

European Charter for Plurilingualism

European Conferences on Plurilingualism 2005-2019

The first Conference on Plurilingualism which was held in Paris, on November 24-25, 2005 gave rise to the European Observatory on Plurilingualism, which is a structure where all the partners of plurilingualism pool their own observations and experience.

The principles of the Conference is to round up policy-makers, researchers and members of civil society in a same movement to pose clearly the linguistic questions in their political, cultural, economic and social stakes at the level of European institutions and of each member state.

The first conference also allowed the writing of the European Charter for Plurilingualism whose phase of consultation is over and which is now submitted to petition.

The text will be presented to the various European and national authorities during the second European Conference. If necessary, drafts of legislative or statutory texts will accompany the charter.

A translation of this text into all the languages of the European Union has been planned on.

The import of this text goes beyond the scope of the European Union for it reasserts universal rights.

Preamble

In the text below we agree to use the term "plurilingualism" to mean the use of several languages by an individual and the term "multilingualism" to mean the coexistence of several languages within a given social group. A plurilingual country or society is one which comprises a majority of individuals who are able to express themselves, at various levels of competence, in several languages, namely multilingual or plurilingual individual whereas a multilingual society may comprise a majority of monolingual individuals who do not speak the language of the other.

Why do we need plurilingualism?

Plurilingualism is a vital tool for promoting democratic citizenship and is also the most desirable and the most effective means of communication in public debates since it enshrines the values of tolerance and acceptance of differences and minorities. Linguistic and cultural diversity which is inseparable from the concept of active European citizenship is therefore a component of European identity.

Language continues to offer the pre-eminent means of access to all cultures. Translation, for its part, can never offer an exhaustive or perfect means of access and cannot replace direct recourse to forms of expression in the original language. Because language enshrines culture, it provides access to different visions of the world. Plurilingual skills therefore underlie mutual comprehension. Rather than having recourse to the language of a third party in exchanges between two people having different

mother tongues, the degree of understanding – both from the point of view of conveying information and with regard to communicating on an emotional level – will always be better when one of the two speakers uses the language of the other. Genuine mutual understanding can only be based on the pooling of cultural languages.

Utilitarian objectives must not determine the fate of languages. Having one overriding vision of globalisation tends to lead to a situation in which one single language monopolises communication. We must therefore underline the superiority of a plurilingual approach, based on the use of cultural languages.

Against the current background of an ambiguous system of globalisation, when biodiversity is becoming a matter of major concern, cultural and linguistic diversity should stand out as a priority. The two issues should be regarded in a similar light.

The principles of plurilingualism have been set out in various declarations, manifestos and national and international instruments having varying degrees of legal scope; the present declaration and action programme wish to make reference to a number of these measures, in particular:

At the level of international organisations:

- The statutes of these organisations: Council of Europe, the United Nations, UNESCO, WHO, IOC
- Resolutions in favour of bilingual education adopted at the 18th and 19th General Conferences of UNESCO (1974-1976)

- The establishment by the UNESCO Executive Board, in October 1998, of an advisory committee on plurilingualism and plurilingual education
- A resolution adopted by the UNESCO General Conference on 6 November 1999, on the implementation of a global language policy based on plurilingualism
- The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, adopted on 2 November 2001 and, in particular, Article 6 of the Declaration and the guidelines for an action plan for implementing this Declaration (Articles 5, 6, 7, 10 and 13 of the Declaration)
- The UNESCO Convention on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions (20 October 2005)
- The Resolution on Multilingualism adopted at the UN's 54th General Assembly
- The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages adopted by the Council of Europe on 24 June 1992; this Charter calls upon states and regional authorities to give regional language communities and minority language communities the requisite resources to ensure their continued existence, as linguistic groups, whilst looking after the interests, of national languages, which ensure homogenous communication throughout the respective states

At EU level :

- The Motion adopted by the Council of Ministers of Education of EU-12 in 1984 recommending "a practical knowledge of two languages in addition to a person's mother tongue"
- The Motion adopted by the Assembly of European Regions (AER), in Madrid on 2 June 1989, proposing that a further provision be added to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, setting out the right of everyone to have a bilingual education
- The Council Resolution of 31 March 1995 on improving and diversifying language teaching, aimed at ensuring that, as a general rule, all pupils must be able to learn at least two other EU languages in addition to their mother tongue
- The European Commission White Paper, published in 1995, on Teaching and learning – towards the learning society
- The Conclusions of the European Council of 12 June 1995 on linguistic diversity and plurilingualism in the European Union
- The Council Resolution of 16 December 1997 on the early teaching of European Union languages

