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Reviving Multilingual Education for Europe

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Analysis and proposals presented in this paper commit only his author and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the European Commission or of other institutions

Executive Summary

Reviving multilingual education for Europe

- **Work of the consultant**

The consultant was responsible for supporting the Commission during 2006 in organising the activities and the joint reflection of the Working group on Languages, composed of representatives appointed by the participating countries (see 6.1 and 6.2.). In this context, the reflection carried out focused on the multilingualism action plans that the Communication entitled *A New Framework Strategy for Multilingualism* invites participating countries to implement (see the introduction). This process led to a rapid survey being carried out by the consultant (see 4.). During the same period, the members of the WG on Languages were asked to answer a follow-up questionnaire relating to the Action Plan 2004-2006, which is coming to an end.

- **Organisation of the report**

The *introduction* repositions this initiative in the new political context created by the Communication of 22 October 2005 (cited above).

The *first part* analyses the participating countries' responses to the follow-up questionnaire on the *Action Plan...* (approximately 250-300 corpus pages), following the same order. Each of the sections and sub-sections presents the action carried out by the participating countries in summarised form, gives examples of good practice (in numbered boxes; reference table p. 18), suggests interpretations of this action and sets out recommendations for action (essentially in the sections giving comments and suggestions for action; reference table p. 17).

Section 4 is dedicated to analysing the questionnaires relating to the national/regional multilingualism action plans.

Section 5 presents the conclusions and main recommendations for action to promote multilingual education (essentially 5.3).

The *second part* is composed of *section 6* only, and includes observations on the interaction between the WG on Languages and the Commission (recommendations in 6.2 and 6.3).

- **Representativeness of data**

The analyses that follow can only give a limited description of the progress made in relation to the *Action Plan...* Indeed, not all the participating countries did respond to the *Action Plan...* follow-up questionnaire, and the usability of the information provided varies. The main

purpose of this summary is not to give a precise account of the situation in language education policies, but to identify the types of language policy that are relevant to future action, and in which areas. With this view, the consultant will focus much more on what actions are still to be carried out rather than what has already been achieved.

- **Main results**

[1.1.]¹ Language learning is compulsory in almost all of the participating countries, and is starting earlier and earlier. However, the questionnaires confirm that the range of languages offered is rarely very wide, probably on request of parents who feel that their children's professional prospects are an issue including from a very young age. This might explain why English is omnipresent as the chosen language.

[1.2.] Very clear progress has been made, in particular at lower secondary level. However the teaching of two foreign languages is not an objective everywhere, or FL2 is still not accorded enough importance.

[1.3.] Higher education does not represent yet, with the occasional exception, a period during which students significantly increase or diversify their multilingual repertoire.

[1.4.] Some countries have granted significant funds for adult education which is the broadest sector of multilingual education: it is still lacking in structure, as it is only partially covered by the national/regional education systems. The large number of initiatives taken have not, in most cases, managed to establish a structured network in this area.

[1.5.] As regards languages, learners with special educational needs seem to be provided for in general education. Here again, it is likely that English is given preferential status, but the most important thing is that these students have the opportunity to learn a language.

[1.6.] Diversification is a responsibility that certain countries have agreed to take on board in spite of a social demand focused on the mastery of English. Others continue to favour English as FL1 but the predominance of English can be compensated for by introducing the teaching of a second foreign language in a substantial manner.

[2.1.] The introduction of integrated teaching to develop and manage multilingualism requires preparatory stages, which are rarely reached. However, the need for integrated teaching has been recognised and it has made some noteworthy appearances.

[2.3.] Significant progress has been made as regards the linguistic and vocational skills of teachers. Nevertheless, all too often continuing education is still optional, and initial university education is not always up to the required standard.

¹ The numbers in square brackets indicate the corresponding sections in the *Action Plan*....

[2.4] Teacher recruitment only poses sectoral problems. In response to the lack of teachers, in most cases incentive measures, intended for nationals, are taken. Real professional mobility is possible in theory but rare, apart from in a few exceptional cases.

[2.5.] CLIL courses are "popular" but the question on CLIL produced the fewest and shortest reactions of the section. These corroborate the findings of the Eurydice survey (2006): these courses are often available but are not widespread or robust, except in some outstanding cases.

[2.6.] There has been spectacular development in qualifications, carried along by social demand (use of the CEFR, professionalisation, outsourcing, reliability). But do these more transparent qualifications contribute to diversification? Moreover, consideration must be given to the balance required in the teaching of these qualifications so that they do not become an end in themselves.

