



Guidance – Promotion of Regional and Minority Languages in Europe

Overview of important documents and chronological development.
Aims and demands for the regional and minority languages

Introduction

The added value of regional and minority languages in multilingual and cross-border regions is undisputed.

The preservation of linguistic and cultural diversity is a declared objective of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU and part of the Lisbon Treaty. Nevertheless the support for regional and minority languages on the European level is insufficient. The potential of the languages is not used. The number of speakers is decreasing and assimilation is wearing on.

The measures called for in the “Ebner-report” of the European Parliament from 2003 have yet to be implemented.

Increasing requirements of societal, economic and political character and the further development of a united Europe ask for a clear position on the future of the regional and minority languages and their communities and consequently for strengthening the regions in Europe.

On the following pages we will give you an overview of the developments of the past ten years, since the European Year of Languages 2001.

We will emphasise the political significance of multilingualism and give an overview of the developments, including a description of the most important documents.

In this guidance we will focus on the policies and the measures of the European Union. We however start with referring to the particular importance of the Council of Europe and its European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. This international treaty is of major importance to the preservation of the regional and minority languages, mainly through its advanced monitoring system. Let us hope that the European Union will revert to cooperation with the Council of Europe and its experience with the Language Charter where it comes to the further development of its own language policy and its concrete measures.

FUEN, as representative organisation of 90 member organisations in 32 European countries now, is the voice of the autochthonous, European minorities. Behind these numbers are also many regional and minority languages. Especially the smaller and smallest languages in Europe, those languages that are critically endangered, are represented by FUEN.

We see – ten years after the European Year of Languages – urgent need for action. The issue of the smaller and smallest languages in Europe is in danger of being pushed more and more to the margins, not in the last place because of the overriding discussion on the financial and economic crisis.

At the moment there is a good occasion to act. The pending negotiations on the financial budget of the European Union from 2014 on offer the chance to place the issues of the regional and minority languages in the focus of attention. Reports, statements, academic analyses and declarations of intend – like the overview in this guidance shows – are available in abundance.

Together with its Network for Regional and Minority Languages – RML2future – FUEN elaborated a concrete proposal for these negotiations, which also has been published.

Creating a European network of the different actors in the field of regional and minority languages is one of our goals.

In 2011, FUEN started a “networking initiative”, which is already yielding results. Together with NPLD a “Joint Statement of Cooperation for the Promotion of Constitutional, Minority-, Regional and Smaller-State Languages” was concluded.

Together we want to work on the European level for the interests of the regional and minority languages.

We invite all parties to support us.

Multilingualism and linguistic diversity as policy objective

A stated universal and European aim is to realise multilingualism and preserve linguistic diversity. These aims have been enshrined both in the Charter of Fundamental Rights and in the Lisbon Treaty of the European Union, and also in the Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe.

On the global level international treaties and political documents of the United Nations protect the use of languages. In this regard we would like to refer in particular to the concept of endangered languages by UNESCO.

The right to protect and preserve indigenous languages is one of the universal human rights. Furthermore each individual has the right to his/her own language.

Article 3 Paragraph 3 Lisbon Treaty (TEU)

[The EU] shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and shall ensure that Europe’s cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced.

Charter of Fundamental Rights

Any discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation shall be prohibited.

On 26 September 2011 the Council of Europe and the European Commission celebrated together the tenth anniversary of the European Day of Languages. Since 2001, 26 September has been dedicated each year to the subject of languages and language learning. In a joint statement, signed by EU Commissioner Androulla Vassiliou and Secretary-General Thorbjørn Jagland of the Council of Europe, the following was said:

“Languages and language learning have since 2001 been celebrated every year on 26 September, the European Day of Languages. Activities cover all languages, including the promotion of less widely used and taught languages, as well as migration languages and sign languages. The European Day of Languages should encourage lifelong language learning for personal fulfilment, full participation in Europe’s democratic societies and professional development.”

According to the European Commission, which refers to recent research, the term “Multilingualism refers to both a person’s ability to use several languages and the co-existence of different language communities in one geographical area.”

Communication from the Commission 2005 (596).

The objective is that each European citizen will learn two languages additional to his/her own mother tongue: this is abbreviated with the formula “*mother tongue plus 2*”.

