

**Leonard Orban**

European Commissioner responsible for multilingualism

**“A New Strategy for Multilingualism:  
a strategy for all EU citizens”**

*Check Against Delivery  
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi  
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

Presentation of the Communication on Multilingualism to the European Parliament's Committee on Culture

**on 6 October 2008 in Brussels**

Ms Batzeli,  
Members of the Committee,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

The last time I spoke to this Committee, at the end of March, we were still in the process of collecting the various contributions being made to nurture our strategy for multilingualism. On 18 September, this strategic Communication was adopted by the Commission.

Please allow me to emphasise from the very beginning that this strategy does not propose to deal with the problems of language within the European Institutions. It addresses multilingualism in a broader and more diverse sense.

### **Contribution of the European Parliament**

As you know, the Communication is based on a series of external evaluations and on the opinions of experts in the field. I would like to thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for the extremely valuable contribution you have made to this strategy.

You have been actively involved in defining lines of action by way of the various resolutions you adopted on this subject.

The exchange of ideas that we have had over the last 15 months – I am thinking, for example, of our working lunch of last June – helped me gain a better understanding of your priorities. I am convinced that, in this spirit, the positions which you will adopt on this Communication will foster the full application of the proposed lines of action.

### **The Strategy's main message**

Allow me to emphasise what from my point of view is the main message that needs to be put to citizens and to all those involved.

I truly hope that the new strategy will be an engine for change and a determining factor leading to a qualitative leap, as we need European thinking on multilingualism to move forward.

I hope that we can bring an end to the old idea that language is an instrument of separation and division. What I would like to achieve is to turn language into a bridge between individuals, between communities, and between peoples.

### **An expression of our diversity**

Europe today is a bastion of diversity. And language is a fundamental part of this. Through it, we construct our identity. Diversity has sometimes been seen as an obstacle to European unity. Today, on the contrary, it seems a beneficial right. It is one of the ties that bind our union.

The European Union fully recognises that linguistic diversity is a treasure that needs to be cherished as it deserves. And as you know, this also includes regional and minority languages.

We will continue to support and promote this diversity, with due respect for the principle of subsidiarity.

## **Main lines of action**

Ladies and gentlemen,

Please allow me to briefly describe to you some of the main lines of action included in the strategy.

### ***Intercultural dialogue and integration of migrants***

Globalisation, advances in technology and an aging population have produced profound changes in European society. Europeans now encounter more and more people from other countries. Ever growing numbers of Europeans live in a country other than their country of origin. The importance of ensuring effective intercultural communication has thus become fundamental.

In such a context, learning the language of the host-country is the key which unlocks all the doors for migrants. This allows them to integrate with our societies in a responsible and active fashion. At the same time, it enables them to grow and improves professional success.

### ***The Lisbon Strategy and the Social Agenda***

Our Communication falls within the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs and the three basic principles of the Social Agenda, i.e. opportunity, access and solidarity:

- every citizen must have the opportunity for appropriate communication to develop their potential and to make optimal use of the possibilities to modernise and innovate in the EU;

- every citizen needs to have access to appropriate foreign language learning or to other means of facilitating communication, so that they do not have to overcome linguistic obstacles impeding them from living, working and communicating in the EU;
- in the spirit of solidarity, even people who may not be able to learn other languages need to benefit from appropriate means of communication, granting them access to the multilingual environment.

### ***Consolidating learning of foreign languages***

This strategy is aimed at all EU citizens. Everyone needs to have the opportunity to learn the languages they need or choose. We need to meet the Barcelona objective, according to which every citizen should learn their language, plus two others. We are now putting forward concrete measures for people outside the system of education: people, including adults, who are taking vocational training.

Foreign language learning depends on a number of options, such as consistency and how motivated the learners are.

It is important that teachers increase their efforts to motivate students, and that they can improve their own knowledge of foreign languages.

We would encourage the Member States to support teachers of foreign languages and encourage them to spend more time abroad to improve their language knowledge. Modern technologies enabling distance learning and partnerships between schools can play an important role in this area.

## **Translation as an instrument for promoting culture**

The European Commission attaches special importance to translation. Literary translators in Europe enjoy the support provided by the Culture programme. The Commission is ready to explore all avenues enabling it to do more in this area.

I am very pleased to see that the French Presidency is very attached to this aspect. What is more, we have already begun preparing for a conference on translation as a tool for accessing other cultures, an event which will take place next year, during the Czech presidency of the European Council.

### ***In the Media***

Multilingualism needs to be given a higher profile in all social spheres. This is why I have raised the problem of the media, the press and films with subtitles.

Translation and interpreting play a key role in spreading language knowledge. And new technologies make it possible to use computer-aided translation tools on a larger scale. This is already happening for multilingual communication over the Internet.

### ***Increasing competitiveness via foreign languages***

We have spent hours discussing the potential growth in business's competitiveness that is lying dormant because of the lack of language policies on employees, and on companies in general and SMEs in particular. The new Communication puts forward measures to support those seeking greater access to the market.

### ***The external dimension of multilingualism***

As the European Parliament also emphasises, a number of the languages spoken within the European Union are also spoken outside it.

This gives us an important advantage in our relations with these countries. In order to exploit these relations to their full potential, we wish to promote the learning and teaching of all the EU languages outside the EU.

Equally, within the EU we need to know the languages of some countries that do not belong to the EU. Chinese, Hindi, Arabic and Russian, for example, hold a real cultural interest, as well as a commercial interest. We would like to take an approach whereby all agreements signed with non-EU countries include cooperation in the field of multilingualism.

## **Conclusion**

I would like to conclude by summing up what the European Commission is doing.

Two platforms are going to be created as a way to share experiences:

- one for the business community, social partners, trade associations, schools and education authorities;
- the other for the mass media, cultural organisations and the various actors in civil society, to promote intercultural dialogue.

In tandem, the Commission is going to utilise the EU programmes to support lifelong learning of foreign languages, professional and

student mobility, research and development of innovative methods, all adapted to the various target groups.

We are going to draw up a list of best practices in language learning and teaching and make it available to the Member States.

The Commission is going to support subtitling and distribution of mass media throughout Europe.

Working with the Member States, the Commission is going to contribute to sharing experiences in refining interpreting and legal translation, and specific means of translation useful for improving access to legal proceedings.

Last but not least, it is going to carry out awareness campaigns regarding the benefits which can be had from intercultural dialogue, linguistic diversity and studying languages.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The success of our strategy will depend on the commitment of the Member States, the support of regional and local authorities and of the various associations in the field, and, of course, the national parliaments. I feel sure that I can fully rely upon the support of the European Parliament, and that of this Committee in particular.

I thank you for your attention.