[3.1] The *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* was ratified by 15 participating states (end of 2005). Between 2004 and 2006, it was ratified by a further two countries. The representation of regional languages is improving in areas where previously they were barely tolerated, but it is relatively rare for the first languages of new migrant workers arriving in a country to act as languages of instruction, and there is probably not enough support for the transmission of bi- or multilingualism within families.

[3.2] The fact that a limited number of local projects are mentioned in the responses can be attributed to the very fact that they are local, and that there is probably no way of cataloguing them or informing people about them. The position of languages in local cultural activities requires development.

[3.3] The *European Day of Languages* has been a success, along with the *Label*. However, language courses for adults are still difficult to access for the greatest number of people possible. In addition, while there is a desire to stop leaving all the responsibility for multilingual education with schools, it seems that the opportunities for lifelong learning are dependent on local resources, which vary greatly.

[4] The action plan culture is already very well disseminated. The participating countries can therefore look to adopting this course of action to promote multilingualism, drawing on the experience of the many that have already begun to implement these plans, for the most part before the *New Framework Strategy* was even introduced. This "desire for a plan" is also evident in the questionnaires, which list the in-progress sectoral or pilot programmes. There is a clear awareness that these would benefit from being more closely coordinated, with this lack of coordination being bemoaned explicitly. Concern for holistic management of teaching is becoming more apparent, even though it is encountering implementation problems.

The very rich creative capacity that those involved in language education policies have all demonstrated in the 2004-2006 period in terms of institutions, curriculums, and teaching skills and methods should be recognised. In a very short period of time, most participating countries have joined the objectives of the *Action Plan*... Even when their actual achievements don't always meet their ambitions, participating countries now share common concerns and strategies which are also to be found in the *Action Plan*... Among other results of the *Plan*, the change experienced by the participating countries in their views on language teaching is a necessary prerequisite and can be considered an important milestone. The above mentioned creativity can certainly lead, in the long term, to the forging of a type of multilingual education that takes different practical forms in the various member countries and is more consistent with the "broadest" conceptions of multilingual education that were put together by the WG on Languages and the Commission.

- **Main conclusions**

The data highlights the fact that the diverse action undertaken by the participating countries in implementing multilingualism reflects more or less ambitious conceptions of it founded in the very complexity of the notion. In this respect, multilingualism is interpreted as:

- a way of taking on board the existing sociolinguistic diversity, that of regional languages or migrant workers, or that resulting from the consistent presence of a foreign language on the national territory;

- an improvement in the quality of teaching (teacher training, syllabuses, more transparent qualifications, etc.). This interpretation often goes hand in hand with often explicit support for the pre-eminence of the teaching of English;

- an extension of language teaching, around the start of teaching or the end of secondary education. More often than not, this is accompanied by a better choice of languages, but this is not put to advantage because students and families are not given information about the choice of languages;

These three interpretations of multilingualism are present in the *Action Plan*....

The responses given also indicate that there are "broader" interpretations:

- new or increased diversification of the languages on offer, but also as a development of the internal diversity of personal repertoires and the diversity of personal repertoires in relation to each other;

- a unique educational approach for the teaching of various languages, moving beyond the separation of language teaching into native language, FL1, FL2, language of instruction, etc.;

- the ongoing assimilation of languages. Here, it is necessary for the principles of multilingualism to be explained and learnt during compulsory education and for the teaching of languages to people to be designed holistically throughout their lives;

- an educational project (hence the term *multilingual education*), which makes language teaching a central element in a person's development in society.

The manifestations of multilingualism are located between these extremes, which are both present in the Commission's reference texts. An assessment of the achievements of the *Action Plan*... depends therefore on the interpretation that has been favoured. It is possible to look to achieve these aims simultaneously, independently or successively. At the same time, it is also possible to account for these differences by looking at the "initial situation" in each of the participating countries: the implementation of multilingualism has to be carried out in stages, with planning at each stage.

- **Main recommendations**

The following summary suggestions are put forward for discussion by the WG on Languages and the Commission. The participating countries are invited to:

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| I. publicise what multilingual education is, clarify the aims of multilingualism, convince the public of the educational value of multilingualism, train teachers in their linguistic and educational responsibilities, and prepare schools |
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- 1 clarify the interpretation of *multilingualism* (see 5.2.), and jointly draw up an explicit definition based on consensus, which may remain open to change, to take account of the diversity in the participating countries;
- 2 make the terminology more consistent (*multilingualism, plurilingualism*);
- 3 establish objectives and means of achieving them by way of action plans;
- 4 promote informative media campaigns to explain what multilingual education is (especially TV campaigns);
- 5 raise awareness of the issues involved in multilingual education among all those working in education, parents, university students, school heads, teachers of subjects other than languages, practising language teachers (continuing education), company directors, heads of associations, and so on;
- 6 raise awareness of the issues involved in multilingual education among political decision-makers and elected representatives;
- 7 very quickly introduce training for teachers that prepares them for their role of acting as intercultural mediators and training students to learn independently and to be proactive and democratic citizens of Europe;