In reality 56% of the EU citizens are able to have a conversation in another language as their mother tongue. In contrast, 44% of the EU-citizens are proficient in no other language than his/her mother tongue. Additionally there is a preponderance of English as taught foreign language (Eurobarometer 2006).

Multilingualism within the European Union is mainly considered as a key competence for economic competitiveness and labour market mobility.

But at the same time the preservation of linguistic diversity signifies an important contribution to the irretrievable cultural heritage of Europe.

The most recent communication from the European Commission with the title “*Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment*”, said:

“The harmonious co-existence of many languages in Europe is a powerful symbol of the European Union's aspiration to be united in diversity, one of the cornerstones of the European project. Languages define personal identities, but are also part of a shared inheritance. They can serve as a bridge to other people and open access to other countries and cultures, promoting mutual understanding. A successful multilingualism policy can strengthen life chances of citizens: it may increase their employability, facilitate access to services and rights and contribute to solidarity through enhanced intercultural dialogue and social cohesion. Approached in this spirit, linguistic diversity can become a precious asset, increasingly so in today's globalised world.”
Source: Communication from the Commission 2008 (3)

In a study on the implementation of the policy objectives in regard to multilingualism and linguistic diversity from 2008 commissioned by the European Parliament mentions the following was written on the implementation of these two objectives:

“Multilingualism and linguistic diversity are sometimes conflicting policy agendas. Language learning policy has tended to be influenced by ‘harder’ priorities like economic competitiveness and labour market mobility, and linguistic diversity policies by ‘softer’ issues like inclusion and human rights. Multilingualism policy has been more highly prioritized than linguistic diversity policy in terms of concrete actions.”

Multilingualism policy includes different fields of action:

- Multilingualism for intercultural dialogue and social cohesion
- Overcoming language barriers in the local environment, the creation of language-friendly environments
- Multilingualism and prosperity, languages and competitiveness
- Languages and lifelong learning
- Media, new technology and translation.

Political development

For the policy objective of multilingualism a large number of documents and reports have been written, conclusions by high-level experts and groups of intellectuals, academic studies and surveys as well as consultations.

(For an overview please have a look at “chronological overview”).

Multilingualism as a political objective is part of the Lisbon Strategy of the European Union (European Council in Lisbon in 2000) and was institutionalised in 2007, when a full-fledged Commissioner for Multilingualism was installed. This situation lasted only until 2010, when the remit was combined again and falls now in the policy remit of EU Commissioner for Education, Culture and Youth as well as Multilingualism, Androulla Vassiliou.

Lately multilingualism was included as a transversal activity in the EU funding programme Lifelong Learning – from which our network RML2future has been funded.

With the Lisbon Strategy the EU pursues the objective to make the European Union the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economic area of the world. To this end the systems of general and vocational education should contribute in the context of lifelong learning.

It is preceded by an interesting political development, focusing mainly on the issue of how European language policy should be developed in the future – in a balance between the “hard” objective of multilingualism and the “weak” objective of preserving linguistic diversity.

The difficulties in realising these objectives within the European Union lie predominantly in the subsidiary nature of the competences of the Union in regard to education issues.

The example best known in practice is the implementation of the Bologna-process and the objective of harmonisation in higher education. Communications and objectives in the field of multilingualism and linguistic diversity are reference standards for the member states, not a joint obligation.

In implementing the objectives, especially “mother tongue plus two”, the member states are developing in a very different way and the EU has to observe that there is some stagnation in realising the objectives.

Each member state has a different background, different goals and also different starting positions in regard to how it will reach multilingualism and preserve linguistic diversity. Additionally many states have national priorities and strategies of their own.

Chronological overview

2001 European Year of Languages

The European Year of Languages was declared jointly by the European Union and the Council of Europe in 2001.

The European Year of Languages had five explicit objectives:

- to raise awareness of the wealth of linguistic diversity within the European Union and of its value in terms of civilisation and culture.
- to encourage multilingualism.
- to bring to the notice of the widest possible audience the advantages of proficiency in several languages.
- to encourage lifelong learning of languages.
- to collect and disseminate information about the teaching and learning of languages.

