

ICEO's proposal for trilingualism to the European Parliament

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General concept

Our proposal is based on two documents:

- The present document, which, after a brief contextual introduction of its approach, proposes a **draft resolution to the European Parliament**;
- A second document called "Flexible trilingualism in practice", developing further our arguments and presenting **practical examples for implementing a "flexible" trilingualism as we envision it**.

The ultimate objective for ICEO is to get the European Union to implement and actively use trilingualism in the functioning of its **executive institutions (Commission and services)** and in exchanges with its partners in inter-European activities. The aim is to avoid the current trend towards a monolingualism, rather systematically implemented and thus privileging the English-speaking EU countries and their speakers to the detriment of other partner Countries (cost-saving on documents' translations, advantage in promoting their ideas and institutional systems, obvious advantage in any type of negotiation as well as on the international expertise "market"). It is also quite essential to underline that language is not just a tool and, if we want to bring Europe closer to its citizens, we should also respect their linguistic diversity. **The "flexible" trilingualism that we propose is thus a compromise between technical efficiency and economy of means** required in the functioning of institutions as well as democratically respecting the people in their access to information. The goal is to reinstate greater equality and equity between the States, their official representatives (political or administrative) and their peoples. More broadly, to maintain and guarantee on the long-term the cultural diversity that makes up the richness of the European civilisation.

The immediate objective is to **persuade the European Parliament to adopt a resolution to that effect** and to set up practical arrangements to control the **effective implementation of a "flexible" trilingualism by the Commission and its services** in all the activities they perform or supervise. What do we mean by "flexible" trilingualism? We suggest that any speaker, addressing a proposal in the context of Brussels' programmes and activities, first uses his (her) mother tongue (which is the only means to best express the subtleties of his or her thought), and then be translated into two (at his or her choice) of the three "pivot" and working languages of the Commission (English, French and German), or at least into one of them plus another EU official language relevant to the case. Experience has shown that, so far, resolutions voted in favour of trilingualism and linguistic pluralism have remained without great effect.

In so doing, the European Union deprives itself of the advantage of being able to negotiate, everywhere around the world and according to the geographical and national context, in one of its official languages that could be both the most appropriate to the preferred practice of such of its stakeholders and partners, and consequently an appreciated courtesy - a positive point in the negotiation, rather than imposing them one language only.

Historical facts:

The Union's language regime is stated by the EC Regulation n° 1/1958 of 15 April, 1958 and the number of official languages has increased with the successive enlargements. The EU now has 23 official languages and the Commission works with **three working languages (German, English, French)**, as the Committee of Permanent Representatives of the member States (COREPER) also do.

Furthermore, French is traditionally the language of deliberation in the EU judicial system: the judgements and opinions of the Court of Justice and the Court of First Instance are rendered in French and subsequently translated into the other official languages.

In the practice of the Commission:

- Press releases and communications from the Commission to the Council are often available in English only, translations being done afterwards.

- The figures regarding the original written language of documents at the Commission show that, between 1996 and 2004, French decreased from 38 to 26%, German from 5 to 3% and English went up from 45.7 to 62%. In the Commission's pressroom, the language proportion for the English language is 60% and French 40%. All tenders are exclusively in English. And things are worsening as times go by.

- The inventory of the various sections of the website <http://europa.eu.int> shows that English is predominant, especially for the most recent information.

Regarding the total websites of the Directorates-General (DGs) of the Commission (total of 79 667 pages); English takes up over two-third of the pages (53 650 pages). French is almost always present and takes the second place (11.6 % of pages), i.e. double up the number of pages available in German. The sites of the DGs "Economic and Financial affairs" and "Information Society and Media" are available in English exclusively.

- Finally, signposting and electronic screens in the hallways of the Commission are solely in English.¹

In the practice of other institutions of the European Union:

- **The Court of Justice of the European Communities**, seated in Luxembourg, is bound by a full multilingualism because of the need to communicate with the parties in the language of the trial and to ensure the diffusion of its jurisprudence to all the Member States: each of the official language of the EU may well be procedural language.

- **The European Court of Auditors** in its internal functioning uses a "controlled multilingualism", i.e. two pivot and writing languages, English and French, but all reports and documents for general diffusion are translated into all the official languages of the Union.

