

Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions — A new framework strategy for multilingualism

COM(2005) 596 final

(2006/C 324/24)

On 22 November 2005 the Commission decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 262 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the abovementioned proposal.

The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 6 September 2006. The rapporteur was Ms Le Nouail Marlière.

In view of the renewal of the Committee's term of office, the Plenary Assembly decided to vote on this opinion at its October plenary session and appointed Ms Le Nouail Marlière as rapporteur-general under Rule 20 of the Rules of Procedure.

At its 430th plenary session, held on 26 October 2006, the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 105 votes to one, with five abstentions.

1. Conclusions

1.1 The EESC recommends that:

- the Commission should give *the Member States* precise indications about the *links which could be established and additional measures which could be taken in the national plans*, stressing that multilingualism or plurilingualism can help to promote cultural and political integration, and foster understanding and social inclusion;
- in order to achieve long-term results, *the language training on offer* needs to be coordinated at EU level, with the potential pool of language skills spanning a wide range of languages;
- *multilingualism in the professional, cultural, political, scientific and social fields should be developed and promoted*;
- the experts involved in this work should be drawn not just from the ranks of specialists in social and scientific disciplines but should also include linguists, interpreters, translators, teachers and other language professionals;
- greater account be taken of today's young and older adult generation in developing this action, via *life-long learning* and, when the Commission reaches the programming stage, through *their cultural rights*;
- the Commission not only draws on university research but also on the work carried out by the networks of *associations working* in this area, and that it supports the grassroots initiatives taken within the civil society network.

2. Introduction: Summary of the Commission's communication

In its communication, the Commission defines a new framework strategy for multilingualism and reaffirms its own commitment to multilingualism. This document is described as 'the first communication in the history of the Commission to tackle this subject'. The communication examines various aspects of European policies on the subject and proposes a number of specific actions.

The Commission calls upon the Member States to play their role and to promote the teaching, learning and use of languages. The Commission launches the event by bringing into operation a new institutional consultation portal, available in 20 languages.

In this initial policy document dealing with the subject of multilingualism, the Commission sets out a new framework strategy, backed up by proposals for specific actions in the social and economic fields and in the field of relations with citizens. The Commission is pursuing the following three objectives: to encourage language learning and to promote linguistic diversity in society; to promote a healthy multilingual economy; and to give citizens access to European Union legislation, procedures and information in their own languages. The Commission draws attention to the fact that the Barcelona European Council in 2002 highlighted the need to promote the teaching of at least two foreign languages. In the light of this call, the Commission asks the Member States to take the following steps: to adopt action plans for promoting multilingualism; to improve the training of language teachers; to mobilise the necessary resources for enabling pupils to learn foreign languages from the earliest possible age; and to step up the teaching of subjects through the medium of a foreign language. The Commission draws attention to the fact that European enterprises need people skilled in the use of the languages of the EU and those of its trading partners throughout the world and points out that language-related sectors of the economy are undergoing rapid development in most European countries; in the light of these considerations, the Commission proposes a number of actions designed to strengthen the multilingual aspect of the EU

economy. With regard to its own multilingual communication policy, the Commission plans to strengthen the multilingual nature of its many Internet sites and publications by setting up an internal network with responsibility for ensuring that linguistic practices are applied in a coherent way by the Commission's departments. The Commission also proposes the establishment of a High Level Group on Multilingualism, made up of independent experts, to help it analyse the progress made by the Member States. It makes two further proposals: to hold a ministerial conference in the near future on the subject of Multilingualism to enable the Member States to take stock of the progress which they have made in this field; and to prepare a new communication setting out a comprehensive approach to multilingualism in the European Union.