- The Declaration and programme on education for democratic citizenship (CM (99) 76), Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, 7 May 1999
- Decision No 1934/2000/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of 17 July 2000 on: 2001 – European Year of Languages
- The Conclusions of the Lisbon European Council of 23-24 March 2000, which include foreign languages in a European framework for defining basic skills
- Article 22 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, proclaimed at the EU Summit in Nice, which states that the European Union will respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity
- The EU Council document (programme of work) No 5680/01 of 14 February 2001, setting out "the concrete future objectives of education and training systems" (p. 14)
- The Council Resolution of 14 February 2002 on the promotion of linguistic diversity and language-learning with a view to achieving the objectives of the European Year of Languages 2001.

Furthermore, despite the fact that no explicit reference is made to linguistic rights, it is clear that the cultural rights covered by a large number of national and international legal instruments also involve freedom of movement of ideas, expressed in words and images, and that these instruments therefore postulate the existence of linguistic diversity.

Plurilingualism and political Europe

Plurilingualism is inseparable from the affirmation of a political Europe.

Europe has a rich geographical, cultural and linguistic diversity. This diversity does not, however, preclude intensive exchanges and the emergence of a European conscience, rooted in a long, rich and turbulent history, frequently involving conflict.

As languages are inseparable from culture, European identity is based both on its cultures and languages, ancient or modern.

The existence of Europe is therefore inconceivable without respect for the languages used on this continent. Europe cannot be confined within the strict limits of a simplistic economic interpretation of human behaviour.

Proposals

In respect of the operation of the European Institutions, opting for plurilingualism implies that clear choices have to be made with regard to the use of working and procedure languages. We cannot simply content ourselves with affirming the principles of the Charter of Fundamental Rights which promote plurilingualism. In the respect of the letter and the spirit of rule number 1 of the Council of Ministers of 6 October 1958 which set the language system of the European Economic Community, the question of working languages has to be resolved in a way which is both fully operational and is in line with the options which characterize European identity in all its diversity and ensure an indispensable balance between languages by respecting their demographic weight. A general framework defining the criteria and rules to be applied in the matter of plurilingualism should be elaborated.

A language mediator must be appointed. He/She will examine individual and collective complaints and will establish a yearly assessment of community practices regarding the respect of the rules of plurilingualism thus established.

All legal documents relating to procedures such as invitations to tender and the different types of contracts if not drawn up in all the official languages, should be drawn up in at least all the procedure languages. The answers should remain possible in all the official languages., Although the field of culture must continue to be a national responsibility, the EU should carry out a large number of actions designed to provide a stimulus and to capitalise on the cultural wealth of the EU, which is seen as its greatest asset.

The principle of plurilingualism must be enshrined in the instruments of accession to the EU. The obligation for new Member States to submit their accession dossiers solely in English is unacceptable. One should stick to the enforcement of articles 2 and 3 of Rule number 1.

National governments must set an example in their reciprocal relations and with European institutions.

Plurilingualism – a means of getting to know and recognise other people

Language diversity ensures plurality and the richness of representations.

Language is the main means of getting to know people and, as such, it should not be reduced to the level of an impersonal code. Language may address objective facts but it does also provide a channel for interpersonal communication in respect of matters relating to the memory, values, sensitivities, feelings and behaviour, i.e. everything which goes together to make relations between people original, profound and cultural. Furthermore, languages express concepts for which there are not always equivalent terms in other languages and which cannot be translated without redesigning the intellectual and cultural reference frameworks.

Language is not only a tool for communicating, it also creates meaning and generates representations.

Conversely, using a single language as a vehicle for international communications, in no way ensures that people can understand and get to know each other.

Proposals

To develop, at European level, the studies and research on plurilingualism, interculturality and the compared analysis of languages and of their cultural expressions.

To increase experiences designed to "stimulate language awareness" which enable students to distance themselves from their own mother tongues by being confronted with several living languages; This approach improves the command of one's own language and is conducive to the learning of other languages.

To enhance the value of the acquisitions and good practices of educational plans of action like the establishment of International Sections (1) in French high schools, which make possible a genuine pacific practice of plurilingualism combined with multiculturalism.

