ON THE LANGUAGE SITUATION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION (EU)

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1. Some questions with respect to languages in the EU

We will concentrate on sociolinguistic and language policy aspects in the EU. The overriding questions from these points of view are how communication all over the EU is made to function and how the linguistically divergent EU population can be held together and feel at home in a single political unit. How this should ever be possible appears a riddle on first view. We will try to shed light on it by dealing mainly with the following questions:

(1) How do EU's political bodies, whose personnel come from all the different member countries, communicate? What are official and what are working languages of these bodies?

(2) What happens to the languages which are not used or have no status in these political bodies? What does the EU do with respect to the linguistic needs of their speakers or to protect these languages?

(3) What solutions are conceivable, judging from today's horizon, to guarantee smooth communication all over the EU, i.e. between all the individuals and within the political bodies?

If one wants to discuss these problems and the respective language policy, one should distinguish various levels of analysis: the entire community, the individual member state and the regional level below the individual member state; or accordingly, the community languages (the official languages of the EU), the official languages of the individual member states as a whole (the national official languages), and the official languages of a segment of a member state (the regional official languages), which Labrie (1993: 40) calls 'langues communautaires', 'nationales', and 'régionales' respectively. In addition, there are the languages without any official status.

Some of the EU's language policy, which also deals with the latter, is limited to the autochthonous (indigenous) languages and does not extend to the allochthonous ones: those of the immigrants or migrants. Finally, it may be useful to make a distinction between languages transcending the community, which could be called *world languages*, and others.

2. *The growing number of official languages*

Today's EU has developed in the tradition of visions of a united Europe which were presented by leading politicians as early as in the 1920's. Thus, for instance in 1929, French foreign minister Aristide Briand proposed a sort of united Europe to evolve out of the League of Nations. This international organisation, to which he presented his proposal in a speech, had just two working languages: English and French. Being different from the League of Nations, the EU has, however, never officially adopted such linguistic limitations. Its official regulations aim, on the contrary, at a kind of multilingualism which means, among other things, that each member country can use one of its official languages as a working language in the EU's political bodies. The EU thus stands very far away from the traditional language policy of some major European nation states, particularly France and Britain, which have since the 16th century adopted as their language policy: one country – one language. By contrast, the EU, however, has from the very beginning adopted a policy based on the idea of a Europe of different language communities, rather than a linguistic melting pot (cf. Coulmas 1991). This policy has been held up in principle in spite of the considerable costs caused by the fact that in 1995, for instance, around 3,400 personnel were employed in the language services, which amounted to about 12% of the EU's total personnel; compare that total personnel costs comprised only 5.2% of the entire EU budget. All EU decrees and regulations have to be translated into all the official languages of the EU in order to guarantee all EU citizens their democratic right that they can read those official documents in their own national languages. In spite of these endeavours, the EU bodies' linguistic reality prevailing in the organs of the EU nevertheless resembles that of the former League of Nations, as will be shown below.

The EU originally developed out of three European organisations: the European Community of Coal and Steel, the European Nuclear Community and the European Economic Community, which were combined into the *European Communities (ECs)* in 1957. Their various political bodies were joined on 1st July 1967, as a consequence of which the new entity came to be referred to in the singular as the *European Community (EC)*. At that time, the EC comprised the same six countries as at the beginning: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxemburg and the Netherlands. Later on, other countries joined, namely Denmark (without the Faroe Islands and Greenland), the United Kingdom, and Ireland (1973), Greece (1981), and Spain and Portugal (1986) (12 member countries). On 1st November 1993, the community was renamed once more into *European Union (EU)* as a consequence of closer economic ties and new political perspectives laid down in the Maastricht Treaty. It was joined by Austria, Finland, and Sweden in 1995 (presently: 15 member countries). Continued economic and political integration and the inclusion of still more countries are to be expected in the future.

