

# Draft European Charter on Plurilingualism

European Conference on Plurilingualism - Paris – 24/25 November 2005

This text, drawn up in the light of the proceedings at the European Conference on Plurilingualism, is designed to be presented, under the petition procedure, to the Council of Europe and the European Parliament, in the form of a Draft European Charter on Plurilingualism. Initially, it will be translated into at least six languages, namely: German, Spanish, Italian, English, Polish and Romanian. It will then be posted on the website of the Observatoire Européen du Plurilinguisme for a period of six months where it will be the subject of a discussion forum.

## 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.

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.

Plurilingualism is inseparable from the concept of active European citizenship and, taken together with cultural diversity, it is a basic component of the 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.

Biodiversity is becoming a matter of major concern. Against the current background of an ambiguous system of globalisation, should not cultural and linguistic diversity be regarded in a similar light to biodiversity?

Are these two issues not inseparable?

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 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 are 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 European identities

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 culture and language.

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

At institutional level :

Plurilingualism should be an integral part of the affirmation of a political Europe.

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 languages. We cannot simply content ourselves with affirming the principles of the Charter of Fundamental Rights which promote plurilingualism. The question of pivot languages has to be resolved in a way which is both fully operational and is in line with the options which characterise European identity in all its diversity. The option which appears to best satisfy this condition is to use the following languages as pivot languages: French, German, English, Italian or Spanish and a Slav language, Polish. This choice should be backed up by other measures designed to consolidate the use of other national and regional languages.

It is therefore proposed that all legal documents relating to procedures such as invitations to tender and contracts should be drawn up in (a) all the official languages, (b) the working languages or (c) a language specifically linked to the subject in question.

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 should be dropped. Once a language has been selected for the presentation of these dossiers, the same language should continue to be used throughout the accession procedure.

Governments must set an example.

A code of good conduct for members of government and senior civil servants must be adopted in respect of the use of languages at international events.

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

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, above all, 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 diversity ensure the richness and pluralism of representations of ideas.

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

### Proposals

It is proposed that studies and research be pursued at European level on the subjects of comparative semantics - including mathematical concepts - and cultural variations in forms of speech.

It is also proposed that language-learning be linked to personal experience, going beyond the strictly functional aspects of language learning; teachers should be trained in the use of this approach. Experiences designed to "stimulate language awareness" should be organised with a view to enabling students to distance themselves from own mother tongue by being confronted with several living languages; the use of this approach places students in a

situation which is more conducive to the learning of other languages.

The establishment of international sections at high schools makes it possible to compare the points of view of speakers using different languages, thereby facilitating mutual enrichment.

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.

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## Plurilingualism and freedom

Plurilingualism represents a freedom since 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.

### 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. In the case of both children and adults, language is inextricably linked to thought and communication; it represents empowerment and the initial stage of 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.

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 maintaining a healthy social fabric. It is essential to underline the importance of language at all levels.

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## Plurilingualism and Europe as a political entity

Although Europe as a commercial entity can accept the use of a single vehicular language, Europe as a political 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.

### Proposals

Europe cannot be represented by just one single language, all the more so if such a language is that of the world's only superpower which, whilst maintaining friendly relations with Europe is nonetheless part of Europe. Furthermore, the language in question is a minority language in Europe. Plurilingualism offers a means of underlining the permanence of national and sub-national entities against a background of globalisation. This point needs to be asserted unambiguously by all political leaders in both their words and their deeds.

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 strict application of the principle of pivot languages and to preserve other national languages. 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.

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## Plurilingualism and citizenship

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, along the lines of Arte or Euronews. Growing awareness of plurilingualism is likely to promote increased demand for such programmes.

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

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.

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## Plurilingualism and international relations

Plurilingualism can change people's perception 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 way in which public opinion and governments behave is determined by the way in which the parties concerned view the world. For this reason, plurilingualism, which implies inter-cultural awareness, may bring an influence to bear on the course of international relations. For this reason, too, the Euro-Mediterranean Dialogue - a major political, economic and cultural project - should also be backed up by action to promote plurilingualism.

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

The use of a single language as a vehicle for international communication does not, in any way, ensure mutual understanding.

On the contrary, such a language becomes a language 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 tendency to employ a single language as a means of international communication and as a working language in the international institutions should be discontinued, irrespective of the circumstances involved.

Plurilingualism offers a realistic alternative, provided that an adequate level of linguistic competence has been reached. On a day-to-day basis, the ability to take part in multilingual exchanges (each of the speakers opting to speak in one of the languages understood by the other participants) and the linguistic skills of international officials should be properly indicated (by means of directories or other means of identification, such as badges) and these skills should be given a higher profile in professional terms.

## Plurilingualism and scientific development

As the level of scientific development varies according to the different cultural and linguistic fields involved, scientific research cannot restrict itself to the use of one single language as a means of communication and publication. Promoting understanding and interaction between various areas of research belonging to different cultural spheres represents a source of progress and requires plurilingualism. Plurilingualism is therefore a key element of scientific innovation.