Vigorous efforts should be made to expand cooperation between schools in different countries; such cooperation should be based on teaching projects involving language activities which exploit the new technologies and the Internet to the full.

(1)The International Sections consist, from elementary school to high school senior year, in reinforced language courses with teachers who are native speakers, and in non-linguistic subjects taught in the foreign language. They also include native students in the language taught. These sections are to be found in France in accordance with the international agreements with ten different countries.

Plurilingualism and freedom

Plurilingualism is a form of freedom.

Plurilingualism represents a form of freedom in the same way as the right to fully master one's own mother tongue is a fundamental freedom.

Language provides the only means of understanding the world. Knowledge of one or more foreign languages enables individuals to broaden their field of vision to a considerable extent and provides a means of bringing about a better understanding of contemporary societies and problems. In the case of both children and adults, language is inextricably linked to thought and communication; it is a form of power and the access to freedom.

Proposals

One possible course of action which could be undertaken in this field is to change the position of language in respect of the scale of values and understanding of the role of education. Mastery of one's own mother tongue and, where appropriate, two further mother tongues, is a fundamental freedom.

The knowledge of several languages – irrespective of the degree of competence involved – represents an additional freedom in a world in which people are free to travel and a necessity in today's European context.

This message must be conveyed by language teachers and a special effort must be made to convince the media of the fundamental role played by language in creating a healthy social fabric.

Plurilingualism and European identities

Plurilingualism is the means to assert the durability of national entities in Europe which are privileged places for the practice of citizenship.

Although Europe as a commercial entity can accept, not without risk, the use of a single vehicular language, Europe as a political and citizenship-conscious entity cannot exist if the peoples of Europe do not have a knowledge and understanding of each other. The only way in which this knowledge and mutual understanding can develop is through the medium of languages of culture.

There cannot be just a single language in Europe. Europe must find its fulfilment by

refusing to think and work through the use of the languages of present or future superpowers, in particular when those languages are minority languages in Europe.

Proposals

In the case of national officials whose work requires them to address various international bodies, a high level of language skill should be demanded, in accordance with the criteria dictated by European plurilingualism.

In the case of European civil servants, there is a need to strengthen their language skills, too, in order to ensure effective plurilingualism in the functioning of the institutions. Notices of job vacancies should no longer include the requirement "English native speaker or equivalent only", as this is an infringement of the principle of equality. The linguistic skills of European civil servants should be adequately displayed (directories or other means of identification such as badges etc.) and should be professionally valued.

The member states should see that plurilingualism is effective and should commit themselves to implementing national plans of action.

Plurilingualism culture and citizenship

Plurilingualism is a basic source of European civic awareness.

Languages, which provide a means of getting to know other people, also provide a means of gaining recognition as a citizen. Citizenship postulates an awareness of the need to share common values and a joint destiny. Active European citizenship is inconceivable if it does not involve a multiplication and intensification of exchanges between peoples and individuals, the main channel for these exchanges being language.

The degree of involvement of citizens in the preparation of EU policies depends on their ability to participate in the public debate and the political debate in Europe. A prerequisite for such an ability is plurilingual skills, i.e. the ability to interact effectively and in an appropriate way with other citizens of Europe".

The desire to master languages, be they one's own mother tongue or the languages of others, may become a powerful lever for promoting accession to the EU and closer links with the EU if the languages in question become common languages.

Proposals

It is proposed that education for citizenship be broadened to include inter-cultural dimensions, and therefore also plurilingualism, as a basic source of civic awareness, even though linguistic unity has traditionally provided the basis for national unity and citizenship.

What does this all mean in concrete terms?

We should re-examine school teaching programmes in respect of history, geography, "foreign" languages as well as languages which serve as a medium for teaching and civic education, in order to ensure that the inter-cultural dimension, which is peculiar to Europe, is adequately taken into account. There is also a need to encourage teachers to engage in inter-disciplinary work in order to show students how the culture which they acquire is regarded in foreign countries where other languages are spoken.

There is a need to support cultural events comprising inter-cultural elements.

Steps should be taken to promote an increased supply of inter-cultural television programmes.

There is a general need to enhance people's knowledge of European languages and foreign languages, in line with the objectives of the Lisbon Process.

The history of European nations and cultures should be written about and taught as an integral part of European history.