As to languages, the European Economic Community's Council decreed Regulation No.1 soon after the ECs' foundation in 1957, namely on April 15th, 1958 (published in the *Official Journal*, 6th October 1958). This regulation has been the basis of all later regulations on official and working languages. Regulation No. 1 comprises 8 articles, the first of which originally declared Dutch, French, German and Italian the 'official and working languages' of the ECs' political bodies.[1] As the community grew, new languages were added under Article 1, namely Danish and English in 1973, Greek in 1981, Spanish and Portuguese in 1986, and Finnish and Swedish in 1995. Thus, the number of official languages increased from the original 4 to 11. This way, every member country is represented in the community's political bodies with at least one of its national official languages. In addition Irish (Gaelic) has a limited official status, which implies that it can be the language of a case at the European Court of Justice and of legal documents, e. g. driving licences.

It is not hard to imagine that working with 11 languages can be cumbersome. Strictly speaking, documents have to be always available in all these languages before consultations can start. Likewise, oral presentations have to be interpreted simultaneously into all the

other languages – as the European Parliament has explicitly decreed in its rules of procedure (14th February 1973, still valid). This regulation allows for no less than 110 ordered language pairings in the case of 11 languages (n x (n-1);. n = number of official languages). In this set, different orderings, e.g. Dutch -> French and French -> Dutch, are of course counted as two pairs, which corresponds to the rule that translation or interpreting should ideally only take place from someone's foreign into her/his native language, not the other way round. Only if one chooses certain languages as pivots of translating or interpreting (as in fact is done), can the number of combinations be reduced. However, two-step interpreting or translating not only takes longer, but often results in distorted products. Over and above, interpreting is generally difficult or impossible in more informal contacts. Here, choosing just one or a few languages for communication seems more practical. These languages, in which more 'work' will be carried out, are usually dubbed *working languages*.

The EC's, or later the EU's, Regulation No.1 seems to avoid any distinction between official and working languages by combining both terms in its Article 1. Articles 2 to 8, however, state how the languages named under Article 1 should be applied. Thus, for instance the regular *Official Journal*, in which new laws and regulations are published, has to appear in all the official languages (Article 5). However, Article 6 of Regulation No.1 opens up the possibility of a distinction between 'official language' and 'working language', in that it concedes that the various political bodies may decide themselves how to apply the language regulation in their particular case – which though, as may be assumed, does not imply the possibility of simply ignoring the existence of the 11 'official and working languages'.

To which degree a distinction between official and working languages has become established within the EU's political bodies has been investigated empirically. Data are available only for the EC in its late period, but they are probably still valid *cum grano salis* for the EU. So far studies, all of which were done by the questionnaire method, have concentrated on the EU's Commission, Council and Parliament. Table 1 shows the results of two rather preliminary studies only of the Commission.

	In writing		Orally	
	Percentage of officials using the language	Share in total communication	Percentage of officials using the language	Share in total communication
French	92.5	64.0	90.1	62.0
English	73.3	35.0	60.8	31.0
German	18.3	1.0	15.0	6.0
Spanish	6.7	-	9.2	-
Italian	8.3	-	-	6.7

Table 1: *Use of languages in the EU-Commission (detailed report in Ammon 1991: 311-313)*

French and English were clearly the preferred working languages. German ranked third, at a great distance from French and English, followed by Spanish and Italian. The other 'official and working languages', four at the time of the investigation, did not appear to be used at all. French seemed to be leading over English. However, among young officials English was preferred to French. A detailed investigation by Schloßmacher (1996: 51) revealed that French was used by more individuals, but that those who used English did so more frequently, i. e. to the exclusion of other languages. Schloßmacher's study was not limited to the EC Commission but included both Council and Parliament. It also compared the language use of officials of the three bodies with that of members of the Parliament. Not only did it distinguish between written and oral use of a language, but, in addition, between different situations; specifically, it inquired about its use as a foreign language. Some of this study's results are presented in Table 2.

