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PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and
a shared commitment**

SUMMARY OF THE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

{COM(2008) 566 final}
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This report commits only the Commission's services involved in its preparation and does not
prejudge the final form of any decision to be taken by the Commission

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Impact Assessment Report presents the state of play in relation to multilingualism policy and proposes to reinforce action in this field. It accompanies the proposal for the Commission Communication “Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment” (n°2008/EAC/004 in the Agenda Planning).

Linguistic diversity is a key long-term feature of the European Union, whose 500 million citizens speak 23 different official languages along with 60 other languages spoken only in specific regions or by specific groups, not to mention the over 300 different languages that our immigrants bring with them. It is estimated that currently citizens from at least 175 nationalities are living within the boundaries of the European Union. Migration flows added to the already existing patchwork of national minorities and cultural. In such a context, interaction between speakers of different languages has increased steadily over recent years, because of increasing intra-European mobility; migration flows from third countries and globalisation. This trend is likely to continue and to further increase in the years to come. Against this background, the two problems highlighted in this Impact Assessment are:¹

- (1) Knowledge of foreign languages remains insufficient. Europeans have not yet acquired skills in two additional languages to their mother tongue, as called for by the Barcelona Council;
- (2) European citizens, companies and service providers are not fully aware of assets as well as of challenges of linguistic diversity in Europe.

The problem definition is supported by data and feedback received during the follow-up of two previous Communications on multilingualism² (2007) and the 9 month-long consultation process (2007-2008).

Previous Communications on multilingualism and language diversity set out an agenda of actions up to 2006-2007, and called for a review and possible further action. The assessment of progress and implementation carried out in 2007 shows that while there is evidence of progress (particularly in language learning in primary and secondary education), implementation needs to continue and should be reinforced in a lifelong learning perspective, with much attention given to informal language learning and linguistic diversity in the local environment.

As for the **consultation process**, Member States, European institutions and stakeholders shared the following views:

¹ Institutional multilingualism (i.e. languages used by the European Commission to communicate internally and with the citizen: publications / translation / interpretation) is out of the scope of this Impact Assessment and related policy initiatives. Although institutional multilingualism deals with languages, it has different problems, objectives and options and decision was taken not to tackle them together

² COM(2003) 449 final, COM(2005) 596 final, COM(2007) 554 final/2

On the scope of multilingualism policy:

- Linguistic and cultural diversity is perceived as a long-term feature of European society: most people value it while acknowledging the need to manage it in an effective and prudent way. Shifting to a single language is not an option for the majority of respondents.
- A language policy promoting only the learning of EU official languages is too limited for present-day society, where citizens (and residents) speaking many different languages are in daily contact.
- Language learning should be placed in a lifelong perspective.
- Multilingualism is a transversal issue that has an impact on competitiveness and European citizenship and which should be mainstreamed in a range of policies going beyond the field of education.
- Promoting linguistic diversity should not aim at preserving languages as an end in itself, on the contrary, it should emphasise dialogue between languages and communities.
- Every citizen needs a different set of language skills, which depend on individual interests and where one lives, as well as family and professional background.

On Methods:

- Member States and the Commission should develop a language policy which favours linguistic diversity and promotes a language friendly environment, through widening the range of languages taught, valuing and maintaining the language skills of their citizens, and motivating them to learn more.
- Lifelong language learning is key to acquiring language skills: start early, sustain motivation through schooling and initial training, and go on learning languages throughout adult life.
- Informal language learning should be better exploited, by increasing access to multimedia, virtual or physical mobility and cultural exchanges. Learning languages in this way is effective allowing people to learn when, where and how they like and enabling people from different backgrounds to communicate, to discover and compare different mindsets.
- Local communities, service providers and companies should take into account that they often serve citizens and customers who speak different languages and they should develop strategies to cater for their language needs.

The added value of the new Communication will be:

- to sustain the efforts towards mother tongue plus two by giving clearer indications on areas and target groups lagging behind (students in vocational trainings, low-skilled adults and migrants) and less tackled by the previous Communications

- to anchor multilingualism in the wider context of “Growth and Jobs process” by raising awareness on the assets of linguistic diversity and on their effects on intercultural dialogue. In this context multilingualism is also emerging as a component of EU external policies, as recently highlighted by the Euromed Culture Summit.³
- to mainstream multilingualism in relevant policies at European level and work in partnership with Member States and stakeholders to ensure that objectives are shared and met at the most appropriate level

Consequently the **two general objectives** of multilingualism policy are:

- (1) to enable citizens to be fluent in two languages in addition to their mother tongue (in short: "mother tongue-plus-two")
- (2) to raise awareness of the linguistic diversity of European society and turn it into an asset for intercultural dialogue and competitiveness.