Plurilingualism and international relations

Plurilingualism is one of the ways of tackling the "clash of civilisations" and the various forms of political, cultural and economic hegemony.

Plurilingualism can change the perception and construction of international relations. In view of the fact that plurilingualism intrinsically implies an openness toward others, it has the effect of replacing the psychology of confrontation and a clash of interests by a spirit of dialogue with a view to constructing a shared future.

The use of a single language as a vehicle for international communication does not, in any way, ensure dialogue and peace. On the contrary, such a language becomes the expression of domination.

Proposals

The use of several languages should be promoted in all international bodies and at all international political, economic, cultural and scientific events and meetings. The procedures involved should be defined and adjusted in the light of the respective contexts.

The easy and deceitful solution to employ a single language as a means of international communication in the international institutions should be dismissed. The plurilingual alternative is realistic, provided that an adequate level of linguistic competence has been reached. The stipulation of official or working languages should be based on objective and reasonable criteria. On a day-to-day basis the recourse to the practice of mutual understanding (each speaker opting to speak in one of the languages understood by the other participants) must be developed.

Plurilingualism, cultural diversity and scientific development

Plurilingualism is a basic element of scientific innovation.

In the field of thought, creativity is linked to the mother tongue and to culture : the sciences of culture are, almost by construction, intercultural : as critical disciplines, they have everything to learn about the difference between languages and cultural traditions, a difference which is, when all is said and done, their subject matter.

The diversity of complementary scientific approaches is a source of richness which cannot be reached by using a single language.

Proposals

In the scientific field, the use of a *lingua franca* or *service language* must remain limited to international exchange. Yet, international exchange should be based on mutual understanding whenever the linguistic knowledge of the participants make it possible.

In the same way the various national languages should be kept as scientific languages and encouraged and, should be used in national scientific activity. In particular, scientific teaching in secondary schools and higher education establishments should be dispensed at least in the national language. Scientific texts should be, as far as possible, written in the national language.. It is advisable to promote plurilingual scientific publications and to encourage the translation of scientific texts.

It is necessary to set up a European assessment system, including pertinent databases, in order

to compensate the current overvaluation of specialized English-language magazines and publications.

A differentiated approach to plurilingualism

Right to language and to linguistic and cultural diversity cannot be divided.

At the stage of development currently reached by mankind, we can state that all languages, in their capacity as testimonies of human experience, should be preserved.

Whilst it is clear that all languages cannot fulfil the same role in the fields of science, commerce and international relations, all languages do, nonetheless, deserve to be studied, used and taught as they provide an accessible intellectual and cultural reference system. Right to language and to linguistic and cultural diversity cannot be divided. Whilst affirming the value of inter-cultural awareness and plurilingualism, it should be pointed out that regional and minority languages must not be protected and encouraged at the expense of official languages and the need to learn them (Reference: the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages).

Proposals

All languages cannot have the same status in respect of the statutes and working procedures of the international institutions. In practice, the necessary balance must be found in order to enable languages spoken by only a small number of people at national and international level to be fully recognised.

Plurilingualism and economic efficiency

Plurilingualism ensures economic progress in a pacified world.

Plurilingualism is favourable to the development of trade in a pacified world if one is careful not to aim at immediate profit.

Plurilingualism, which ensures economic progress, also offers a fundamental asset to the individual by providing access to cultural and intellectual spheres. Once people have a good command of their own mother tongue, plurilingualism gives them a sense of personal achievement and a capacity for exchange which are conducive to the social and economic success of every individual.

Proposals

There is a need for specific research to be carried out into the economic impact of the action taken by enterprises in connection with the use of the languages. Enterprises which flourish whilst pursuing a successful plurilingual approach should be cited as examples.

The establishment of development plans for language-learning in enterprises should be encouraged by means of tax deductions.

There is a need to explain more effectively to families that, whilst learning English constitutes an essential minimum requirement, it by no means guarantees that their children will have successful careers and that learning living languages, including the cultural dimension of these languages, is not just a luxury but is something which brings readily understandable benefits.

Plurilingualism and the right to work

Every worker must have the right to work using the language of the country in which he or she lives.

This is a matter of respect for the individual; the use of foreign languages cannot be imposed upon people at all levels of the enterprise. It is also a matter of safety at the workplace since a proper understanding of orders, instructions and information on how to use equipment is a fundamental prerequisite for ensuring safety. This criterion makes it necessary to use the language which is most readily spoken. It is, in the final analysis, a question of economic efficiency.