	Officials				Parliamentarians	
	With EC bodies		With countries outside EC		With administration of EC parliament	
	Native language	Foreign language	Native language	Foreign language	Native language	Foreign language
French	100	98	94	79	100	66
English	97	80	98	97	100	67
German	62	15	54	12	100	15
Spanish	36	2	22	3	66	4
Italian	29	2	6	<0.5	71	2
Dutch	42	1	26	<0.5	84	0
Portuguese	21	-	10	<0.5	75	0
Danish	16	-	21	-	57	0
Greek	-	-	-	-	75	1

Table 2: *Percentage of individuals using a particular language orally in EC bodies (Schloßmacher 1996: 57-60)*

Obviously, all languages are used as a native language, at least, as may be assumed, vis-à-vis native speakers of the same language. However, only English, French, to some degree German, and in very few cases Spanish are used as a foreign language. Therefore, just two, or at best three, languages serve as a kind of lingua franca.

Table 2 also reveals that French and English are the only foreign languages that are used to more or less the same degree that they are used natively. In the case of all other languages, their use as a foreign language is considerably more limited than their native use. Furthermore, among the parlamentarians there is a stronger tendency to use the own language than among the officials, which may be due to the parliamentarians' more limited foreign language skills and to their keeping in touch more with their own national population. The comparison between French and English shows that the former is used more for communication within the EC and the latter more for outside communication, such as with countries outside the EC.

It may be assumed that these results from data collected in the early 1990's are still valid today, i. e. within the EU with its 15

member countries. As to the new languages: Finnish and Swedish, it seems likely that they rank in the third category together with Dutch, Portuguese, Danish and Greek, i. e. as *merely official languages.* This term, which expresses the difference from the other languages in extent of use, should not be misunderstood in the sense that these languages are not used at all by the EU's political bodies. But they are only used in bilateral contacts between the EU and their respective country, and not outside of these; thus, they are among the languages of the EU's *Official Journal.*

There are reasons for these functional differences of the various 'official and working languages'; these we will look at more closely in section 18.4. Furthermore, there are consequences, for the different language communities as well as for the languages themselves (cf. Ammon 1991: 176-181, 313-315). Neither the reasons nor the consequences have been studied in depth; therefore, what can be said about them at this point is rather hypothetical . One of the possible consequences is that the countries or populations whose national languages are actually not used in the EU's political bodies, may feel underrepresented there. The differences could also contribute to seeing these political bodies as a remote and anonymous bureaucracy; or they might hurt national pride. To simply discard such possible reactions as irrational would be irresponsible, for they could, if unattended, develop into a disruptive force (cf. Coulmas 1991 on ideologies connected with languages in Europe).

In addition to these more ideologically motivated potential consequences there are practical ones. Communication with the EU's political bodies is more difficult (or less smooth) for the merely-official-language countries, as they could be called, such as Denmark, Greece etc., than for the working-language countries such as France or Britain. One important instance are the invitations for tenders (services, construction work etc.), which the EU regularly issues and for which companies from all EU countries can apply. They are by no means always available in all 11 official languages. Often, in fact, they are published only in French or English, which can make it difficult for companies from other than French- or English-speaking countries to bid for them. Particularly these countries' smaller companies, which cannot afford their own translators or interpreters, tend to be disadvantaged.

As to consequences for the languages themselves, these are found with respect to *modernization* or *development* (German: *Ausbau*). The

languages without working-language function will most likely not develop the technical terminology necessary for the particular kind of communication; rather, they tend to stay terminologically underdeveloped. For this reason, they could not even be used for these functions, should the opportunity ever arise in the future; they would first have to be modernized. Even German, which at least has a limited degree of working function, has been perceived as being not fully modernized as to the necessary communication with the EU's political bodies. Rather than using regular German with the EU, German officials have been observed to use 'Eurospeak', a kind of German mixed with English and also French terminology, and the question has been raised whether finally an altogether mixed language might develop for communication on the EU level.