3. General comments

3.1 The EESC endorses the Commission's initiative and notes that this strategic framework is described as a new departure and the communication is defined as the first policy document on the subject of multilingualism. In this context, the many references made to the former strategic framework ⁽¹⁾ fall short of what is required to provide a clear appraisal of this strategy. In the EESC's view, it would be helpful if the Commission could summarise the contribution which the new framework strategy is expected to make in terms of added value and summarise its comparative impact. Will an impact assessment be made, along the lines defined in the inter-institutional agreement between the European Commission and the EESC ⁽²⁾ and as part of the drive to bring about legislative simplification and to simplify governance? The EESC suggests that, by itself, the communication might fail to give the proposed measures the prominence required by the Member States to enable them to approve the programmes in question which are, furthermore, not binding. Although the framework strategy has been requested by the Council, harmonisation is required in order to make optimal use of the resources which may be allocated by both the Member States and the EU itself. Such harmonisation can only take place if there is a clear awareness of the measures which have already been carried out by the Member States and the EU.

3.2 The Commission 'reaffirms [its] commitment'; the EESC therefore notes that this commitment has already been expressed on an earlier occasion. The EESC notes that the state of play as regards internal practice at the Commission with regard to multilingualism does not give rise to unanimous satisfaction both within the Commission's departments and in its relations with outside bodies.

3.3 The EESC notes the discrepancy and lack of equal treatment between the Institutions, on the one hand, and European civil society in all its component forms (autonomous social dialogue and civil dialogue), on the other hand. All the memos, studies and documents which are both useful and necessary for drawing up European legislation and holding consultations and discussions on this legislation are produced and are available to a disproportionate extent in English. Likewise an increasing number of internal meetings organised by the Commission are held in English. In order to work as a Commission expert one therefore has to speak English, and the same applies in the case of persons wishing to represent civil society in Brussels. Furthermore, many of the statistical and qualitative studies referred to in this opinion are available only in English ⁽³⁾.

3.4 A number of documents are not always available in the language of the institutional rapporteurs or the players who are usually consulted, which shows that the agreement on the use of the three pivot working languages of the EU institutions is far from being respected, whether at an institutional or at an informal level; the upshot is that several interlocutors can easily find themselves excluded from an increasing number of debates. It is therefore not surprising to discover in the various statistical studies presented that the sample of persons questioned prefer to pursue their studies in English, since this is *de facto* the language which is likely to be increasingly used when taking key decisions. This is exactly the line of reasoning which has led several generations of parents and governments to focus on the learning of English as the preferred language and it has also brought about the present situation.

3.5 Furthermore, the annex to the present communication demonstrates that the 'foreign' language most commonly used in the EU is not the one spoken by the largest mother tongue group. The most commonly used language in the EU is said to be spoken (and the term 'said to be' is employed because Eurostat does not specify the definition used with regard to the level of knowledge or vocabulary deemed to be required before people can be regarded as speakers of the language in question) by 47 % of the sample of persons questioned, even though it is apparently the mother tongue of only 13 % of them.

3.6 In the EESC's view, this situation represents a *de facto* impediment to the right of citizens and their representatives, i.e. the European Parliament and the consultative committees (EESC and CoR), for direct and indirect democratic participation in drawing up the rules that apply to them. In reality, when rapporteurs within the institutions, who as representatives of civil society are asked to give their views as members of democratic, legal bodies and institutions, they are frequently only able to grasp what the Commission is proposing at the price of undue effort and guess-work. How can the fact that citizens have, at no point, had proper access to information, be overlooked? This situation is particularly illogical in the case of a communication on this subject. Finding a way out of this collective, intellectual and cultural predicament and this economic dependence at the expense of essential good participation requires resources and a political will.

The EESC is therefore pleased to note that the Commission intends to mitigate these problems by setting up a more effective portal; this portal does however concern multilingualism, rather than all its communication. The objectives presented by the Commission in the chapter entitled 'Multilingualism in the Commission's relations with citizens' are not very clear when it comes to institutional communication: the communication might just appear to be an extension of Plan-D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate. Communicating in 20 official languages does not change the nature of institutional communication which takes place retrospectively and is based on decisions in which citizens do not participate; such communication does not, in itself, strengthen public involvement.

