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1997 Manifesto of the European Language Council for a pluralistic language policy

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CONSEIL EUROPEEN DES LANGUES
EUROPEAN LANGUAGE COUNCIL
EUROPAISCHER SPRACHENRAT
CONSEJO EUROPEO DE IDIOMAS
CONSIGLIO EUROPEO DELLE LINGUE

ADDRESS

to the International Congress of Linguists
(Paris, 25/30 July 1997)

To break the curse of Babel, Umberto Eco, one of the two hundred personalities who have become members of the "*European Language Council*", proposed, during his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, to "*reassess Babel*".

Two keys are within our grasp :

- first of all, we must cross the Rubicon as far as the teaching methods of modern languages are concerned : two vehicular languages instead of one, from the beginning of school life,

- secondly, the beginnings of a solution must be found to the eternal problem of teacher training, through large-scale exchanges, at European level, of primary and secondary school teachers who would come and teach their own subjects in their respective languages (with, of course, the necessary guarantees for their careers).

For several years, Claude Hagège, Titular Professor of the Chair of Linguistic Theory at the Collège de France, Honorary President of the "*European Language Council*", stressed the urgent and radical need for a large-scale educational plan to foster the advent of a true plurilingualism.

In line with the action of "*The Bilingual World*" association, founded in 1951, based on the values of the Resistance Movement, the "*European Language Council*" is proposing a European and world Project of Plurilingualism, based on the generalisation of bilingual education at an early age.

Bilingual education, namely learning everything that will forge the man of tomorrow in two languages, is in itself a true revolutionary idea :

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- it enables the same concept, the same situation, the same object, to be described in two different languages and thus allows a better definition of what things really are; it opens the mind to another way of thinking and makes it possible to understand that what is different is not necessarily bad, but on the contrary, enriching and finally, more complementary than conflicting. It also makes it possible to discover the relativity of things and embark on the path of tolerance and the spirit of universality, almost without realising it, by virtue of this plural type of education.

This form of acquiring knowledge through two different channels is a new pedagogy of peoples and should open up the way to a higher level of thought and political action.

Today, if we wish to react against the phenomenon of the uncontrolled generalisation of a single language, with the danger of the marginalisation of national and regional languages that this entails, it is necessary to ensure the adoption by the governments of all countries, and already by the *"European Council of Heads of State and Government"*, of a **pluralistic linguistic policy**, which can meet the challenges of the third millennium, in order to save the linguistic and cultural heritage of mankind and enable every man to speak to his fellow men.

This is why the *"European Language Council"* is launching an appeal to the linguists of all countries, meeting in Paris at the end of July 1997, to adopt the *"1997 Manifesto for a Pluralistic Linguistic Policy"*, prefaced by Professor Claude Hagège, in order to use their influence on all those who govern us to take this problem into account.

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members of the "European Language Council"

Enc. - 1997 Manifesto for a Pluralistic Linguistic Policy

1997 MANIFESTO ⁽¹⁾

of the *European Language Council (ELC)*

for a pluralistic language policy

Introduction

by Claude HAGEGE, Professor at the Collège de France

In tomorrow's, or even today's Europe, those who are monolingual run the risk of being considered as disaster victims as far as speech is concerned. Yet bilingual education for all European citizens can only be carried out in the context of a system fostering bilingual education at an early age, that is, an education at school which introduces a second language in addition to the mother tongue, from the beginning of primary school. Such a system, given the difficulty of its implementation with the limited means of each European country taken individually, presupposes an international consultation which would give rise to large-scale exchanges of teachers throughout Europe. Each teacher would come and teach his or her subject in his or her own language to the children of another country, on a reciprocal basis, depending on subject and country. This is a radical calling into question of all the usual school routines. It means using languages as teaching aids and no longer merely as subjects to be taught. This alone enables the true immersion which is the condition for the success of bilingual education at an early age. All the rest is only pious wishes and pipe dreams. The effective victory of bilingualism calls for political imagination and true audacity. The time has never been more ripe. The defence of Europe's cultural diversity has never been as necessary as it is today.

Sooner or later, the governments of the European Union will be called upon to define the linguistic and cultural guidelines for Europe's future. One acknowledgement is necessary : neither economic and monetary projects, nor institutional bodies will succeed in establishing peace in Europe without the emergence of a Europe of peoples and cultures, which will only be possible if a **Europe of languages** is developed.

A century of European History and five years of bloody nationalist conflicts clearly show the continued existence and very real presence of these threats : ignorance, the failure to understand and *contempt for the Other*, which can even go as far as the destructive negation of anyone who is different.

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Nothing can bring about peace amongst the peoples of Europe and create a fraternal spirit without a linguistic and educational policy of open-mindedness, exchange and cultural communication.

"*Peace through languages*", proposed by the international "*Bilingual World*" association *, is one of the priority objectives that the European Union must assign itself.