3. *The Council of Europe and the United Nations*

The Council of Europe, which was founded in 1949, comprised 39 member countries by the end of the year 1995. It has just two full-fledged working languages (called the 'official languages') and six working languages to a limited degree (called 'working languages'). The former are English and French, and the latter are German, Italian (only these two are actually guaranteed this status by the Council's statute), Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, and Turkish. There is a striking parallel to the language situation in the EU. The full-fledged working languages are the same in both cases, with the only difference that in the Council they are declared as such, though in a terminology different from ours, while in the EU they are not. Furthermore, the working languages, too, overlap to a limited degree: Those of the Council comprise those of the EU (German, Italian, Spanish). Finally, in both cases the majority of the national official languages of the member countries have no working function.

The United Nations with its 185 member countries in 1995 started out in 1945 with the two working languages English and French, which were at the same time official languages, and three merely official languages: Chinese, Russian, and Spanish. In addition, Spanish was promoted to a working language in 1948. Today, there are six official languages, Arabic having been added to the previous five in 1973. The distinction between working language

and official language has been blurred in the General Assembly and the Security Council, where interpreting and translating takes place from each language into each of the six others. For the United Nations' other political bodies, however, the distinction is still relevant. Again, in this most comprehensive international organisation of the world, the two full-fledged working languages of the EU are among the working languages, with Spanish playing a privileged role as well.

It seems to be a valid assumption (which however would need further scrutiny) that a language's position in international organizations, especially in such prestigious ones as the United Nations, has some impact on its position in the EU's political bodies. One of the reasons is that the language can be used in the EU's contacts with these international organizations. However, there are other, internal factors which in addition influence a language's standing in the EU, and at which we will have a look now.

4. *Fundamental figures on the official EU-languages*

This section intends to expand on the explanation for the observed functional differences between the official EU-languages. The explanation will, however, remain fragmentary, because the weight of the factors highlighted here has not been studied in full depth and can therefore only be guessed at, and also because still other factors would have to be included in a comprehensive explanation. Our brief review of the Council of Europe and the United Nations has already provided a partial explanation for why English and French are the only full-fledged working languages of the EU, and why Spanish is still among the working languages to a limited degree. There are, however, other EU-internal (and in some respects more basic) parameters which we want to look at now. In addition, these factors are worth looking at in themselves, independently of their contribution to the explanation of their working function in the EU, since they shed light on the general standing of the languages in question within the EU. The parameters in question are (1) numerical strength, (2) economic strength, (3) strength as official language (in various countries), and (4) strength as a subject of study as a foreign language.

4.1. Numerical strength

Numerical strength is a basic attribute of a language, or better: of a language community. Here, as elsewhere we follow the commonly accepted terminology which, rather than attributing a property to the language community only, attributes it metonymically to the language itself. Such a kind of terminology is convenient, but can become misleading if one forgets its abbreviative character.

A language's numerical strength refers – if not specified otherwise – to its number of mother tongue or native speakers; non-native speakers or foreign students of the language are not included (cf. section 4.4). Table 3 gives an overview of the numerical strength within the EU of all the EU's 'official and working' languages.

Language	*Number of native speakers*
German	89,413,000
French	63,948,000
English	61,631,000
Italian	57,154,000
Spanish	39,551,000
Dutch	21,137,000
Greek	10,408,000
Swedish	9,035,000
Portuguese	9,832,000
Danish	5,173,000
Finnish	4,753,000

Table 3: *Numerical strength of official EU languages within the EU (figures around 1990 to 1993, according to* Fischer Weltalmanach '97*)*

Figures on a language's numerical strength tend to vary to some degree, depending on source, definition of 'mother tongue' or 'native speaker', and method of counting (cf. for slightly different figures for the EU, e. g., Labrie 1993: 214). Part of the methodological problem can be illustrated by the term *mother tongue*, on which such figures are usually based. This term has various meanings which are not always controlled in statistics. The following meanings can

minimally be distinguished; they do not necessarily or always have the same extension:

(1) language in which the speaker has the greatest skill:

(2) language which the speaker learned first in the course of her/his life;

(3) language to which the speaker feels most attached or towards which s/he shows the most positive attitudes;

(4) language which the speaker claims as her/his *mother tongue.*

However, in spite of the considerable divergency of these concepts, figures of numerical strength are usually a reasonably reliable basis of comparison, particularly if meaning (4) is treated separately (as it can be assumed for the figures included in Table 3).