Proposals

Imposing the use of a foreign language as the working language at the workplace constitutes discrimination between workers on grounds of their linguistic skills since being fully conversant with the language in question is not essential to the task or role to be carried out.

Although there is a need to introduce legislation in this field, laws by themselves are not sufficient.

Trade organisations, trade unions and enterprises need to be very attentive to this matter. Adopting a solution based on obliging all employees to learn just one foreign language must be rejected.

One should keep an eye on the issue of migrant workers.

The issue of language and languages on the workplace is becoming an aspect of the social dialogue

Plurilingualism and education

Educational systems must provide plurilingual education.

The first task of school is to teach the national language(s), the basis of all learning and the foundation of social cohesion. As only languages open access to the comprehension of the world, reinvesting on languages must be a priority of the educational system.

The educational system must offer the choice of plurilingual education from an early age and develop the skills required for independent learning in order to enable people to engage in lifelong learning of new languages. This task is, by no means, designed to promote the use of a single foreign language as a minimal channel of communication, having an essentially commercial objective.

Families must be made aware of the importance of linguistic stakes and choices must be clearly explained to them.

Proposals

Appraisals should be carried out to establish best practice in this field which should provide a model for other systems with a view to providing students with real skills in all aspects of language use.

The key requirements are as follows :

- to reaffirm – and to accept the consequences of this reaffirmation – that learning to read and write, provides the foundation stone for the learning of all other subjects.
- to stress the benefits of learning living languages at an early age with a view to helping students master their own mother tongues and other school disciplines (e.g. scientific disciplines).
- to draw the consequences from the recognition of the fact that an educational system which fails to provide students with effective teaching of living languages at an early age – and also does not enable them to engage in life-long learning of languages – does not provide students with equal opportunities.
- to make arrangements for learning two living languages, in addition to one's mother tongue, at an early or fairly early age to avoid starting the process of

teaching living languages by teaching students English.

- to introduce innovating teaching methods.
- to develop a plurilingual and multicultural approach of teaching based on teachers who are native speakers and on the occasional use of foreign curricula.
- to provide students with the possibility of learning several languages in parallel, or one after the other, by making use of flexible courses, having a modular structure and tailored to individual requirements; in such courses students organise their own language-learning, on the basis of self-assessment.
- to increase the number of opportunities for language and cultural exchanges from elementary school level upwards. These opportunities may take the form of systematic twinning and may embrace more than two schools.
- to capitalise on multi-level identities and mother tongues other than the national tongue.
- to support cultural associations representing migrants with a view to promoting the provision of teaching in their mother tongue in the host country and to facilitating integration by teaching the national language of the country concerned.
- to provide teachers with better training in plurilingualism and multiculturalism. To provide incentives for teachers to engage in international mobility by introducing the requisite administrative measures. If we set the target of having students learn two languages in addition to their mother tongue, a lower level of qualification cannot be prescribed in the case of teachers.
- to promote the establishment of a European plurilingual baccalaureate, a hallmark of excellence denoting a baccalaureate which meets the requirements of plurilingualism; The French model of the European option of the Baccalaureate (OIB) could serve as an example.
- to make widespread provision for the teaching of languages in higher education establishments and to organise real plurilingual training courses, whilst maintaining a balance between language skills.
- to ensure that Erasmus courses are indeed geared towards plurilingualism. The language used in Erasmus courses should be the language of the host country.

- to ensure that Erasmus students attain a level of proficiency in the language of the host country which enables them to properly follow courses provided in that language. This goal should be fulfilled mainly by improving facilities for receiving students.
- to develop a real culture of self-training and self-assessment.

Plurilingualism and the media

The media must facilitate the expression of numerous cultures.

- The media must facilitate the expression of a wide range of cultures – which are a source of richness for the world – rather than broadcasting low-cost, programmes reflecting a one-sided culture.
- Furthermore, the media should take account of the key role played by language in personality development and the establishment of social contacts.

Proposals

- The establishment of a Festival of Languages and Cultures should be promoted.
- Step should be taken, if necessary by establishing quotas, to promote the broadcasting of original language versions of films on television.
- The media should be made aware of the linguistic aspects of social and economic problems.
- To develop community support to European film and TV productions.