

**“Perspectives of language communication in the EU”  
Nitra, Slovakia, 28 – 29 July 2016**

**“Nitra Declaration”**

L'Italia è fatta. Restano da fare gli italiani.  
(We have made Italy. Now we must make Italians), Massimo d’Azeglio, 1866.

We have made Europe, now we must make Europeans. Only Europeans can provide the necessary affective and democratic legitimacy for the EU. Brexit has made clear that the present crisis in European integration is one of identity. Governing diversity is the key issue. There is a need to improve governance by aligning government institutions with communities of communication. The lack of such alignment is an existential problem for the EU.

Many citizens have legitimate fears that, for Europe to succeed, their national identity will be destroyed. Their concern must be addressed. Citizen engagement with Europe will remain weak until citizens feel a European identity, in harmony with their national and regional identities. This is so because, despite the great strides of European integration in the economic and commercial spheres, its cultural, educational and linguistic aspects have remained at the national level. There has been no attempt to develop a common education for European citizens. Languages enable communication but, of equal importance, they express identity. There is at present no one language which expresses a pan-European identity. The EU motto of united in diversity appears to favour diversity at the expense of unity. Yet a balance between both is essential.

Increasing globalisation has led to the dominance of English. As a global language, English is poorly equipped to express a European identity. In the post-Brexit EU, only 10% of EU citizens speak English as a mother tongue or very well as a foreign language, so its exclusive use in the EU would exacerbate social inequalities, and be perceived as elitist. Over-concentration on English is a crucial factor weakening motivation to study other languages. Linguistic inequalities are often the result of ill-advised language policies and not the outcome of spontaneous socio-economic phenomena. Linguistic injustice generates different forms of economic and social discrimination, which should be tackled through appropriate language policies at the EU level.

There is a widespread tendency to undervalue the importance of language policy as an integrating factor. This strengthens the status quo, which is unsatisfactory, even for native English speakers, as Brexit and other referendums have shown. Multilingualism is a core EU value, as it is essential to ensure non-discrimination in the treatment of EU citizens, including speakers of regional or minority languages. There is a need for thorough exploration of these crucial areas.

Foreign language teaching is not producing the expected results. Both Eurobarometer and SurveyLang have shown decreases in competence, both in first and second foreign languages. There is a clear need for a new strategy to improve language learning, and increase language awareness and intercultural competence, by testing empirically which first foreign language is most likely to encourage subsequent language-learning. The Visegrad 4+ countries present an ideal framework for this innovative approach, and to take practical steps to make it a reality, thus promoting both linguistic diversity and a common European identity.

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***Theme 1:*** *Citizen engagement - measures to ensure that governments and EU institutions provide information on their activities and programs in a wide range of European languages, and that access to the institutions does not privilege only one or two languages.*

*(Author: Seán Ó Riain et al.)*

***Context***

Increasing globalisation has been inexorably leading to the ever-increasing dominance of just one language – English. While the growth in the use of English has many positive features, it also has important negative features, which are largely ignored. Among them are the increasing alienation from the EU of citizens whose languages are not widely used by EU institutions. Multilingualism is a core EU value, as it is essential to ensure non-discrimination in the treatment of EU citizens. There is a widespread tendency, both at the EU and global levels, to ignore the importance of language policy. This inevitably leads to a continued strengthening of the status quo – i.e. the ever-greater dominance of English at the expense of all other languages, whether national, regional or minority, and the injustice of conferring lifelong, unearned privileges on the 1-2% of EU citizens (post Brexit) whose first language is English. The present conference is a step toward raising awareness of language policy as a vitally important component of bringing European integration closer to the citizen, by encouraging the EU and its Member States, *and particularly the V4+ countries* as a European vanguard, to take some concrete steps, as outlined in the three theme documents.

***Recommendations***

1. Europe urgently needs a transparent public discussion on language policy with the aim of developing guidelines for EU and national language policies, to raise public awareness of the importance of language policy.
2. Dialogue between key stake-holders in language policy work, politicians, journalists, researchers and representative of civil society is a prerequisite for more informed policy formation.
3. Both the European Commission and national governments should set up units staffed by well-qualified civil servants specializing in language policy, with responsibility for integrating language policies in commerce, culture, education, research, the media, international relations and in the supranational institutions of the EU system.
4. A primary function of these language policy specialists would be to push language policy higher up on the political, academic, educational and media agendas, and to ensure that the language factor is explicitly addressed in all relevant policy fields at both EU and national level.
5. A serious study should be undertaken by the Commission on the use of Esperanto as a bridging or pivot language in EU-internal communication, to calculating the economic costs in the short term of learning the language, and the longer-term economic savings that would result from implementation of an Esperanto-based system. Support for NGO projects in this sphere should also be examined.
6. A Code of Language Conduct in EU Institutions, aimed at equality for all citizens of all Member States in EU integration, irrespective of mother tongue, should be elaborated. The implementation of this Code should be monitored by the EU Ombudsman.
7. The EU institutions should develop active policies that counteract linguistic discrimination. Recruitment must never discriminate in favour of native speakers of a language, either *de jure* or *de facto*.

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***Theme 2:*** *Multilingualism in the economy and in society. Avoiding social exclusion and strengthening the Single Market.*  
(Author: Michele Gazzola et al.)

Linguistic inequalities generate different economic and social discriminations that should be tackled through appropriate language policies at the EU level.

***Five priorities can be identified:***

1. *Social inclusion.* The teaching of at least two foreign languages in European schools and/or lifelong language learning should be enforced by all Member states. The local language should be taught to immigrants, including international students, in order to promote social inclusion.

