



Procedure file

Basic information		
INI - Own-initiative procedure	2005/2213(INI)	Procedure completed
Promoting multilingualism and language learning in the European Union: the European Indicator of Language Competence		
Subject 4.40.08 Language learning, regional and local languages		

Key players			
European Parliament	Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
	CULT Culture and Education	PPE-DE MAVROMMATIS Manolis	30/08/2005
Council of the European Union	Council configuration	Meeting	Date
	Education, Youth, Culture and Sport	2729	18/05/2006
	Education, Youth, Culture and Sport	2710	23/02/2006
European Commission	Commission DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture	Commissioner	

Key events			
01/08/2005	Non-legislative basic document published	COM(2005)0356	Summary
17/11/2005	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
23/02/2006	Debate in Council	2710	Summary
21/03/2006	Vote in committee		Summary
23/03/2006	Committee report tabled for plenary	A6-0074/2006	
27/04/2006	Results of vote in Parliament		
27/04/2006	Debate in Parliament		
27/04/2006	Decision by Parliament	T6-0184/2006	Summary
27/04/2006	End of procedure in Parliament		
18/05/2006	Resolution/conclusions adopted by Council		Summary

Technical information

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Procedure type	INI - Own-initiative procedure
Procedure subtype	Initiative
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Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	CULT/6/31690

Documentation gateway

Non-legislative basic document	COM(2005)0356	01/08/2005	EC	Summary
Committee draft report	PE369.872	02/02/2006	EP	
Amendments tabled in committee	PE370.196	01/03/2006	EP	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading	A6-0074/2006	23/03/2006	EP	
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading	T6-0184/2006	27/04/2006	EP	Summary
Commission response to text adopted in plenary	SP(2006)2095	11/05/2006	EC	
Commission response to text adopted in plenary	SP(2006)2906	31/07/2006	EC	

Promoting multilingualism and language learning in the European Union: the European Indicator of Language Competence

PURPOSE: The establishment of a ?European Indicator of Language Competence?.

CONTENT: In a diverse union, encompassing some 450 million people from distinct ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, the importance of acquiring language skills can not be over-estimated. In March 2002, the Heads of Government recognised the need for EU citizens to learn at least two EU languages at an early age and called for the establishment of a linguistic competence indicator. The realisation of this indicator is the purpose of this Commission proposal.

The Commission points out that there is, at present, a lack of accurate data on the actual language skills of people in the EU, hence the need for a reliable system to measure progress in language acquisition across the EU. The objective, therefore, of a language indicator would be to measure overall foreign language competencies in each of the EU?s Member States. In line with similar international indicators the Commission proposes that the data should be gathered at regular intervals ? certainly within a three year cycle. The data for the indicator would be gathered from pupils at the end of compulsory education or training, by which stage all basic objectives should have been reached. The age proposed by the Commission is 15. Six levels of scales from the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages would be used as a benchmark. Students would be tested on at least two languages, which are not their mother tongue. The kind of skills tested would include reading, listening, speaking and writing. The tests would be complemented by questionnaires to teachers and pupils in order to gather contextual information. In addition, the Commission proposes the setting up a European Indicator of Language Competence Advisory Board. Its role would be to advise the Commission on tendering for testing instruments, to help assess the work of the contractor, offer advice on standards and technical protocols for data gathering activities in the Member States and to help monitor the results. The Commission suggests that the first meeting of the Advisory Board should take place before the end of 2005 to allow for tender co-ordination by Spring 2006. The first pilot exercise could be up and running by 2007.

To conclude, the Commission notes that the European Indicator of Language Competence has a value all of its own. It will allow the EU to better understand the multilingual capacities of young European in a way that is impossible to achieve using present methods. The Commission invites the Council to express its agreement with the proposal so that preparatory work can go ahead at an appropriate speed. Indeed Council support before the end of the year is vital if the time-table outlined above is to be respected.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS :

- Budget lines and headings: 15.02.02.02 Socrates and 15.03.01.02 Leonardo da Vinci. As from 2007 the budget line will correspond to the proposed programme ?Life-long Learning?, which was presented as a Decision by the Commission in July 2004 (2004/0153(COD)).

- Period of application: The programme is due to begin in 2005 - it could become permanent but will last for at least three years.

- Operational expenses: The Commission has made an estimate for central costs based on the central costs for PISA. The appropriate resources have been approved within the budgets of Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci for 2005 (later Lifelong Learning). The Commission suggests that similar sums be made available for the years 2006. From 2007 onwards the cost for running the indicator should be covered by the new Life Long Learning programme. As far as Member State estimate of resources is concerned, these will depend on the methodology finally chosen in consultation with representatives of the Member States. However, the functions set out will necessarily involve some costs. An indication of these can be gained by referring to the relevant national budgets for PISA.

- Technical and administrative assistance and support expenditure: EUR 0,594 million, of which EUR 0,054 for 2005 and EUR 0,108 million as

from 2006 ;

- Human Resources: 2 x 0,25 posts for 2005 and 2 x 0,5 posts as from 2006.

- Administrative costs: EUR 0,516 million ? or EUR 0,086 million per year.

- Overall total: EUR 1,110 million, including the cost of human resources.

Promoting multilingualism and language learning in the European Union: the European Indicator of Language Competence

The Council held a policy debate on the issue of a European indicator of language competence, covering, in particular, the following topics:

- the approach outlined in the Commission communication towards the establishment of the European indicator of language competence (EILC);

- the establishment of an advisory board composed of a representative of each Member State whose initial mandate would be to clarify/define the parameters for implementation;

- as regards the main parameters for the EILC:

i) the level of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) at which data should be gathered on competences in first and second foreign languages from a representative sample of pupils in education and training;

ii) because respect for linguistic diversity is a core value of the European Union, the indicator should be based upon data concerning the knowledge of all the official languages of the European Union taught as foreign languages in the Union, but for practical reasons it would be advisable, in the first round of data-gathering, for tests to be made available in those official languages of the European Union that are most widely taught in the Member States, to the extent that they provide a sufficiently large sample of testees.