Quelle und gute Zusammenfassung:

http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/lifelong_learning/c11044_en.htm

In the underlying legal act Decision No 1934/2000/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 July 2000 on the European Year of Languages 2001 the following is written:

(4) All the European languages, in their spoken and written forms, are equal in value and dignity from the cultural point of view and form an integral part of European cultures and civilisation.

The European Parliament adopted a resolution at the end of the Year of Languages 2001. The Commission was urged to take measures to strengthen linguistic diversity in Europe.

In 2002 the Council of the EU (Education Council) adopted a resolution on the promotion of linguistic diversity and language learning.

The European Commission adopted an Action Plan. This plan started with a public consultation, in which FUEN participated as well.

In 2002 the European Council – the meeting of the heads of state and governments – decided in Barcelona to adopt a concluding document, which also dealt with linguistic diversity. Topic 44 reads:

“to improve the mastery of basic skills, in particular by teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age...”

In the discussions since then, this decision has been repeated regularly with the formula “mother tongue plus two”.

In 2003 the Action Plan of the European Commission on language learning and linguistic diversity was presented after the consultation phase had ended. The main objective is the promotion of language learning and linguistic diversity.

The Commission proposed to install a permanent high-level group and to develop a European network of inspectors as well as to finance studies on multilingualism.

The Action Plan defines the individual objectives and specific actions, which have to be implemented according to a clear short-term planning (between 2004 and 2006).

Good summary can be found at:

http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/lifelong_learning/c11068_en.htm

The European Parliament dealt intensively with the issue of linguistic diversity and therefore also with the issue of regional and minority languages.

Useful reading: the course of the negotiations has been illustrated in “Einheit in Vielfalt”, a book written by the main rapporteur Michl Ebner (in German).

Out of the intensive efforts developed the “Report with recommendations to the Commission on European regional and lesser-used languages – the languages of minorities in the EU – in the context of enlargement and cultural diversity (2003/2057(INI)).“

The “Ebner-report” was adopted with 423 votes in favour, 27 against and 21 abstentions.

The adopted initiative report was of a special legal character. In the legislative process of the EU in almost all situations the European Commission has the sole right of initiative. But the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament can call on the Commission to initiate a proposal. A similar right has been introduced in the Lisbon Treaty in the form of the European Citizens’ Initiative. Article 225 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (Lisbon Treaty) / Article 42 of the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament.

The European Parliament agreed to address a clear call on the Commission:
look after linguistic diversity in Europe – and take particular attention of the regional and minority languages in Europe!

The demands:

- Creation of an EU Agency for Linguistic Diversity and Language Learning which takes due account of the European regional and minority languages
- Creation of a specific EU-programme to promote linguistic diversity and language learning in Europe – including the regional and minority languages

The European Commission has the obligation to act on the basis of the initiative report. EU Commissioner Viviane Reding, who was the responsible Commissioner back then, ordered a feasibility study which should investigate the measures asked for in the Ebner-report – especially the call for an agency had to be examined.

The feasibility study from 2005 supported the demand of the European Parliament for a Language Agency – but offered also the alternative of strengthening existing networks.

As a preparation of the answers given, an online-consultation took place, which yielded more than 2000 responses. FUEN also participated with an answer.

The majority of the experts who were asked and the organisations who took part in the consultation process were in favour of an agency (74 percent). In regard to the funding, a minimum amount of eleven million Euro per year was calculated and a staff of 25 to 30 persons.

2005 – Framework Strategy for Multilingualism.

The answer from the Commission on the demand to improve the situation in the field of linguistic diversity, taking into account the regional and minority languages, was presented in the form of a “Communication from the Commission of 22 November 2005 - A new framework strategy for multilingualism.”

In this Communication from the responsible Commissioner Figl' the establishment of a Language Agency was rejected:

“The Commission believes that a network would be the most appropriate next step and, where possible, should build on existing structures; it will examine the possibility of financing it on a multi-annual basis through the proposed Lifelong Learning programme.”

The Commission policy in the field of multilingualism had three aims:
to encourage language learning and promoting linguistic diversity in society;

- to promote a healthy multilingual economy;
- to give citizens access to European Union legislation, procedures and information in their own languages.