For comparison, it shall be noticed that the Council of Europe, another major European institution but independent from the EU, and older since it was founded on May 5th, 1949, covering 47 member States, twice as many as in the EU, **only has two official working languages, English and French**, that all its agents must master both orally and in writing. All documents produced are in both languages. German, Italian and Russian are also, as appropriate, used as working languages. But the meetings of its elected bodies (Parliamentary Assembly, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Committee of Ministers, European Committee on Local and Regional Democracy, European Court of Human Rights) are in several languages, all the languages of the member States being thus available.

ICEO, who has been campaigning for a "flexible" trilingualism for several years, wishes to promote to the European Parliament – whose powers are now stronger – a precise and practical proposal that could take the legal form of a new resolution or even the proposal for a legislative amendment to the existing treaties (associated to the means for controlling and ensuring its implementation).

This resolution would make it mandatory for the European authorities placed under its democratic control to effectively practice and equally use the three pivot languages German, English and French as established by the previous EU decisions, but in the suggested flexible way as follows: either two of these three, together with the speaker's mother tongue, or one of them plus another EU official language relevant to the case, with again the speaker's mother tongue - and with periodic reporting obligation to the parliament.

ICEO's campaign began when Mr Jerzy Buzek, former Polish Prime Minister, was President of the European Parliament. It referred to the Polish Universities Rectors' Conference (who voted on June 25th and 26th 2004 the "*Appeal to the European Parliament for Trilingualism*" on which is based ICEO's action on this matter). We are engaging a new campaign in 2012, with the election of Mr Martin Schulz as President: he speaks fluently the three pivot languages that we recommend. Once elected, he proclaimed his intention to put pressure on the Brussels institutions for them to better respect the Parliament's resolutions. Although the role of the President of the European Parliament is limited – as is the legislative power of the Parliament itself ² - he can still act on the Parliament for

¹ Reference: OIF, report from the General Secretary of Francophonie 2004-2006, chapter IV – French language in international organizations.

² The European Parliament has no legislative initiative, which belongs to the Commission. It can take "co-decisions" shared with the Council of the European Union. It contributes to prepare the legislative and work agenda of the Commission and has some control over this work program that could eventually lead the Parliament to censure the Commission. It examines Commission's performance reports and may prompt it to take action in a particular domain, upon which it will then exert its control. However, article 192 of the EC

the linguistic issue to be put on the agenda and leads to a well-defined, concrete and binding Recommendation.

This is the purpose of the draft resolution presented below, which, based on previous EC resolutions, suggests going further:

(Proposal)

Resolution

The European Parliament,

- **Taking into account** the previous decisions, motions and resolutions that the European institutions have adopted to preserve the linguistic and cultural diversity within the European Union, to promote multilingualism and specifically trilingualism in the running of its Political and Administrative institutions, especially:

- The EC Council Regulation n° 1/1958 dated April 15th, 1958 determining the languages to be used by the European Economic Community;
- The Motion of the "Twelve's" Education Ministers Council of 1984 recommending "the practical knowledge of two languages in addition to one's mother tongue";
- The Motion voted by the Assembly of European Regions (AER), in Madrid on June 2nd, 1989 proposing an addendum to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, regarding the right of each citizen to a bilingual education;
- The Council's Resolution of March 31st, 1995 on improving and diversifying the learning and teaching of languages within the education systems of the European Union, which states that each student, in general, must be able to learn two other languages from the European Union additionally to one's mother tongue;
- The 1995 European Commission's White Paper called *Teaching and learning: Towards the Learning Society*;
- The Council of Europe's Conclusions of June 12th, 1995 on linguistic diversity and multilingualism in the European Union;
- The Council's Resolution dated December 16th, 1997 on the early teaching of European Union languages;
- The Declaration and Programme on Education for Democratic Citizenship (CM/99/76, Committee of Ministers, May 7th, 1999);
- The European Parliament and of the Council's Decision No 1934/2000/EC dated 17 July 2000 on "2001- the European Year of Languages";
- The Conclusions of the European Council of Lisbon on March 23-24, 2000 which include foreign languages in the European framework for defining basic competencies;
- The Charter of Fundamental Rights adopted by the European Council in Nice, especially its article 22 stating that the European Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity;
- The Work Programme "Concrete Future Objectives of Education and Training Systems" a European Council's paper n° 5680/01 February 14th, 2001, p. 14;
- The Council's Resolution of February 14th, 2002 on the promotion of linguistic diversity and languages' training for achieving the objectives of 2001 - the European Year of Languages.

