

Council conclusions of 22 May 2008 on multilingualism

(2008/C 140/10)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

HAVING REGARD to:

1. the conclusions of the Lisbon European Council of 23 and 24 March 2000, which included foreign languages within a European framework for the definition of basic skills to be provided through lifelong learning ⁽¹⁾;
2. Article 22 of the Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union, which recognises the principle that the Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity ⁽²⁾;
3. the conclusions of the Barcelona European Council of 15 and 16 March 2002, which called for further action to improve the mastery of basic skills, in particular by teaching two foreign languages to all from a very early age ⁽³⁾;
4. the Commission communication of 24 July 2003 '*Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity: an Action Plan 2004-2006*' ⁽⁴⁾, and the subsequent Commission report of 25 September 2007 on the implementation of that Action Plan ⁽⁵⁾;
5. Decision No 2241/2004/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 December 2004 on a single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences (Europass) ⁽⁶⁾;
6. the Commission communication of 22 November 2005 '*A new Framework Strategy for Multilingualism*', which encompasses both internal and external action on the promotion of languages and communication with the citizens ⁽⁷⁾;
7. the Council conclusions of 19 May 2006 on the European Indicator of Language Competence ⁽⁸⁾, which reaffirmed that foreign language skills, as well as helping to foster mutual understanding between peoples, are a prerequisite for a mobile workforce and contribute to the competitiveness of the European Union economy;
8. the Recommendation 2006/962/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning ⁽⁹⁾, one of which is communication in foreign languages;

9. the Resolution of the Council of 16 November 2007 on a European Agenda for Culture ⁽¹⁰⁾, which sets multilingualism as one of the priority areas for action to promote cultural heritage,

and in the light of the discussions during the Ministerial Conference on Multilingualism held on 15 February 2008,

CONSIDERS that:

- linguistic and cultural diversity are distinctive features in the daily lives of an increasing number of European citizens and companies as a result of increased mobility, migration and globalisation,
- linguistic competences are a desirable life-skill for all EU citizens, enabling them to enjoy the economic, social and cultural benefits of free movement within the Union,
- successive reports and recommendations by various stakeholder groups have shown that insufficient account is still taken of language needs in European society,
- the importance attached to multilingualism and other language policy issues in the context of common EU policies imposes the need to pay these matters the attention they deserve, as well as the need for the European institutions to re-emphasise their long-standing commitment to the promotion of language learning and linguistic diversity.

AFFIRMS that:

1. multilingualism policy encompasses the economic, social and cultural aspects of languages in a lifelong learning perspective;
2. the linguistic diversity of Europe should be preserved and parity between languages fully respected. The European Union institutions should play a key role in pursuing these objectives;
3. as well as contributing to personal and cultural enrichment, a knowledge of languages is one of the basic skills European citizens need to acquire in order to play an active part in the European knowledge society, and one that both promotes mobility and facilitates social integration and cohesion;

⁽¹⁾ Doc. SN 100/00, paragraph 26, p. 9.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 364, 18.12.2000, p. 13.

⁽³⁾ Doc. SN 100/02, paragraph 44, p. 19.

⁽⁴⁾ Doc. 11834/03.

⁽⁵⁾ Doc. 13346/07.

⁽⁶⁾ OJ L 390, 31.12.2004, p. 6.

⁽⁷⁾ Doc. 14908/05.

⁽⁸⁾ OJ C 172, 25.7.2006, p. 1.

⁽⁹⁾ OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, p. 10.

⁽¹⁰⁾ OJ C 287, 29.11.2007, p. 1.

4. since language needs may vary according to each individual's interests, work and cultural background, the broadest possible range of languages should be available to learners, with the support of new technologies, innovative approaches and networking between educational providers;
5. with a view to promoting economic growth and competitiveness, it is important for Europe also to maintain a sufficient knowledge base in non-European languages with a global reach. At the same time, efforts should be made to uphold the position of European languages on the international stage;
6. quality teaching is essential for successful learning at any age and efforts should therefore be made to ensure that language teachers have a solid command of the language they teach, have access to high quality initial and continuous training and possess the necessary intercultural skills. As part of language teacher training, exchange programmes between Member States should be actively encouraged and supported;
7. to help them integrate successfully, sufficient support should be provided to migrants to enable them to learn the language(s) of the host country, while members of the host communities should be encouraged to show an interest in the cultures of newcomers;
8. linguistic and cultural competences lie at the heart of education. Proficiency in the first language may facilitate the learning of other languages, while early language learning, bilingual education and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) are effective means of improving language learning provision;
9. quality interpretation and translation is needed to ensure efficient communication between speakers of different languages, while greater attention should be paid to linguistic considerations in the marketing and distribution of goods and services, in particular audiovisual media services.

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES, WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE COMMISSION, TO:

1. work together to enhance European cooperation on multilingualism and — in consultation with the relevant stakeholders — pursue the above-mentioned policy orientations, making use as appropriate of the open method of coordination to facilitate the exchange of experience and good practice;
2. take appropriate steps to improve effective language teaching and continuity for language learning in a lifelong learning perspective, including by making existing resources and infrastructure more widely available, accessible and attractive to all, developing resources and increasing the diversity of languages offered;
3. promote the learning of their national languages in other Member States, including through greater use of distance learning technologies, and encourage the learning of less widely used EU languages, and non-European languages;
4. use existing tools to confirm language knowledge, such as the Council of Europe's European Language Portfolio and the Europass Language Portfolio;
5. encourage measures to facilitate language learning by people with special needs, as a means of contributing to their social inclusion, better career opportunities and welfare;
6. cooperate with international organisations working on issues relating to multilingualism, in particular the Council of Europe and Unesco.

INVITES THE COMMISSION TO:

1. support the Member States in their efforts to pursue the above priorities;
 2. draw up proposals by the end of 2008 for a comprehensive policy framework on multilingualism, which takes due account of the linguistic needs of citizens and institutions, including by respecting their right to communicate with the institutions of the European Union in any one of its official languages.
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