It seems fairly obvious that numerical strength is an important factor in the standing of a language in a community, particularly due to democratic rules which make majorities more powerful than minorities. Language rights of whatever kind will be granted more easily to the 'big', i. e. the numerically strong, than to the 'small', i. e. the numerically weak languages. Thus, the official languages of the EU are at the same time the numerically strong ones, with the exception of Catalan, which is not among the latter, despite being numerically stronger (7.2 million, following Labrie 1993: 214) than Finnish (4.9 million) and Danish (5.0 million). This irregularity indicates that numerical strength is not the only factor involved.

In addition, world-wide numerical strength of the EU's official languages might be worth looking into, as the possibility of contacts beyond the EU depends on this strength, at least to some degree; in its turn, a language's numerical strength can have an impact on its standing within the EU. The following languages' global numerical strength is considerably stronger than their numerical strength inside the EU: English, 300-415 million, Spanish, 211-285 million; and Portuguese, 120-160 million (figures according to four different sources between 1984 and 1990, cf. Ammon 1991: 41-42).

4.2. Economic strength

Economic strength of a language, or again, better: of a language community, can be measured as the GNP of all its native speakers. It has of course to be added up across the various countries in which the language is spoken, according to the share the speakers of the language have in each country's GNP. Share of GNP is respective language have in each country's GNP. Share of GNP is usually calculated according to the share of speakers for whom figures are normally available. The economic strength of the official EU languages within the EU is given in Table 4.

Language	*GNP(in million US$)*
German	1,764,577
French	1,234,848
Italian	939,718
English	930,383
Dutch	416,755
Spanish	352,444
Swedish	216,514
Danish	131,473
Finnish	81,116
Portuguese	73,598
Greek	73,087

Table 4: *Economic strength of official EU languages within the EU in 1993 (following* Fischer Weltalmanach '96*)*

That economic strength should be taken into account as one of the factors determining a language's standing in a political body or a community, can be inferred for instance from the fact that the Arabic-speaking countries managed to boost their language to official UN language status during the various oil crises, when they could show their economic muscle, or from the fact that Japanese has lately been expanding rapidly as a foreign language more or less hand in hand with Japan's growing economic strength. Within the EU, the German government in particular has been hinting at its language's economic strength in occasional attempts to raise German

to the level of a working language, one a par with English and French. Though these attempts have not been successful, the considerable economic strength of German within the EU is probably among the factors which work in favor of the language. This appears plausible, for instance, when one compares German to Spanish, which in some sense could be called a world language, but has clearly a weaker position within the EU than German.

Again, it seems worthwhile to extend our view to a global level. Here, particularly English has by far the greatest economic strength of all the official EU languages; Spanish, too, moves up the rank scale. The following figures were found for world-wide economic strength of some of the bigger EU-languages around 1988 (in million US $): English 4,271, German 1,090, Spanish 738, French 669, Italian 302, Portuguese 234, and Dutch 203 (Ammon 1991: 49). Economic strength may be assumed to particularly strengthen a language's standing because of the increase of motivation to study the language in view of the apparent greater market potential inherent in better language skills.

4.3. Strength as an official language (in various countries)

Table 5 gives an overview of the number of countries within the EU in which the various official EU languages have official status, either on a national or on a regional level.