3.7 Many observers have pointed out that the first pages of the institutional portals or websites may contain documents which appear to be multilingual but, on further consultation, turn out to be available only in English.

⁽¹⁾ COM(2002) 72/ COM(2003) 449/ COM(2005) 24 of 2.2.2005 / 2005/29/EC/ COM(2005) 356/ COM(2005) 229 and 465.

⁽²⁾ Protocol of cooperation between the European Commission and the European Economic and Social Committee (November 2005).

⁽³⁾ See footnotes [2], [12], [17], [19], [24], [25], [26], [30], [31], [32], [37] in the communication under review COM(2005) 596.

3.8 The EESC stresses that all languages are rightfully part of the cultural human heritage and observes that imposing the use of English for technical reasons rather than as a cultural asset could be detrimental to it if, despite being widely used, it is poorly mastered. The EESC has taken its cue from this observation to set out, further below, specific comments on language status and use.

3.9 The EESC notes that there is an imbalance in the restrained approach based on the economic aspects of multilingualism (consumers, the information society, professions and industries, and the knowledge-based economy) and that it could be skewed more towards human, social, sociological, cultural and political considerations. If it is the case, as mentioned during the press conference which launched this Commission communication, that what lies at the heart of the difference between human beings and other animals is language and the exchanges between human beings which it gives rise to, then the communication should duly bear in mind that human exchanges are not solely geared to trade or the defence of existing territory and its resources. The communication would thus benefit from referring to the work carried out by UNESCO in this field, with a view to putting forward positive recommendations ⁽⁴⁾.

3.10 The EESC endorses the link between the Lisbon strategy, its implementation, the European employment strategy and the new framework strategy but proposes that the Communication define in greater detail the concrete measures which have to be taken (with more coordination between the Commission's internal departments and the DGs responsible for employment, culture etc.). The EESC asks the Commission to give the Member States precise indications about the links which could be established and the additional measures which could be taken, stressing that multilingualism or plurilingualism can help to promote EU political and cultural integration and foster understanding and social inclusion. A sectoral impact assessment should cover the number and quality of jobs that are preserved or created and the real impact on wages which is expected to occur.

The EESC supports the call for Member States to 'establish national plans to give structure, coherence and direction to actions to promote multilingualism...' but observes that, in order to achieve long-term results, this must be coordinated at EU level, in order to draw on a potentially much wider pool of language skills.

Within the framework of the strategy aiming to create 'the most competitive knowledge-based [European] economy in the world', it would seem appropriate — in order to ensure that the European Union does not become constrained by its language barriers — to think along the lines of the full range of languages present within the European Union and ensure that this figure exceeds the number of languages currently available and used within the internal market.

⁽⁴⁾ UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, adopted on 2 November 2001; Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (10 December 2005) — these Conventions underline the need for linguistic diversity and diversity as regards means of expression with a view to establishing diversity and cultural pluralism as inalienable, universal rights which are inseparable and interdependent. The Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights, which was adopted in Barcelona at the World Conference on Linguistic Rights held between 6 and 8 June 1996, and which was signed by 66 national and international NGOs and legal networks, must also be mentioned.

The right of immigrants to learn the language of their host country should be exercised in tandem with the right to maintain their own language and culture ⁽⁵⁾. The European Union should consider these languages as additional human resources in its quest towards 'global competitiveness'. A number of enterprises have already contemplated these issues, but workers, trade unions and targeted consumer associations should be involved as well. Advantage should also be taken of support provided by local authorities which have introduced concrete measures, such as reception services aimed at promoting 'integration' and made available in the languages most commonly spoken by recent immigrants.

3.11 Another area of the economy which should be further developed in the communication is that of the needs of workers and ways of motivating them in the pursuit of their respective occupations and in consultative bodies, such as the European Works Councils. It is in the EESC's view regrettable that the communication is able to envisage advocating harmonised programmes which fail to take account of these particular needs. Such a wide-ranging communication should propose areas which would provide enterprises and workers with both the prospects and the means of becoming the principal agents for building the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world, whilst fully respecting the remit of social dialogue and fundamental rights ⁽⁶⁾.