Summary:

http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/lifelong_learning/c11084_en.htm

In the subsequent year, 2006, a Eurobarometer-survey took place on the language skills of European citizens.

56 Percent of the Europeans in the EU member states are able to have a conversation in another language as their mother tongue. But 44 percent had to admit that they were not proficient in any language other than their mother tongue.

There were no specific questions asked about regional or minority languages. But the respondents had the chance to indicate “other languages” as their mother tongue.

English is and will remain the most-spoken foreign language. In either case 14 percent of the Europeans indicate that they speak respectively French or German additional to their mother tongue. German is the most-spoken mother tongue (18 percent). More than 80 percent of the citizens regard language skills as useful nowadays.

A majority of the respondents is in favour of learning a foreign language already from the age of six on. And two thirds consider foreign language teaching as a political priority.

Based on the Framework Strategy for Multilingualism the responsible EU-Commissioner installed an expert group / High Level Group, who publish their report in 2007.

An innovation was in 2007 (until 2010) the installation of a EU Commissioner for Multilingualism, personified by Leonard Orban from Romania.

He also very soon ordered a renewed consultation on multilingualism. Also here FUEN was involved in the consultation process.

In 2008 a new communication of the Commission followed, under the title: “Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment”.

In the new communication, presented by EU Commissioner Orban, a group of European intellectuals was commissioned to examine the issue of multilingualism. This took place in the context of the “European Year of Intercultural Dialogue”.

In the end report, presented in 2009, the group of participating writers and philosophers proposed the idea of a “Personal Adoptive Language”. Every European citizen should select a language and learn it (not one of the usual “big languages”). This language would open new worlds for him – and he would so to speak acquire a second mother tongue. The report however did not take a position in regard to the special significance of natural multilingualism existing with regional and minority languages.

Adhering to the previous decision by the EU Commission not to fund an EU Language Agency or permanent Europe-wide structures, the Commission decided to start funding networks. Through these networks a new momentum should develop in the field of linguistic diversity, with the inclusion of regional and minority languages.

This new network approach was complied with through funding granted from the Lifelong Learning programme to NPLD (2007), the Mercator Network (2008) and the FUEN-network RML2future (2008).

www.npld.eu

www.rml2future.eu

www.mercator-network.eu

The EU Commission has tried in a top-down approach to establish the “Network of networks” it canvassed for in the feasibility study from 2006. In 2009 the Commission invited the main actors to found a “network of networks” under the title of “Civil Society Platform for Multilingualism”.

Several meetings took place in Brussels and a number of working groups were established. FUEN was invited to cooperate and participated in all the meetings. A report with recommendations from the working groups was adopted.

About 20 organisations from several fields connected to multilingualism and linguistic diversity in Europe worked together on the report (amongst them the national institutes for culture, such as the British Council and Goethe Institute).

The report, with recommendations to the European decision makers, also deals with the role of regional and minority languages. It calls amongst other things for a European plan to protect the endangered languages in Europe and to guarantee equal rights for all languages.

On the basis of the platform a consortium was established lead by the Goethe Institute and the British Council in Brussels. A network with the name poliglotti4.eu was founded, which has amongst other things as its task to organise linguistic diversity within a network of networks.

FUEN is an associated partner of the network.

Within the framework of its network RML2future, FUEN is seeking cooperation with other European actors in the field of regional and minority languages.

In Eisenstadt, at the FUEN Congress of 2011, a first networking initiative was started that had as its goal to bring together the different actors– 10 years after the European Year of Languages - in order to work together for the future, and for better protection of the regional and minority languages.

Between two of the remaining intact networks on the European level – NPLD and FUEN – a memorandum of joint cooperation was signed in 2011, which will give structure to further collaboration.

In 2011 FUEN received as representative organisation of the regional and minority languages a grant for its follow-up project to the RML2future network. From 2012 on FUEN will together with its network RML2future start a two-year long image-campaign on multilingualism in Europe, including cross-border regions and regional and minority languages in particular.

An overview of the different documents (this is only a selection) can be found in the internet at

www.fuen.org

Here also the surveys FUEN did in recent year amongst our member organisation, statements, contributions to consultations and working papers can be found.