

A political agenda for multilingualism

Multilingualism was created on 1 January 2007 as a separate portfolio to reflect its political dimension in the EU given its importance for initial education, lifelong learning, economic competitiveness, employment, justice, liberty and security.

Linguistic diversity is a daily reality of the European Union. The European Commission is committed to preserving and promoting this key feature. The Commissioner's mandate will have as main objectives defining the contribution of multilingualism to:

- economic competitiveness, growth and better jobs
- lifelong learning and intercultural dialogue
- nurturing a space for European political dialogue through multilingual communication with the citizens.

1. Contribution to competitiveness, growth and better jobs

Multilingualism makes a real contribution to the competitiveness of the European economy, for reaching the targets of the Lisbon strategy. A study on the **"Effects on the European Economy of Shortages of Foreign Language Skills in Enterprise"** made by CILT (UK National Centre for Languages) suggests real lost business opportunities due to the lack of language skills in enterprises. It is also important to remember that multilingualism in itself constitutes an important industry and creates a large number of jobs.

A **Business Forum on Multilingualism** will be set-up during the second half of 2007, to identify ways to increase the multilingual abilities of companies to help them enter new markets. Language skills can also considerably improve the employment prospects and mobility of individuals. Therefore, the Business Forum will also be asked to look further into opportunities in that field.

A better understanding of the potential of new technologies to attract and train language learners is needed; hence, a **study on new technologies and linguistic diversity** will be launched in 2007. Moreover, research in new technologies for language learning and the use of **artificial intelligence as a tool for translation and interpretation** should be encouraged.

2. Promoting lifelong learning and intercultural dialogue

To promote high quality language learning, policies need to be based on solid evidence. There are two reports to be finalised in 2007:

- "Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity" (implementation of the 2004-2006 Action Plan)
- "Diversity of language teaching offered in the EU" (first 5-yearly report)

Stock will be taken as well of the work of the **European Language Inspectors Network (ELIN)**.

The Lifelong Learning Programme will provide financial means for language projects; it will be addressed to all languages, including **regional and minority languages**. Support for multilingualism will in fact be one of the overarching priorities across all the projects of this programme.

The increasing demand for interpreters and translators for the European institutions proves already the necessity to further encourage their training. By the same token, there is an increasing need for them on the private market (for instance, the demand for interpreters at the European Patent Office, in courts or at the level of local communities). The Commission is already supporting post-graduate programmes for interpreters and translators in Member States. **Programmes for the Training of Interpreters and Translators** will be developed to ensure constant financial support and a bigger pool of well prepared candidates.

Subtitling is a spectacular tool for helping people learn languages easily and enjoyably. A series of meetings will therefore take place in order to exploit this potential of the **media** with regard to language learning.

Finally, it should not be forgotten that language learning is a crucial vector for intercultural awareness and understanding. Therefore, a contribution of multilingualism to intercultural dialogue must be guaranteed. Indeed, it is only by learning languages that one can move from a *multi-cultural* society to a truly *inter-cultural* one. 2008 will be the European year of intercultural dialogue. A **High Level Group of intellectuals and practitioners of multilingualism** will be set up in 2007. Its purpose is to define the contribution of multilingualism to this year and thereafter. This will build on other on-going internal work.

3. Nurturing a space for European political dialogue: multilingual communication with EU citizens

Translation and interpretation enable citizens of all the Member States to read and understand the laws that apply to them; and for democratically elected representatives to be able to defend their interests and ideas without being hampered by language.

Therefore, **for two out of three new official languages**¹ (Bulgarian and Romanian) the priorities for this year are finalising the publication of EU secondary legislation and starting the consolidation. For the other official languages, the priority is to consolidate the legislation. To improve communication with EU citizens, the Commission will seek to improve the multilingual cover of its **websites**, as far as resources permit.

¹ As regards Irish, there is a special regime of five years as of 1.1.2007, entailing that only Regulations adopted jointly by the European Parliament and the Council will be translated into Irish.

Providing access to online information services to citizens in their languages (such as **EUR-Lex**² for professionals in the legal field, **CORDIS**³ for those interested in research, **TED**⁴ for EU public procurement, **EU Bookshop** as the EU's virtual bookstore) will be a cross-cutting action in 2007 and 2008.

The European institutions have developed several tools to help translators and interpreters in their work. These should be available to the public. For instance, by the middle of this year, the **inter-institutional terminology database IATE**⁵ will be opened to the public. This will provide business with precise terminology (e.g. for lawyers, engineers) that can be used in technical aspects of different fields of activity.

Moreover, modern tools have been developed to facilitate communication. DG Interpretation has developed the **Advanced Technological Platform for Multilingual Communication**. This allows remote audiences to be connected through a video-conference system, providing simultaneous interpretation. This system should be extended at the level of the European Commission and of other institutions. In this way citizens from Member States will be enabled to be in contact with European institutions and bodies.

Towards a new strategy

The multilingualism portfolio has a significant horizontal dimension, inter-acting closely with other policies of the European Union, such as culture, education, communication, social policy, employment, justice, liberty and security, etc. Therefore, its contribution to the development and shaping of EU policies - both internal and external - should be further examined and the benefits promoted wherever possible.

Gathering ideas and suggestions from Member States and stakeholders in the field is therefore essential in order to build new policies reflecting their needs. This will be done in the framework of the **High Level Group on multilingualism** (which will present its conclusions on 26 September) and a **Ministerial conference on multilingualism** (which will be organised at the beginning of next year). All these ideas will provide a basis for a **Communication outlining a new strategy on multilingualism** (to be presented during the second half of 2008).

² EUR-Lex is a data base, which provides direct free access to European Union law.

³ Community Research and Development Information Service. CORDIS is an interactive information platform that provides information on news, progress and initiatives in European innovation, research & development

⁴ Tenders Electronic Daily, is a database of all tenders published in Europe.

⁵ Inter-Active Terminology for Europe.