The debate was focused on a number of issues, which would facilitate the further work which was needed with a view to adopting a set of conclusions at the May 2006 Council. There was broad agreement on the advisability of establishing an Advisory Board whose primary task would be to define the parameters of the indicator.

Concerning the main parameters for the EILC, there were differences of opinion on the level of education stage at which evaluation should be carried out.

While a large majority of delegations agreed that ultimately the Indicator should be available in all official EU languages, most could accept, for practical reasons, a limitation during the first round of data gathering to the most widely taught languages in the Member States. In addition, some delegations recalled that in their countries there was more than one national language and that such particularities should be taken into account so as to ensure comparability of data in the first round.

Promoting multilingualism and language learning in the European Union: the European Indicator of Language Competence

The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Manolis MAVROMMATIS (EPP-ED, GR) in response to the Commission communication on a 'European Indicator of Language Competence'. The committee welcomed the Commission's proposals, saying that greater and more widespread linguistic proficiency was a yardstick for measuring the quality of European education and training systems, as well as being essential for the achievement of the Lisbon strategy. MEPs believed, however, that the Commission and Council should ensure that further languages were added as soon as possible to the language proficiency tests (which would initially focus on the five most widely taught languages in the EU: English, French, German, Spanish and Italian). The Member States, for their part, were urged to participate actively in the implementation and development of the Indicator, and to give fresh impetus to language teaching.

The Commission was also asked to be more proactive in informing the public of the advantages of foreign language proficiency and in helping to promote multilingualism.

Lastly, the committee pointed out that the proposed Indicator did not involve additional EU budget outlay, as expenditure would be met by the existing Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci programmes, and the new integrated Lifelong Learning programme. It called on the Commission and Council to ensure that the latter programme was allocated the necessary resources for the promotion of language learning and that the next financial perspective included sufficient funding for measures to make full use of the Indicator.

Promoting multilingualism and language learning in the European Union: the European Indicator of Language Competence

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Manolis MAVROMMATIS (EPP-ED, GR) in response to the Commission communication on a 'European Indicator of Language Competence'. (Please see the summary dated 21/03/2006.)

Parliament felt that it was essential for the achievement of a People's Europe and the knowledge-based society, both of which are aims of the Lisbon strategy, for every citizen to have a practical grasp of at least two languages other than his own. The acquisition of just one common language of communication (as a lingua franca) is not sufficient. It welcomed the Commission proposal concerning the inclusion of a European Indicator of Language Competence among the criteria used by Member States under the 'Education and Training 2010'

programme. The indicator in question sought to establish accurately, reliably and at regular intervals on the basis of objective tests overall foreign language proficiency standards in all the Member States. Parliament agreed with the Commission' that in the initial phase this indicator should be used to assess linguistic proficiency in the five most widely taught languages in the Union's education and training systems (English, French, German, Italian and Spanish). However, measures should be taken to extend these tests to a wider range of official Union languages without undermining standards of teaching in respect of other languages not assessed by the indicator.

Parliament called on the Member States to participate actively in the implementation and development of the Indicator and give fresh impetus to language teaching. It pointed out that the Indicator proposed by the Commission did not involve additional EU budget outlay, the estimated operating expenditure being met by the existing Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci programmes and the new integrated Lifelong Learning programme. The Commission and Council must accordingly ensure that the new integrated Lifelong Learning programme was endowed with the necessary resources for the promotion of language learning, and that the next financial perspectives include sufficient funding for measures to make full use of the Indicator.

Promoting multilingualism and language learning in the European Union: the European Indicator of Language Competence

The European Council has approved a series of Conclusions regarding the proposed establishment of the 'European Indicator of Language Competence'. Recalling the principle that all European languages are, from a cultural point of view, equal in value and form an integral part of European culture/civilisation, the Council reaffirmed that:

- foreign language skills, as well as helping to foster mutual understanding between peoples, are a prerequisite for a mobile workforce and contribute to the competitiveness of the European economy;
- periodic monitoring of performance through the use of indicators and benchmarks is an essential part of the Lisbon process, allowing good practice to be identified with a view to providing strategic guidance and steering for both short and long term measures of the 'Education and Training 2010' work programme.

The Council accepts that measures are needed to remedy the current absence of reliable comparative data vis-à-vis foreign language teaching and learning. Any measures used to gather such information, however, must be done through objective tests and they must be delivered in such a way as to ensure the reliability, accuracy and validity of the data.

In its Conclusions the Council also stresses that the development of the Indicator should fully respect Member States prerogative for education and that the Indicator should impose no undue administrative or financial burdens on the institutions concerned. Further, the method for data-gathering should take account of previous work in the international field.

As far as its timing is concerned the Council states that the Indicator should be put in place as soon as possible and that it should be based on common terms of reference ? for example, a common set of tests administered to a representative sample of the target population in each of the EU Member States and from a representative sample of pupils.

The Council also invites the Commission to set up, as soon as possible, an Advisory Board (the EILC Advisory Board) whose mandate will be to advise the Commission on matters such as the tender for the creation of the testing instruments, assessing the work of the contractor and the necessary arrangements for data gathering.

The Board will be asked to assist in bringing forward the timetable for work to begin as well as offering a more detailed description of the construction and administration of the tests such as: sample sizes; preferred testing methods; preferred arrangements for administering the tests; and the minimum sample size needed to determine whether a test for a particular language shall be made available to the Member States. The Commission is asked to report back, in writing, to the Council by the end of 2006 on progress.