2. *Intellectual Property Rights.* The EU should design a set of effective compensatory measures in order to cancel language-related economic inequalities in the protection of IP rights at the European level. The European Patent Office accepts only English, French and German as official languages, and the European Union Intellectual Property Office only English, French, German, Italian and Spanish. European business based in countries where these languages are not official must bear high translation costs that are not fully compensated by the said Offices, not even under the current regulation of the EU unitary patent. This biases competition among EU companies, and violates the free market principles of the Common Market. Further, the paradox exists that protection of intellectual property rights at the European level is cheaper for a US or Australian company than for a Portuguese or Polish one.

3. *Consumers.* The EU should protect the right of EU consumers to be informed in their native language or primary language of education when they purchase goods and services. No informed choice is possible if labels, ingredients, nutritional facts, users' manual and safety instructions are not available in the native language of EU citizens. Multilingualism is necessary for the free market to work effectively. EU treaties and international treaties should acknowledge the respect of multilingualism as a necessary component of free and fair trade.

4. *Call for tenders and procurement procedures at the EU level.* The Internet webpages of the EU Commission should be more multilingual. Such pages contain different calls for tender and guidelines of EU funding projects that often are available in one language only. This biases competition among EU business, NGOs and associations both in procurement procedures which lead to the conclusion of public contracts at the EU level, and in the allocation of resources supporting transnational projects. The EU is funded by European taxpayers, and it should not allow any bias in access to public funding.

5. *Publishing industry.* The use of bibliometric indicators and international university rankings skewed towards the English language entails severe competition biases in the publishing sector, notably in academic publishing. This restricts the access to knowledge of EU citizens, and it unduly favours the publishers based in some Member States. The EU should act in order to neutralise negative externalities due to linguistic hegemony in the publishing industry by setting up a market for language rights or by subsidizing multilingual academic publishing. Resources should be collected by levying a linguistic tax on English-speaking academic publishers. This would be consistent with the Single Market principles. Further, oppose the use of procedures for the evaluation of the quality of research that artificially push researchers to abandon their native language in academic publishing and teaching. The EU should support academic publications in more languages. It is worth evaluating the linguistic impact of the Bologna process.

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**Theme 3:** *Educational inclusion - measures to (a) encourage the learning and use of smaller/neighbouring languages; (b) support learners' home languages, and (c) tie language learning more closely to the development of European identity and solidarity.*

*(Author: Seán Ó Riain et al.)*

**Context**

The Barcelona European Council of 2002 recommended that all EU citizens study at least three languages (mother tongue plus two). The 2011 Report<sup>1</sup> to the European Commission of the European Civil Society Platform on Multilingualism/ECSPM, reported that English is the first foreign language learned by the vast majority in the EU, and identified this dominance of English as a factor weakening motivation to study subsequent foreign languages. The importance of learning English is not contested, but the order in which languages are learned can be crucial. Foreign language teaching is not producing the expected results. Although it is commonly believed that knowledge of English is spreading, *Eurobarometer* shows that in 2005-2011 throughout the EU countries the percentage of those claiming to speak a first and second foreign language actually dropped, from 56% to 54%., and 28% to 25%, respectively.<sup>2</sup> For *SurveyLang* 2012<sup>3</sup> language testing was conducted only up to the B2 level, as it was considered that those who achieve the C1 level are a tiny minority, of the order of 1%. There is clearly room for improvement. There is also a need to develop a common element in the education of European citizens, to illustrate the contribution of European integration to peace.

***A strategy to improve language learning***

The first ECSPM recommendation in the education section is as follows: *The Platform recommends empirical research in primary schools in a number of Member States to ascertain which first foreign language is most likely to encourage subsequent language-learning and also contribute to the EU's Europe 2020 priority of “reducing the school dropout rate to 10% from the present 15%” (section 3.1).* The aim is to test the results of *second foreign language learning* where the first foreign language learned in schools is English, French, etc. It is generally accepted that learning any second language will be helpful in subsequent language-learning. This is the *propaedeutic* effect. Since curriculum time in schools is at a premium, it makes sense to use time dedicated to language to best advantage. The actual language used for propaedeutic purposes is less important, but its structure must contribute to rapid and easy learnability, thus increasing motivation for subsequent language study. For instance, a ‘*language orientation course*’, lasting 50 – 100 hours, covering the basic grammar of Esperanto and the 500 most frequently-used morphemes, has produced interesting results in the UK<sup>4</sup> and elsewhere, as described by Professor Renato Corsetti<sup>5</sup>. It should therefore be included in the tests recommended by the ECSPM.

**Recommendation**

The Nitra Conference recommends the implementation of the above ECSPM recommendation in a number of **primary schools in the Visegrad 4+ countries**, to test objectively which first foreign language is most effective in improving subsequent language learning; and initial work to develop a proposed common educational element, to illustrate the contribution of European integration to peace.

1 [ec.europa.eu/languages/pdf/civilsocplrapport-full-version\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/languages/pdf/civilsocplrapport-full-version_en.pdf), p 9. The ECSPM comprises 29 pan-European organisations

2 [ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_386\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_386_en.pdf) - survey published in 2012 and [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_243\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_243_en.pdf) - survey published in 2006.

3 [ec.europa.eu/languages/eslc/index.html](http://ec.europa.eu/languages/eslc/index.html).

4 [www.esperantoresearch.org.uk/site/publications](http://www.esperantoresearch.org.uk/site/publications).

5 [www.springboard2languages.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Rationale-of-the-Springboard-to-Languages-programme.pdf](http://www.springboard2languages.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Rationale-of-the-Springboard-to-Languages-programme.pdf).