Language	Countries in which the language has official status	
	on the national level	on a regional level
German	3 (Germany, Austria, Luxemburg)	2 (Belgium, Italy)
French	3 (France, Belgium, Luxemburg)	1 (Italy)
Dutch/English	2 (Netherlands, Belgium /United Kingdom, Ireland)	--
Danish/Finnish/Swedish	1 (Denmark/Finland /Sweden)	1 (Germany/Sweden /Finland)
Greek/Italian/Portuguese /Spanish	1 (Greece/Italy/Portugal /Spain)	--

Table 5: *Countries in which the official EU languages have official status*

In a political body in which each country has one voice, such as for example is the case in the EU Council, the number of countries in which a language has official status can sometimes be important, by influencing the language's standing. In addition, different countries may have different weight according to their numerical and economic strength. This becomes, for instance, noticeable in the European Parliament, in which the EU countries are represented by numerically different memberships, namely Germany 99, France /Italy/United Kingdom 87, Spain 64, Netherlands 31, Belgium /Greece/Portugal 25, Sweden 22, Austria 21, Denmark /Finland 16, Ireland 15, and Luxemburg 6. It would be possible, too, to weight the official EU languages in accordance with European Parliament memberships; in this case, the multilingual countries would have to be included in proportion to their various languages. Generally speaking, the official status of the EU languages in the member countries has some bearing on their standing in the EU's political

bodies, because language choice in official contacts with the respective countries will, as a rule, depend on it.

As in the case of the other factors, a global perspective should be added. The official status of languages in countries world-wide must have some impact on language choice for the EU's contacts outside of the EU, which in turn affects these languages' standing in the EU's political bodies. On a global level, the rank order of languages becomes significantly reversed. Though figures for countries with official status languages vary to some degree in different counts, depending on the definition of 'official status', the following may serve to give a valid impression. The first figure in the bracket represents the official status on a national level (in the countries' central political bodies), the second on a regional level (in regional political bodies only): English 63 (19 + 44), French 34 (11 + 23), Spanish 23 (15 + 8), Portuguese 7 (6 + 1), German 7 (3 + 4). These figures contribute to an explanation why English and French are the EU's only full-fledged working languages, whereas German, in spite of its strength within the EU, is only a working language to a limited degree, and Spanish, despite its weakness within the EU, still is a working language to a limited degree.

4.4. Strength as a subject of study as a foreign language

It seems obvious that a language's practicability as a working language depends first of all on the extent to which it is known. The greater the number of individuals familiar with it, the better it can function as a working language. Since in the EU's political bodies any language's native speakers are a minority, though certainly quite different in size, the degree to which a language is studied and used as a foreign language can make a decisive difference. The numbers of foreign language students (though only those enrolled in public schools) are available for the former EC with its 12 member countries (Table 6). The comments in brackets have to do with the fact that a language is not studied as a foreign language (at least for curricular purposes) in a country where it is generally classified as the mother tongue or a native language, such as English in the United Kingdom and Ireland, German in Austria and Germany, and so forth.

Language	Number of foreign language students in public schools	
English	18,133,320	(in 10 countries, all non-mother-tongue)
French	9,088,163	(in 11 countries, all non-mother-tongue)
German	2,888,011	(in 11 countries, all non-mother-tongue)
Spanish	1,385,801	(in 9 countries, all non-mother-tongue, except Greece and Portugal)
Italian	215,840	(in 8 countries, all non-mother-tongue, except Greece, Netherlands, and Portugal)
Dutch	212,214	(in 4 countries: Belgium, France, Germany, and Luxemburg)
Portuguese	13,709	(in 3 countries: France, Germany, and Spain)
Greek (Modern)	80	(in 1 country: France)
Danish	0	

Table 6: *Number of foreign language students in public schools of the EC around 1986 (Eurydice 1989)*

Though the figures in Table 6 are not up to date – a new investigation sponsored by the EU is presently under way –, it seems safe to assume that the proportion, at least of the numerically stronger languages, is roughly the same today. Thus, it has been reported that according to a more recent poll, 41% of the EU population have studied English, 28% French and 15% German as a foreign language (*Eurobarometer* 41, July 1994).

The same study reveals, however, that the rank order of overall knowledge of the language is probably different. When native speakers were included, 42% of the overall EU population claimed to be able to communicate in English, 31% in German and only 29% in French. According to these figures, English would clearly be the most practicable working language of the EU, with German and French following suit, both with roughly the same overall figures.