A – Whereas all these Decisions, Motions and Resolutions have had little effect so far and that a progressive generalisation of monolingualism in favour of the English language is developing;

Treaty, confer on Parliament and its MPs a right of initiative to propose a new act or the modification of an ancient one, which may result in a Resolution addressed to the Commission on this regard. The Parliament can also create ad hoc or temporary committees of inquiry to exercise the democratic control on Commission's activity. Among the permanent Committees, the General Directorate for Education and Culture is in charge of defending and promoting the cultural and linguistic diversity. However, we can notice that this commission's newsletter ('CULT News') is published only in English...

B – Whereas this evolution also:

- Creates a financial disparity between the various Member States as regards translation costs, some States being exempted from these costs while others bear a heavy financial burden;
 - Creates also a disparity in expressing one's ideas and concepts during negotiation rounds and for implementing EU projects and programmes and thus penalizes officials and experts whose mother tongue is not English;
 - Generates an unequal treatment between Partners according to the linguistic family of their national language;
 - Compromises in the long run the preservation of the cultural and linguistic diversity that makes the richness of Europe's heritage;
 - Deprives the Union of the advantage of being able to use, anywhere in the world, such of its official languages that would be the most appropriate to deal with its various stakeholders and partners, according to their own preferences;
1. Strongly recommends that all working documents and official texts within the European Union be written and presented first in their author's mother tongue, if different from the three "pivot" languages, and secondly in at least two out of the three pivot languages of the EU, namely: English, French and German, the working and procedure languages determined by the "Manual of Operational Procedures for the European Commission" and by the Committee of Permanent Representatives of the Member States (COREPER) in the addendum adopted in December 2003, or at least in one of these language plus another official language of the Union, if relevant to the intervention's context.
 2. Recommends that, when the author's mother tongue is English, French or German, he shall choose one of the following possibilities:
 - Either presenting the text in his/her own language and in the other two working languages of the Commission,
 - Or presenting the text in his/her own language, plus into one of the other two working languages and into another third official language of the Union, chosen according to the context of the intervention, the contents of the document or its destination.
 3. Invites the Member States to implement more systematically an educational policy so that the youths, at an early age, or at least when entering the secondary education cycle, are given the opportunity to study at minima two languages in addition to their mother tongue, including at least one of the three pivot languages listed above, taking into account also the language of the closest neighbouring country, language that should be a natural priority for the young people of a given region, in order to promote inter-regional exchanges.
 4. Insists moreover that the Member States take necessary steps to ensure that their civil servants and experts involved in inter-European exchanges are able to use, in addition to their mother tongue, two other languages selected from the three working and procedure languages of the Commission: English, French and German, or among the other official languages most in use across the Union.
 5. Urges the Member States and their political and administrative bodies to systematically use, in their interventions at the European and Inter-States levels, their national language, which is best suited to express all the nuances of their opinions, before translating their proposals or recommendations in two out of the three so-called "procedure" languages, which this Resolution validates as the pivot languages of the European Union, or at least into one of these and in another official language regarded more relevant to the intervention context.
 6. Strongly requires the Commission to ensure that its activities, meetings and negotiations, as well as its programmes and projects, systematically use trilingualism based on speaker's or author's mother tongue and two other pivot languages, or at least one of them and another official language regarded more relevant to the intervention context..

7. Sets up a special Committee for trilingualism that will sit every six months to hear the Commission, and more specifically the Commissioner in charge of linguistic diversity, about the effective implementation of this policy. This Committee will be repeated periodically so that its control can be achieved over time.

8. Emphasises nevertheless that implementing this flexible trilingualism as defined above, does not prevent the use in simultaneous translation of all the EU official languages, every time the peoples' direct access to information and democratic control is needed, especially in the public sessions of this Parliament and its Commissions.

9. Invites the Commission to submit an annual report, during the plenary sessions of this Parliament, on the implementation of this resolution.

10. Instructs its President to forward the present Resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Governments and Parliaments of the Member States as well as to the candidate countries.

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