3.12 The EESC recognises that multilingualism makes the EU special ⁽⁷⁾. Nonetheless, Europe is not the only continent, country or political entity where a large number of different languages are spoken.

4. Specific comments

4.1 The debates and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages of the Council of Europe ⁽⁸⁾ must not hide other issues, such as:

- a) The status of languages: Languages may be classified as: official, working, Community, minority, dominant, languages used in various forms of exchange — cultural, scientific or commercial, institutional and diplomatic — languages in everyday use and languages for professional use (in the fields of health, education, construction, industry, fashion industry and arts, etc.). Respect for linguistic diversity, which the European Union recommends and defends, dictates that different and balanced solutions need to be proposed in order to respond to these situations and needs: a single

⁽⁵⁾ CoR opinion CdR 33/2006 adopted at its 65th plenary session, 14 June 2006, rapporteur: Mr Seamus Murray, point 2.7.

⁽⁶⁾ Article 21 of the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the Union* stipulates that any discrimination based on the grounds of language shall be prohibited and Article 22 stipulates that the Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity. There are already court cases involving instances at the workplace where these rights, though guaranteed by national law, have not been respected (General electric medical systems GEMS, judgment of the Versailles Appeal Court, 2 March 2006, France).

⁽⁷⁾ Point IV.2 of the communication.

⁽⁸⁾ *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* of 5 November 1992, which was ratified by 21 members of the CoE, 13 of which are EU Member States.

proposal which treated the language issue solely in terms of education/jobs, or of 'language use — new products market — internal market' would miss the objective of ensuring that every EU citizen is able to speak two foreign languages in addition to their mother tongue, and paradoxically could reduce the number of languages that are effectively mastered or spoken within the European cultural area. The EESC recommends that all professional, cultural, political and scientific use within its area be allowed and encouraged, and it supports the large number of grassroots initiatives that have originated within civil society. Accepting and supporting written or oral communication in the original language extends the public area of freedoms, without however necessarily requiring recourse to translation or interpretation. The issue of the number of languages in use is thus not contingent on language translation, interpretation or teaching costs.

- b) The degree of social power which is conveyed by the ability to use a given language or languages. Access to, and the distribution of, multilingual-learning resources determines to a certain extent social exclusion or inclusion and material or cultural poverty since language knowledge provides access to professional, social, and particularly, cultural and solidarity networks. The fact of belonging to a network also contributes towards greater individual autonomy, while constituting an aspect of integration in contemporary society. Some population groups will be excluded if an effort is not made, as of now, to extend multilingualism at all the relevant levels of society, including vulnerable or disadvantaged groups.
- c) Democracy: The EESC supports the recommendation to ensure that people are able to speak in or have a working knowledge of two foreign languages in addition to their mother tongue; however, how many people today have a realistic chance to achieve this in their lifetime? Even for the professional, political and economic 'elite' of the current adult generation, this is a difficult objective to attain in the framework of the 2004-2006 action plan Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity and the Culture 2007 programme (2007-2013) ⁽⁹⁾, both for EU and national institutions, but if the ambitious target of 'every citizen' is maintained, the EESC would stress the extent of the challenge involved. We know, for example, which foreign language has gained the upper hand at the earliest level of foreign language learning. The rare or less common languages ⁽¹⁰⁾ are known by a smaller number of people because, in these cases, language-learning starts at a later stage in school or university courses. The EESC thus supports the recommendation that people be given the opportunity to learn a foreign language from the earliest possible age, provided that the choice of languages on offer is devised as part of an overall framework, which should be the main issue to be addressed by the communication. What is at stake here is the future of the EU and the kind of society which we pass on to future generations.
- d) The survival of languages as Europe's linguistic heritage: Wanting to see a large number of people learn a second or

