to the Presidency Conclusions of the Barcelona European Council of 15 and 16 March 2002,
 - having regard to the conclusions of the Education, Youth and Culture Council of 21 and 22 May 2008, with specific reference to multilingualism,
 - having regard to the Conclusions of 20 November 2008 of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on the promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue in the external relations of the Union and its Member States²,
 - having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions on multilingualism of 18-19 June 2008³ and to the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee of 18 September 2008 on multilingualism,
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Culture and Education and the opinion of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (A6-0092/2009),
- A. whereas linguistic and cultural diversity have a significant impact on the daily life of citizens of the European Union due to media penetration, increasing mobility and migration and advancing globalisation,
- B. whereas the acquisition of a diverse range of language skills is considered to be of the greatest importance for all EU citizens, since it enables them to derive full economic, social and cultural benefit from freedom of movement within the Union and from the Union's relations with third countries,
- C. whereas multilingualism is of increasing importance in the context of relations between Member States, cohabitation in our multicultural societies, and in the Union's common policies,
- D. whereas the evaluation of multilingualism needs to be validated by recognised instruments, such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and others,
- E. whereas certain European languages form a vital bridge in relations with third countries and between peoples and nations from the most diverse regions of the world,
- F. whereas linguistic diversity is acknowledged as a citizen's right in Articles 21 and 22 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, and multilingualism should also have the goal of encouraging respect for diversity and tolerance, so as to prevent the emergence of possible conflicts, whether active or passive, between the different linguistic communities within the Member States,
1. Welcomes the submission of the Commission Communication on multilingualism and the

¹ OJ L 232, 14.9.2000, p. 1.

² OJ C 320, 16.12.2008, p. 10.

³ OJ C 257, 9.10.2008, p. 30.

attention paid to it by the Council;

2. Reiterates the positions it has upheld over time on multilingualism and cultural diversity;
3. Insists on the need for recognition of parity between the EU's official languages in all aspects of public activity;
4. Considers that Europe's linguistic diversity constitutes a major cultural asset and it would be wrong for the European Union to restrict itself to a single main language;
5. Stresses the crucial role of the EU institutions in ensuring respect for the principle of linguistic parity, in relations between Member States and in the EU institutions themselves, as also in EU citizens' relations with national administrations and with Community and international institutions and bodies;
6. Recalls that the importance of multilingualism is not confined to economic and social aspects and that attention must also be paid to cultural and scientific creation and transmission and to the importance of translation, both literary and technical, in the lives of citizens and for the EU's long-term development; and last but not least, the role played by languages in shaping and strengthening identity;
7. Stresses that multilingualism is a transversal issue that has a major impact on the lives of European citizens; calls on Member States also, therefore, to mainstream multilingualism in policies other than education, such as lifelong learning, social inclusion, employment, media and research;
8. Stresses the vital importance of creating specific programmes to support translation and of setting up multilingual terminology database networks;
9. Recalls that information and communication technologies are to be used for promoting multilingualism and therefore emphasises the role and the use of the appropriate international standard (ISO 10646) - which allows for the representation of the alphabets of all languages - in European and Member States' administrative systems and media;
10. Proposes introducing a European Day of the Translator and Interpreter or taking account of and raising the profile of these professions during the European Day of Languages, celebrated on 26 September each year;
11. Asserts that it is vital to safeguard multilingualism in countries or regions in which two or more official languages coexist;
12. Stresses the need, in Member States with more than one official language, to ensure full mutual intelligibility between those languages, especially in relation to senior citizens and to the legal system, health, administration and employment;
13. Encourages the learning of a second European Union language by officials who come into contact with the citizens of other Member States in their work;
14. Believes it necessary and appropriate to create opportunities for foreign language learning in adulthood and, through vocational and lifelong learning programmes, with a view to personal and professional development;
15. Emphasises the vital need to provide special attention and support at school to pupils who

cannot be educated in their mother tongue, and warmly welcomes the Commission proposal to promote 'mother tongue plus two' in education;

16. Regrets that the Commission has not as yet instituted either a multi-annual programme on linguistic diversity and language learning or a European Agency on linguistic diversity and language learning, as called for in the abovementioned resolution adopted by Parliament by a large majority on 4 September 2003;
17. Stresses, further, the importance of a full knowledge of the host state's official languages for the full integration of immigrants and their families and emphasises that national governments must effectively promote special language courses, particularly for women and older people; calls on Member States to act responsibly vis-à-vis immigrants, providing immigrants with the necessary means to learn the language and culture of the host country, while allowing and encouraging them to maintain their own language;
18. Recalls that for these reasons it is vital to ensure quality in this context, including relevant teacher training;
19. Stresses the need to give sufficient importance at pre-school level to learning languages, and above all the national language of the country where the children attend school;
20. Takes the view that children should, in their own interest, be able to speak the language of the country in which they live to ensure that they are not subject to discrimination in the course of their education or subsequent training and are capable of taking part in all activities on an equal basis;
21. Suggests to the Member States that they examine the possibility of exchanges of teaching staff at different educational levels, with the aim of teaching different school subjects in different languages, and believes that this possibility could be exploited, in particular, in border regions and thus improve worker mobility and citizens' knowledge of languages;
22. Believes it is vital to promote mobility and exchanges of language teachers and students; recalls that the fluid movement of language teachers in the European Union will help ensure effective contact for as many of those professionals as possible with the native environment of the languages they teach;
23. Urges the Commission and the Member States to encourage professional mobility for teachers and cooperation between schools and different countries in carrying out technologically and culturally innovative teaching projects;
24. Encourages and supports the introduction of mother-tongue minority, local and foreign languages on a non-compulsory basis within school programmes and/or in the context of extracurricular activities open to the community;
25. Calls on the Council to produce an annual progress report on multilingualism in formal and informal education systems, vocational training and adult education in the Member States, paying attention to the relationship between the prevalence of national, regional and minority languages and immigration;
26. Reiterates its longstanding commitment to the promotion of language learning, multilingualism and linguistic diversity in the European Union, including regional and minority languages, as these are cultural assets that must be safeguarded and nurtured; considers that multilingualism is essential for effective communication and represents a