Coming to **implementation**, the first operational objective will be to ensure that multilingualism is consistently promoted across the above-mentioned European policies, using a **mainstreaming approach** and making the best use of financial support available under existing European programmes. According to the subsidiarity principle, Member States are key decision-makers on these matters, while several stakeholders (educational providers, social partners, the media, local authorities, etc.) are essential to implementation. Therefore the second operational objective will be **to work in partnership with Member States and stakeholders** and support them in achieving the common objectives and adopting a mainstreaming approach at their level.

Different options have been taken into consideration to achieve the objectives:

- (1) No further action with Member States and no strategic use of EU programmes (mainstreaming)
- (2) Use of regulatory instruments (a Recommendation)
- (3) Use of the Open Method of Coordination: issuing a Commission Communication paving the way for cooperation with Member States and having it endorsed by the other European Institutions. Mainstreaming multilingualism in current EU programmes and initiatives.

DG Education and Culture, in comparing the strengths and weaknesses of the above options, has elected to propose option 3, which would enable the Commission – with the co-operation of the Member States and the stakeholders – to address the identified challenges to multilingualism and find appropriate solutions. This option, which also corresponds most closely to Member States’ and stakeholders’ expectations, complies with the subsidiarity

³ *Agreed Conclusions of the third Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Ministers of Culture Athens, 29 – 30 May 2008, ; Presidency Declaration at the Conference New Paradigms, New Models — Culture in the EU External Relations, Ljubljana, 13 -14 May*
http://www.mzz.gov.si/si/zunanja_politika/kulturno_sodelovanje/nove_paradigme_novi_modeli_kultur_a_v_zunanjih_odnosih_eu/.

principle, and would provide the best basis for raising awareness of the challenges and problems and achieving real progress towards their solution.

As for the way multilingualism should be promoted by Commission policies and programmes, the option of an expenditure programme for multilingualism was discarded because multilingualism is a transversal objective of very different policies (education, culture, media, employment, social inclusion, research...) and supporting them outside their natural contexts does not seem to be either appropriate or effective. Therefore the approach of mainstreaming multilingualism in relevant Commission policies and programmes seemed a viable answer. Chief among these programmes are: all strands of the Lifelong Learning Programme, language training support given through structural funds, language integration courses for immigrants supported by JLS, Youth in Action, Citizens for Europe, Literary translations supported by the Culture programme, Media programme, Research Programme and Information technology.

In the light of observations made and considering the limited scope for direct action of the Commission, these are the economic and social impacts the chosen option is likely to have, depending on the determination with which Member States and stakeholders will implement the recommended strategy:

- Economic impacts: through the impact of language skills on citizens' employability and competitiveness, the new strategy defined in the Communication is likely to have a positive impact on international trade and cross-border investments; technological development and innovation; the number and quality of jobs; third country and overseas relations.
- Social impacts: the strategy is likely to have a positive impact on social inclusion, as well as governance and participation since language skills are a prerequisite for intercultural dialogue.

As for costs: at Commission level the implementation of the actions recommended in the Communication will not entail a budget increase. It is aimed at making more effective use of existing programmes to promote multilingualism, notably by ensuring:

- a more consistent approach (i.e. pass on a consistent message in support of linguistic diversity, give attention to language issues in projects and initiatives)
- more synergy between Member States (i.e. support them to achieve shared objectives, through Commission initiatives and the exchange of good practices).

As for Member States, the Communication, in line with the already agreed EU objectives such as the Barcelona target of "mother tongue plus two" will recommend general and operational objectives and suggest ways of achieving them, while the implementation will remain the competence of the Member States. A general principle to be conveyed by the Commission Communication will be to recommend that action is taken close to citizens, taking into account local language needs and pooling the resources of business, civil society and local authorities so as to use them in the most effective way.

Concerning monitoring, the already existing Inter-service Group on Multilingualism could be used to ensure a coordinated approach with the Commission and to mainstream multilingualism in relevant European programmes and initiatives, through interventions at programme level (thematic priorities, budget for linguistic preparation and linguistic activities, adequate monitoring, etc.). Follow-up with Member States will be ensured through a Working Group of High Representatives of Member States, based on the existing Working Group on Languages. To maintain focus on multilingualism policy and to ensure a periodic review of its progress, the Commission will recommend that the European institutions devote an annual slot in their agenda to its discussion. In the case of the Council, it will suggest the inclusion of multilingualism in the rolling agenda of the Education Council.

The Commission will regularly update available indicators and consider the possibility of funding surveys of less charted areas (like business and service providers). As far as mainstreaming is concerned, the Commission should ensure that language issues are adequately taken into account while evaluating relevant EU programmes and policies. The Commission will encourage Member States and stakeholders to include language as an issue in the evaluation of policies and strategies at their level. The Commission will carry out a global review of progress in 2012 and report to the European Parliament and the Council on the experience gained. To this end, Member States will be invited to report on their progress by end 2011.