This is why the European Language Council (ELC) is launching a solemn appeal to European governments and is asking them to establish

a pluralistic language policy in Europe, in all fields of activity, particularly through the promotion of bilingual education, at an early age, the basis of plurilingual education.

It is calling upon them to provide the means of allowing a new generation of young people to grow up in Europe, who are aware of being European citizens and able to live in harmony, because they will have access, through plurilingual education, to a richer and more efficient kind of communication.

This appeal is based on three types of considerations :

1. political principles
2. objectives
3. practical proposals.

I. Political principles

The need for a greater cultural and linguistic open-mindedness in all the countries of the European Union, as recommended by the "*European Charter for Plurilingual Education*" **, has been reaffirmed by the Union's highest bodies on many occasions.

In 1984, the Council of Ministers of Education of the European Community recommended "*the practical knowledge of two languages in addition to the mother tongue*" as an educational objective.

Article 126 of the Union's Treaty states the following principle : "*the action of the Community aims to develop the European dimension in education, particularly through the learning and dissemination of the languages of its Member States*".

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* The Bilingual World was founded in 1951 by a group of former members of the Resistance Movement, to bring about peace by direct people-to-people cooperation, through bilingual education and town-twinning.

** This Charter is the result of three International Conferences : Aosta 1990, Barcelona 1991 and Luxemburg 1993 (this latter organised in conjunction with the Ministry of National Education of the Grand Duchy and the Bilingual World, sponsored by the Commission of the European Communities and with the participation of the Council of Europe).

It is therefore necessary today to redefine a "*strategy for plurilingualism*", as the European Council stated in 1995.

2. Objectives

The signatories of this "*Manifesto*" are committed to the following objectives and proposals that they undertake to promote amongst regional, national and European bodies :

1. promoting a linguistic policy in Europe based on :

- the diversification of modern languages learned as early on in life as possible, thus avoiding "*all-English* " and developing, as a priority, the learning of the language of the neighbouring country;

2. promoting, through plurilingual education, the democratic access to knowledge for all European citizens, whatever their mother tongues;

3. Promoting plurilingual education by giving priority to the development of the capacities of very young children by :

- the early acquisition of a second language at an early age, preferably in nursery school ;
- the intensive and transdisciplinary teaching of this language at primary school;
- the intensive and transdisciplinary teaching of at least a third modern language at secondary school ;
- a final assessment and school-leaving diplomas giving priority to ease of communication and academic (cognitive) ability in three modern languages by the end of secondary school ;
- international exchanges of teaching staff, involving both primary and secondary school teachers, to teach the different school curriculum subjects in their respective languages;
- taking into account the enormous fund of linguistic abilities that are neglected in Europe (minority or regional languages, neighbouring languages, the languages of origin of immigrants) in education, vocational training and the firm;
- the multiplication of "*language careers and services*", benefiting all the languages present in Europe;
- the introduction of different systems of incentives to favorise truly plurilingual students and professionals in higher studies, as well as in the workplace.

3. Proposals

Such a *European language policy* should be supported by a transnational and pluridisciplinary body, independent of political bodies and representative of the different languages and countries of the European Union.

This is the definition of the "*European Language Council* ", founded in Paris in 1996, on the initiative of the Bilingual World, to which we invite all Europeans, desirous of open-mindedness and democracy, to give their support.

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We call on all decision-makers, trainers, researchers, company directors, teachers, media professionals and elected representatives to support the need for a **new language policy for Europe** :

- . by the creation of national and local study and proposal committees to institute true plurilingualism in Europe,
- . by calling for a debate on linguistic policy in national parliaments and the European institutions;
- . by an information campaign directed at the general public and particularly at parents, students and pupils, on the guidelines and challenges of this **European language policy**;
- . by a large-scale programme of exchanges of teaching staff, proposing a legal framework to allow them to go and teach their own subjects in schools in other countries, using their own mother tongues and thus enabling pupils to increase their knowledge and learn a modern language.

We call on national and European political bodies to devise and establish a legal framework for the reciprocal and large-scale promotion of European, national and regional modern languages :

- . in education and training,
- . in large-scale exchanges of pupils, students and teachers,
- . in language careers,
- . in the media.

To be an area of peace, Europe must be able to fully assume its intellectual, cultural and linguistic dimension.

Through languages, we can provide the future generations of Europe-builders with the intellectual and democratic impetus which will enable the conditions for a true European awareness to be created.

1997 can be a historical rendez-vous which will enable the citizens of Europe to understand each other and, as Umberto Eco proposed during his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France (2 October 1992), to "*reassess Babel*". This is a reasonable ambition and one which the European Language Council intends to make, from now on, the priority objective of its linguistic and cultural policy.

(1) This text is taken from the constitutive Acts of the ELC - the "*European Charter for Plurilingual Education* " (1994) and the "*Amsterdam Appeal* " (1996).