means of facilitating comprehension between individuals and hence acceptance of diversity and of minorities;

27. Recommends that Member States' academic curricula include optional study of a third foreign language, starting at secondary school level;
28. Stresses the importance of studying the languages of neighbouring countries as a way of facilitating communications, enhancing mutual understanding in and strengthening the European Union;
29. Recommends support for learning the languages of neighbouring countries and regions, especially in the border regions;
30. Reiterates the importance of promoting and supporting the development of innovative pedagogical models and approaches for language teaching in order to encourage the acquisition of language skills and to raise awareness and motivation among citizens;
31. Proposes that at every level of education, and regardless of geographical environment, there should be qualified foreign language teachers;
32. Recommends consultation of the European federations and associations of modern language teachers on the programmes and methodologies to be applied;
33. Insists on the need for policies to stimulate reading and encourage creative writing with a view to achieving these objectives;
34. Welcomes plans by the Commission to launch information and awareness campaigns regarding the benefits of language learning through the mass media and new technologies; urges the Commission to draw on the conclusions of the consultations regarding language learning for migrant children and the teaching in the host Member State of the language and culture of the country of origin;
35. Recommends and encourages the use of ICTs as an indispensable tool in language teaching;
36. Reiterates its political priority of the acquisition of language skills through the learning of other EU languages, one of which should be the language of a neighbouring country and another an international "lingua franca": considers that this would give citizens competences and qualifications for participating in democratic society in terms of active citizenship, employability and knowledge of other cultures;
37. Suggests that an adequate degree of multilingualism should also be ensured in the media and in Internet content, and most particularly in the language policy of European and other European Union-linked sites and portals, where European multilingualism must be fully respected, at least as far as the 23 official European Union languages are concerned;
38. Notes that the use of subtitles in television programmes will facilitate the learning and practice of EU languages and better understanding of the cultural background to audiovisual productions;
39. Encourages the EU to reap the potential dividends offered by European languages in its external relations, and calls for further development of this asset in cultural, economic and social dialogue with the rest of the world with a view to strengthening and adding value to

the EU's role on the international scene and to benefitting third countries, in the spirit of the development policy promoted by the EU;

40. Proposes that the Council co-organise, with civil society, a first European Conference on language diversity in order to discuss this matter thoroughly, in the framework of the recommendation of the United Nations international expert group on indigenous languages, adopted in the Report of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues at its Seventh Session in May 2008 (E/2008/43);
41. Believes that in the context of life-long learning, sufficient support should be provided to help citizens of all age groups to develop and improve their language skills on an ongoing basis by giving them access to suitable language learning or other facilities for easier communication, including language learning at an early age, with a view to improving their social inclusion, employment prospects and welfare;
42. Invites the Commission and the Member States to promote measures facilitating language learning by people in disadvantaged situations, persons belonging to national minorities and migrants, in order to enable these persons to learn the language(s) of the host country and/or region in order to achieve social integration and combat social exclusion; stresses that it is necessary for migrants to be able to use their main language in developing their language skills; urges the Member States, accordingly, to encourage the use of a person's main language as well as the learning of the national language(s);
43. Advocates greater support for the international projection of European languages worldwide, with these constituting an asset for the European project, in the light of the key importance of the linguistic, historical and cultural ties between the EU and third countries and in the spirit of promoting democratic values in those countries;
44. Believes that companies in the EU, and especially SMEs, should be provided with proper support for language instruction and use, thus facilitating their access to world markets and especially to emerging markets;
45. Underlines the right of consumers to receive information about products sold on the market of their place of residence in the official language or languages of that place of residence;
46. Draws particular attention to possible dangers in the communication gap between individuals with different cultural backgrounds and the social divide between multilingual and monolingual people; draws attention to the fact that the lack of language skills continues to be a serious obstacle to the social and labour market integration of non-national workers in many Member States; urges the Commission and the Member States, therefore, to take measures to narrow the gap between multilingual people, who have more opportunities in the European Union and monolingual people who are excluded from many opportunities;
47. Believes that support should be provided for learning third country languages, including within the EU;
48. Demands that the coverage of the language competence indicators should be extended as soon as possible to all the official EU languages, without prejudice to their also being extended to other languages spoken in the European Union;
49. Considers that the collection of data should include testing the four language skills, that is,

understanding of the written and spoken language and written and oral expression;

50. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to strengthen their efforts in enhancing cooperation between the Member States by making use of the open method of coordination, in order to facilitate the exchange of experiences and good practices in the area of multilingualism, taking account of the economic benefits, for example in multilingual undertakings;
51. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the Governments and Parliaments of the Member States.