third language is not the same as wanting to ensure the survival of a large number of European languages in Europe or the world. Whilst these two goals do not clash, they nonetheless require two separate approaches and means of implementation. In this particular context, the Commission's initiative in respect of standardisation, aimed at making the use of languages compatible with the new information and communication technologies, should take account of the danger of linguistic impoverishment if the efforts are concentrated disproportionately on this particular field ⁽¹¹⁾. The EESC recommends that the experts involved in this work should be drawn not just from the ranks of specialists in social and scientific disciplines but should also include linguists, interpreters, translators, teachers and other language professionals. The abovementioned UNESCO declarations and conventions clearly demonstrate, among other things, that too few languages are already used on the internet, bearing in mind the global linguistic heritage, and further demonstrate that this limited use of languages has an effect both on the quality and the number of languages which still exist.

- e) Conservation of the use of minority and/or regional (or even local) languages in Europe should not be evaluated in terms of teaching-cost criteria. Not only — as supported by a large body of literature — does language teaching at a very young age foster an intellectual flexibility which develops cognitive capabilities that are useful for future learning, but it also serves as a bridge to learning sister or cousin languages. Thus, it is not enough simply to preserve the linguistic heritage by teaching a language at a very early age or by rehabilitating it in both private and public spheres; in order to survive, a language must be spoken and it needs to have the right conditions so that it can thrive in the public and social domain: it serves no purpose to learn languages at primary school if one has to give them up in the secondary years because no course is provided ⁽¹²⁾. Economic dynamics can be taken into account in education systems if the necessary links to other languages are developed and if the learning of a minority or regional language can be harnessed in the later school years as support towards a second language. To this end, the study of the links between languages is as vital as the number of languages spoken ⁽¹³⁾.
- f) Proximity: This term does not only imply making official and institutional texts accessible via the internet; it also means enabling EU citizens living in countries which are geographically in close proximity to get to know each other and to acquire a better understanding of their respective mother tongues and to engage in exchanges, since language is not just a channel of communication but also a representation of the world. Language shares this characteristic with other media, such as painting, music, the graphic arts, mime and dance, and the plastic arts. These same citizens must be enabled to learn and communicate in languages belonging to different linguistic groups, whilst respecting the cultures and identities which make up the European identity (and underlie

⁽⁹⁾ COM(2004) 469.

⁽¹⁰⁾ 'Minority languages'.

⁽¹¹⁾ Les processus de modernisation dans l'enseignement des langues pour adultes (*The process of modernisation in adult language teaching*), thesis of Ms Judith Barna, Charles de Gaulle University, Lille, France, 2005.

⁽¹²⁾ Opinion of the CESR of Aquitaine-France, adopted at its plenary session on 14 December 2005, *Langues et cultures d'Aquitaine*, rapporteur: Mr Sèrgi Javaloyes.

⁽¹³⁾ Council conclusions on the European Indicator of Language Competence (OJ C 172 of 25.7.2006).

European values). The EESC stresses the positive role of exchanges and twinning schemes mentioned by the Committee of the Regions ⁽¹⁴⁾ and stresses that, irrespective of the strategy involved, when it comes to learning languages, demand is just as necessary as supply. The motivation for learning languages should therefore be considered from other standpoints than solely that of how useful a language is (in terms of the economy and employment).

g) Needs: Our needs in terms of cohesion and European identity do not involve just commercial aspects or identity aspects. There are also real needs for mutual understanding, which are felt by people who may or may not share the same geographical, social and cultural backgrounds. No impact assessment has been carried out to take stock of the way in which different aspects have been taken into account, including even minor aspects which may turn out to be important in the long term. The time frame in respect of supply and demand in the field of language training can be measured in terms of years and generations.

From a more general standpoint, the commitment expressed in the communication lacks a reference time frame: are we talking about a commitment in the past, the short-term future, the medium term or vis-à-vis future generations?