### Proposals

Research workers are very often polyglots and their linguistic ability is rarely limited to the mastery of just one foreign language. At scientific meetings, wherever possible, the principle of passive understanding should be applied, i.e. speakers may use the language in which they have the greatest fluency, provided

that the language in question is understood by the other parties involved.

The production of scientific research in the author's own mother tongue and the translation of such work into several languages should be encouraged.

There is a need to establish, at European level, a referencing structure for scientific work designed to correct the linguistic bias brought about by the current methods.

## A differentiated approach to plurilingualism

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. 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

As plurilingualism provides the basis for getting to know other people, it is, by definition, conducive to the development of trade in a peaceful world.

Plurilingualism, which ensures economic progress, also offers fundamental advantages to the individual by virtue of the access to cultural and intellectual spheres which it provides.

Once people have a mastery of their own mother tongue, plurilingualism gives them a sense of personal achievement which is, in turn, conducive to the social and economic success of every individual.

## Proposals

In the case of monolingual individuals and enterprises, learning a second language clearly represents a considerable step forward. It is equally clear that learning a second, third or even additional language represents an ever greater step forward. Although it has been scientifically proven that the level of investment in learning languages is tending to decrease, taking account also of the progress which has been made in methods of language teaching, the investment made in learning languages has been shown to be profitable.

It has been profitable for workers and heads of enterprises and also for enterprises themselves in cases where they work to a large extent with other countries or have offices in these countries.

The economic future will clearly be marked by plurilingualism.

The change which is expected to take place concerns the behaviour of enterprises. The need for proper communication provides an important lever.

Economic reality is, however, the decisive factor. 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. It also needs to be made clear to families 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 has the right to work using the language of the country in which he or she is living. This is a matter of respect for the individual; the use of foreign languages cannot be imposed upon people. 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.

This matter now represents an aspect of the social dialogue.

## Plurilingualism and education

From nursery school to university, and also including lifelong learning, the educational system must have the task of developing plurilingual education and conveying 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 a commercial rather than a cultural objective.

## Proposals

European educational systems record very differing results in the field of language learning. 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.

In this field, as in others, diversity and exchange are plus factors which promote efficiency and ensure progress.

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 be able to cope with learning two mother tongues;
- to make arrangements for learning two living languages, in addition to one's mother tongue, at an early age;
- to avoid starting the process of teaching living languages by teaching students the most widely-used foreign language. Whilst no obligation can be imposed, step should be taken to encourage students to learn, at an early age, a language other than English;
- to introduce innovative teaching methods; examples which come to mind are methods such as those used in respect of Galanet (mutual understanding between speakers of Romance languages), E-tandem (tandem learning of the language of a student's study partner through the intermediary of the Internet), "Describe to me the colours of the world" (language learning programme based on making comparisons between cultures and languages);
- to make it possible for students to learn two or more languages as part of the same teaching programme; a number of different convincing experiments have already been carried out in this field (such as: measures to stimulate students' awareness of languages and the establishment of European sections and international sections in high schools);
- 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. By way of example, a student who has reached the requisite level (Level B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for languages, depending on the programmes involved) in a given language before completing his or her school education could either simply maintain their knowledge by following a limited timetable of language learning or, alternatively, make use of their skills to pursue courses taught in a foreign language, as it is the case in the European

sections of high schools. Students could thus take advantage of free periods in order to learn other languages. The requisite conditions are already in place: the Council of Europe's portfolio of languages enables students to pursue courses based on self-assessment. Furthermore, assessment of language skills in the third-year class, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and the *(French) Higher Education Language Certificate (Certificat de Langues de l'Enseignement Supérieur)* all permit a modular system of language-learning geared to the level which students have attained. The French plan for updating the teaching of languages (*Decree of 22 August 2005, drawn up in accordance with the basic programme law on the future of school education in France*) has the same aim in view;

- to increase the number of opportunities for language and cultural exchanges from junior school level upwards. These opportunities may take the form of systematic twinning and may embrace more than two schools (cf. the proposed law presented by the Children's Parliament on 11 May 2002 and included in the French Senate Commission Report No 63 (2003-2004));
- to capitalise on multi-level identities and mother tongues other than French in the French educational system;
- to reactivate the provisions governing mother tongues and culture teaching, whilst enabling children having other mother tongues and cultures to follow the courses in question, in accordance with the guidelines pursued since 2001;
- 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 incentives for teachers to engage in international mobility by introducing the requisite administrative measures;
- to provide teachers with better training in plurilingualism and multiculturalism. 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. Teacher training is of course the main prerequisite for providing an adequate supply of language teaching. Incentive should be provided in this context;

- to promote the establishment of a European plurilingual baccalaureate, a hallmark of excellence denoting a baccalaureate which meets the requirements of plurilingualism;
- 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 in the host country;
- to carry out a scientific study to determine whether the use of Esperanto could help to facilitate the learning of living foreign languages;
- to develop a real culture of self-training and self-assessment.

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## Plurilingualism and the media

- 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 Culture 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.