

EAFTELETO Symposium

“National Languages and Terminology in Higher Education, Science & Technology”

Athens, Greece, 7 November 2013

European policy and actions on Multilingualism

The language we speak helps to determine our identity. The many languages spoken by more than 500 million EU citizens are spread across the continent in a way that makes it look like a huge mosaic. The EU recognizes the right of citizens to have their own identity and actively defends our freedom to speak and write in our language, and continues to pursue its goal for greater integration between the Member States. These objectives complement each other and express in concrete terms the EU slogan "United in diversity".

There are 24 official EU languages. When a new country joins the EU, the national language of this country is usually the official language of the EU. This decision is taken by the Council of Ministers of the EU. This guarantees that EU citizens have the opportunity to use the same language for each contact with the EU and its institutions as they do with the authorities of their country. So any new legislative act adopted by the EU is translated into all official languages, so that every citizen in all countries of the Union is informed immediately about the content of the new law and how they affect him/her. All language versions of a legislative act of the EU have the same legal effect. This way, there is no distinction between citizens whose language is spoken by a large number of people and citizens of countries with small populations.

The EU language policy policies aim to protect linguistic diversity and promote knowledge of languages for reasons of cultural identity and social integration, but also because multilingual citizens are better placed to take advantage of the educational, professional and economic opportunities created by an integrated Europe. The goal is a Europe where everyone can speak at least two other languages in addition to their own mother tongue.

Respect for linguistic and cultural diversity is a hallmark of the European Union. It is enshrined in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights adopted by EU leaders in 2000. Regional and minority languages are more specifically protected by a charter agreed within the framework of the Council of Europe. The notion of regional and minority languages does not include dialects of any of the official languages or any of the languages spoken by immigrant communities in the European Union.

Improving education and language skills is one of the five goals and one of the seven flagship initiatives of the EU Europe 2020 strategy. Language skills (communication in mother tongue and communication in foreign languages) are among the eight skills young people should have for personal fulfilment and development in a knowledge society.

Commission means for promoting education and language policy are cooperation with governments, dialogue with stakeholders, and EU programmes such as the Lifelong Learning Programme.

At the same time, the Commission develops a language policy within its institutions, through the development of translation and interpretation services, training policies for translators at bachelor's and master's level, the development of translation tools, terminology bases and corpora.

The Directorate-General for Translation makes it possible for the Commission to fulfil its commitment for multilingual written communication. It interacts with other Directorates-General to promote linguistic issues in both the development and implementation of policy. It also seeks to highlight the language professions with initiatives such as:

- the European Masters in Translation network
- Lind-Web network
- Juvenes Translatores (young translators) contest

Lately, globalisation and technological progress are radically changing the landscape of higher education. Over the next 20 years the demand for higher education is expected to increase dramatically.

In particular, higher education is at the heart of the EU's ambitious goal to become a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy. The aim is to support higher education institutions in order to increase their internationalization activities evolving and supporting international student exchanges and strengthen cooperation between European universities and their EU partners worldwide.