The same considerations apply in the case of the following aspects: humanitarian and cultural aspects; asylum and immigration; the needs and the role of local authorities in this field; and socio-economic aspects. The socio-economic partners (UNICE, the European Centre of Public Enterprise (ECPE/CEEP) and the ETUC), together with NGOs working in the field of human, social and cultural rights and universities and administrations, should all be consulted on an equal footing, thereby developing a strategy which, far from excluding them, is decided jointly with them and by them. This would guarantee the wide-ranging consensus that is required for these ambitious initiatives to succeed. The successful implementation of the Council's '1 + 2' strategy ⁽¹⁵⁾ requires resources that transcend the institutional framework. The largest possible number of EU citizens must be able to participate and feel personally concerned.

The EESC approves the action framework to promote the teaching and learning of languages and observes that its success will depend on the support of those most immediately concerned with the issue, i.e. the teachers themselves and the students.

Accordingly, before embarking on new initiatives, the Commission and the Council should consolidate the strategy by ensuring that the general public and young people are more fully aware of the specific reasons which led them to choose the path of multilingualism, rather than promoting the use of a single common language, whether living or dead, modern or artificial.

The main reasons can be summed up as follows:

- Encouraging the use and propagation of a hegemonic living language gives rise to unfair economic advantages for the main country of origin and can undermine cultural rights and the world heritage.
- The cost of learning and disseminating a scientifically and artificially designed European language such as Esperanto would be less (learning time and converting the current language ⁽¹⁶⁾) than that for a living language but, to date, the political and cultural conditions in the European Union have not been met ⁽¹⁷⁾.
- The compromise scenario which involves *increasing the number of languages that are spoken and used* in the European geographical and political area needs to be consolidated by *increasing the number of people speaking them*.

In view of the above, the EESC recommends that future measures take greater account of today's young and older adult generation, via life-long learning and, when the Commission reaches the programming stage, through their cultural rights.

Young people should be informed about and motivated to seek jobs involving multilingual or plurilingual 21st century media ⁽¹⁸⁾. More should be done to promote professions which require an in-depth knowledge of languages (linguists, interpreters, translators and teachers): one sure step towards achieving this is to recognise their social role and to involve the current practitioners.

⁽¹⁶⁾ L'enseignement des langues étrangères comme politique publique (*Teaching foreign languages as public policy*), François Grin, 2005.

⁽¹⁷⁾ Grin, 2005, cf. abovementioned work, footnotes 59 and 84 'it has been forgotten that a large number of states had, at the time of the League of Nations, supported the introduction of Esperanto as an international language, and that UNESCO, at its plenary sessions in 1984 and 1985 adopted resolutions in favour of Esperanto. At the time (September 1922), France, which had banned teaching and advertising [Esperanto] on the grounds that it was a dangerous instrument of internationalism and that it would diminish the strength of the French language on the international scene' had rejected the document. Moreover, Mr Umberto Eco, who held the European Chair at the Collège de France, Paris, delivered his inaugural lecture on 'the quest for a perfect language in the history of European culture' in 1992.

The EESC would like to point out that the so-called dead ancient languages have gradually ceased to be taught. Nonetheless, over and above the issue of researching which *lingua franca* (common language) would potentially best respond to the requirements of contemporary European society, these languages provided the foundation for easier mutual understanding between Europeans, given that a large number of European languages — Indo-European and Finno-Ugric — have their roots in these languages; furthermore, knowledge of these ancient languages is a help when learning other languages.

⁽¹⁸⁾ There are several definitions of plurilingualism and multilingualism. For some, plurilingualism defines the personal skill of being able to speak several languages, whereas multilingualism refers to the social environment of a given geographical area where several languages are in use (European Conference on Plurilingualism, 2005). For others, the inverse is true (Grin, 2005). The Commission considers that multilingualism refers to both individual skills and the community.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Abovementioned opinion, CdR 33/2006.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Mother tongue and two foreign languages, Barcelona European Council, 15-16 March 2002, Presidency Conclusions, Part I, point 43.