As to the world-wide knowledge of the official EU languages as foreign languages, reliable data are hard to come by. Crystal (1987: 436-444) gives the following numbers (in million) of individuals using the languages 'as a second language' (which may be roughly

equivalent to use as a foreign language): English 700-1,400, Spanish 280, French 220, Portuguese 160, German 100, Italian 60. – Lately, the governing bodies of the EU have made spectacular moves to increase foreign language skills in the EU. One of these moves has been the LINGUA program, for which 200 million ECU were made available for its initial phase from 1990-1994 (cf. Olivieri 1994); a continuation of this program is SOCRATES, starting in 1997.

5. *Languages without official status at the EU level*

The 11 official languages of the EU are only a small subset of all the languages spoken on EU territory. The European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages has registered, in addition to the official ones, no less than 34 autochthonous minority languages (cf. also Haarmann 1993). Among the official EU languages, one does not even find all national official languages of the member countries, for instance not Luxemburgish. Nor are the official EU languages generally numerically strongest. Catalan supersedes Finnish and Danish (cf. section 4.1); at the same time, it is only a regional official language in Spain, namely that of Catalonia.

There are various sociolinguistically and politically relevant options for classifying the languages which are non-official on EU level; of interest are especially the following:

(1) Languages that are official in some countries, but not at the EU level (e. g. Luxemburgish, Catalan), versus those that have no official status within the EU (e.g. Occitan, Turkish);

(2) The latter can be further distinguished into those with official status somewhere outside the EU (e.g. Turkish: Turkey), versus those languages that are not official anywhere in the world (e.g. Breton, Occitan).

(3) Accordingly, among the minority languages within countries, one can distinguish between those which are majority languages in other countries (e. g. German in Belgium: Germany), versus those which have no majority status anywhere (e. g. Frisian).

(4) Some minority languages have official status in their country on the national level (e.g. Swedish in Finland), some on a regional level (e.g. Galician in Spain), and some none at all (e.g. German in France).

(5) Some minority languages are recognized as such (e.g. German in Denmark), while others are not (e.g. Kurdish in Germany).

(6) Furthermore, it can make a difference whether minority languages are autochthonous (e.g. Provençal in France) or not (e.g. Turkish in Germany).

(7) Further distinctions (which however are sometimes difficult to make, or politically problematic) can be made between languages with a particular territory (e.g. Sorbian in Germany) and those that have none (e.g. Romany), or are scattered (e.g. Yiddish); furthermore, between migrant languages (those of migrant workers) and immigrant languages (e.g. Kabyle (Berber) in France).

The non-official languages have for many years been ignored by the official EU. Only in the late 70's did the European Parliament take notice of them, mainly because the language problems of migrant workers could no longer be overlooked. The various motions towards establishing a EU policy resulted in a charter issued by the European Parliament in 1981 in favor of regional and minority languages (cf. Labrie 1983: 221). A number of resolutions followed. None of them, however, has become legally binding for the individual member states; they are merely recommendations for improving the linguistic minorities' lot. One outcome of these endeavours has been the foundation of *The European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages* in 1982 (main seat in Dublin), whose task is 'to conserve and promote the regional, autochthonous languages and cultures of the European Union' (the Bureau's *bulletin* 12/1, 1995). As to the allochthonous languages and their speakers (i.e. immigrants and migrants), these have to be content with whatever other support they are able to find.