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| II. structure multilingual education within education as a whole |
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- 8 support by way of appropriate means the early and pre-school (nursery school) transmission of bi-/multilingualism from parents;

- 9 offer a choice of languages (even if it is limited and controlled) at all stages of education rather than just one language, as the possibility of choosing a language is an important symbolic sign acknowledging multilingualism and its practical application;
- 10 look to create similar/common language syllabuses and curricula and teacher training programmes that have broad areas in common²;
- 11 build syllabuses that take account national/regional language needs (and not only personal needs) and expected developments in language use³ as well as the feasibility of learning objectives (which means not automatically adopting a single CEFR "level" for a syllabus);
- 12 make it an aim of compulsory education to make students understand and be aware of what multilingualism is (while giving them language skills identified by way of skills profiles in line with the CEFR; see 10);
- 13 assign to teachers of the native language/language of instruction and those of the most taught languages (in particular English), as a priority, the educational responsibility of introducing students to multilingualism and bringing them into contact with other languages and other language cultures;
- 14 make the teaching of two modern foreign languages (i.e. languages not spoken in the country) widespread on all lower and higher secondary courses of study, in particular technical and vocational courses (see 11);
- 15 make language learning methods more diverse, going beyond "language classes";
- 16 seek the balance necessary in the teaching of language skills so that qualifications do not become an end in themselves;
- 17 convince higher education institutions that they should participate fully in language policies for multilingualism by making them responsible for teaching a third foreign language;
- 18 support pilot programmes on intercultural education;
- 19 support creativity and research in teaching methods, emphasising that there is no "miracle method" for implementing multilingualism;
- 20 support research and pilot programmes on learning centred around reading and listening comprehension and on communication by way of symmetrical intercomprehension;

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| III. make multilingual education the concern not only of schools, but of society as a whole |
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- 21 design school education with lifelong learning in mind;
- 22 further increase the scope of action to promote multilingualism to cultural life, in particular by working with the media;
- 23 catalogue festive/cultural events with a strong language focus and increase their audience;
- 24 create the role of language ombudsman to try to resolve language issues in society (in particular language discrimination);

² See European Commission (2004): European Profile for Language Teacher Education - A Frame of Reference.

³ See D. Graddol (2006): English next. Why global English may mean the end of English as a foreign language, British Council.

- 25 create local, regional and national synergies between the authorities, the business world and players in cultural life and the media to increase the opportunities offered to adults for continuing to learn languages throughout their lives;
- 26 interact closely with the authorities and players involved in local life;
- 27 legitimise regional languages by equipping them for teaching that meets the same criteria as that of modern/foreign languages and to give them the means to express the realities of modern life;
- 28 ensure that regional and national/official language syllabuses include a component that introduces students to language diversity and goodwill towards other languages;
- 29 look for ways to carve out a place for neighbours' languages;
- 30 look to creating local solutions so that children's first languages/"mother" tongues are also languages of instruction, at least during the first years of primary education;
- 31 support the transmission within families of newcomers' original languages;
- 32 offer linguistic and civil support to immigrants;
- 33 as a means of resocialisation, provide language training - even if it is only symbolic - to marginalised groups: prison inmates, hospital patients, homeless people, longstanding-immigrants' wives who do not have jobs, etc.

This set of possible courses of action invites reflection on how to refocus action on multilingual education **for Europe**. Many of the measures taken between 2004 and 2006 moved towards better language teaching and constitute the fundamental basis for multilingual education. However, many of them would probably have been taken by the participating countries had the European initiative not been in place, with countries encouraged to implement them by national public opinion.

Fresh impetus is therefore necessary after this first stage, as it is this new action that will lead to the gradual establishment of multilingualism for Europe, whose foundations have just been laid in language teaching at the end of the *Action Plan*.... For this renewed action to be taken:

- it must be ensured that the participating countries subscribe to the explicit "broad" definition of multilingual education;
- action plans must be put in place to implement it, at different rates according to the country concerned;
- the plans could - potentially, and if the participating countries wish - be made contractual, committing the Commission and the participating countries;
- this action must be more concrete outside the school environment to create major opportunities for living with languages throughout life;
- the action must become more diverse, in particular in the field of cultural events with a strong language focus;

- cooperation between the participating countries, coordinated by the Commission, and other European institutions (such as the Council of Europe) must continue to fuel reflection by all, by way of an essential exchange of experiences.