As the Commission itself fully recognises, its recommendation to start learning languages at an early age requires resources and properly trained staff, and that parents support the diversified choice on offer.

The EESC also recognises the positive role of the family in promoting language learning at an early age and stresses the cultural support of 'mixed' culture families, such as when the parents come from different countries. These families generally have a culture of openness and tolerance extending over several generations, which has been confirmed by several European and Canadian studies.

- h) With regard to the chapter dealing with translators and interpreters, the EESC draws attention to the fact that needs do not arise solely in the institutional, professional and economic fields; the views of other stakeholders must also be heard. Social and cultural requirements deserve to be taken into account, both as basic human rights and as essential components of the internal market.

By way of example, everywhere one goes, one hears that translation and interpreting requirements cannot be met either because of a shortage of interpreters and translators or for financial reasons. In the light of this situation, the EESC proposes that consideration be given to the responsibilities of both the Member States and the EU in respect to the following aspects: provision of training for an adequate number of interpreters and translators; language diversification; the cost of providing training and paying salaries and costs linked to statutes. The EESC would refer, once again, to all the various aspects which it raised earlier in this document and would also point out that this sector is not the only one to suffer from a shortage of trained professionals; the demographic deficit cannot be blamed for all these shortages. The balance between supply and demand in this segment of the labour market has undoubtedly not been adequately foreseen, even though the European venture and successive EU enlargements, together with the issue of globalisation, would have provided scope for learning lessons from the past.

Brussels, 26 October 2006.

To sum up, the EESC recommends that the Member States make an active contribution towards shaping the future in this context and it endorses the views expressed by the Commission on this point.

4.2 Lastly, the EESC urges the Commission to collate the information which it has or could have at its disposal as regards follow-up to the earlier language policies pursued by the Member States in order to be in a position to make an appraisal of the actions to which it is committing the Member States.

4.3 The EESC acknowledges the efforts made by the Commission and endorses its intentionally innovatory approach. It supports linguistic diversity in its role as an instrument for promoting cultural, social and political diversity and pluralism, and is aware of the counter-productive risk that the use of a limited number of languages will be further institutionalised. The EESC expects that, in connection with the next communication announced on this subject, a broader consultation of civil society players will be carried out.

4.4 The EESC endorses the Commission's initiative to increase support for university research on higher education under the 7th research framework programme and suggests drawing not only on the university research but also on the work carried out by the networks of associations that are involved in the area ⁽¹⁹⁾.

In the Appendix to this opinion, the EESC sets out the proceedings of the European Conference on Plurilingualism, which was held in November 2005 by civil society organisations ⁽²⁰⁾ in conjunction with the Forum of Cultural Institutes ⁽²¹⁾. The conference drew up a European Charter on Plurilingualism, which was posted on the ASEDIFRES website for debate. This association intends to present the charter to European parliamentary and institutional representatives. In its role of 'bridge between civil society and institutions', the EESC supports and encourages such initiatives, as they constitute identified good practice.

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Dimitris DIMITRIADIS

⁽¹⁹⁾ For example: Linguamón — Casa de les Llengües (House of Languages), an organisation with the aim of protecting languages in danger of extinction, linguamon@linguamon.cat; Babel, which is an organisation that brings together translators and interpreters working within international and regional social forums on a voluntary basis; ASEDIFRES www.europe-avenir.com, the association which co-organised the European Conference on Plurilingualism held in November 2005.

⁽²⁰⁾ Details of participants, results and records of proceedings are posted on the website mentioned in footnote 20.

⁽²¹⁾ The forum comprises the following members: Alliance française, Swedish Institute, Italian Language and Culture Centre, University of London Institute in Paris, Camoes Institute, Cervantes Institute, Finnish Institute, Goethe Institute, Hungarian Institute and Dutch Institute
<http://www.forumdeslangues.net>.