6. Eliminating the communication barriers in the EU?

For most individuals in the EU, communication barriers are a regular experience: Businesswo/men find it difficult to extend their markets; scholars are unable to follow their colleagues' presentations; tourists cannot understand information leaflets; and so forth. The problems caused by such barriers are due to the multitude of languages in Europe where, in contrast to regions like North America, languages are often limited to small areas. The EU's political bodies have followed different policies in order to eliminate these language barriers without abolishing linguistic diversity itself, which is esteemed as one of Europe's precious traditions (cf. Coulmas 1991). Language teaching has been improved in all areas and on all levels (cf. section 4.4). To facilitate communication within the EU's political bodies, multilingual terminology data banks are under construction, such as EURODICAUTOM (cf. Reichling 1994); in contrast, the machine translation project EUROTRA has failed and was abandoned. Another development (natural rather than planned) has been the selection of working languages from among the official languages (cf. section 2). If the EU wants to achieve its final aim of economic and political integration, all language barriers between its citizens should be eliminated, i.e. no individual should be barred from communicating with others for language reasons.

There have been various proposals as to how the existing language barriers may be eliminated without jeopardizing linguistic diversity, of which the following are the more important ones:

(1) 'English only', that is English as the sole lingua franca for Europe. At first sight, this proposal does not seem to be too far from reality. On second thought, however, it is less realistic since, if taken literally, it rules out any other lingua franca. Presently, other languages also function as lingua francas, i.e. as means of communication among individuals, none of whom are native speakers of the language. 'English only' is mainly a provocative proposal, which could stimulate the discussion of possible solutions to the European language problems (cf. Ammon 1994).

(2) A less extreme proposal 'English generally', i.e. English as everyone's lingua franca in Europe seems to be more realistic

(for its acceptability, cf. Willemyns and Bister-Broosen 1995). It differs from 'English only' in that it does not exclude other, additional lingua francas in the case of multilingual individuals. That the proposal 'English generally' is not too far removed from reality can be inferred from the fact that English is already being studied as a native or foreign language in all the EU countries. Nevertheless, 'English generally' is not yet a reality in today's EU, because there are still non-English-speaking individuals without acquire sufficient skills for communicating in any foreign language whatever.

(3) A related proposal, which has been put forth repeatedly, is 'an artificial language generally'; for this, Esperanto has usually been suggested (cf. Schulz 1979). The proposal is appealing because none of the European language communities would have the privilege of having the general lingua franca as their native language. This privilege includes advantages such as additional income through language teaching, translating, interpreting and text correcting, as well as communicative superiority in important situations. To illustrate this with just one example: English EU officials need, as a rule, less time to read the numerous EU texts written in English than do their Italian or German colleagues; they understand these texts more thoroughly and can express themselves more articulately at the meetings. In addition, they get less exhausted and retain more energy for other activities. The solution 'an artificial language generally' could prevent such unfair competition. It has, however, at least one serious flaw: It would require a total restructuring of foreign language teaching in Europe, and it would devaluate the present foreign language skills which have been acquired at great costs. It is further troubled by a deep-seated aversion, justified or not, of influential parts of the EU population against any artificial language.

(4) Another way of reducing unfair competition has been to propose 'several languages generally'. This has been called the 'oligophone', rather than the 'monophone' solution exemplified by (1), (2) and (3). English, French, and German are usually proposed as members of this 'oligophony'. It is easy to see that unfair competition would be eliminated only for the speakers inside the oligophony, but certainly not for the members of other language communities. Therefore, this solution has always mainly been favored by those language communities who saw a fair chance for their languages to be included in the oligophony, while the others never have been attracted to it.

None of these, or any other proposals have been explicitly adopted by the EU's political bodies as part of their language policy. There is, in fact, no comprehensive language planning or policy in the EU (cf. Coulmas 1991). Basically, each country seems primarily interested in promoting its own national or official language(s), while at the same time willy-nilly having to pay tribute to the 'important' other languages through teaching them as foreign languages. Thus, eliminating the language barrier has been largely 'left to the market' and to the attempts of the individual countries to achieve a stronger position for their own language. There is no indication that this style of handling the language problems of Europe will essentially change in the future.

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Notes

1. In the following, we will refer to this wording in Article 1 simply with the phrase *official languages*, whenever we do not distinguish 'official' from 'working language', and we will also use the shorter phrase *the EU's official languages* (or *the EU's working languages*) in the sense of 'the official (or working) languages of the EU's political bodies'.

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