Language & Law

Digital Peer Publishing DiPP NRW

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The EU Policy on Institutional Multilingualism: Between Principles and Practicality

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Abstract

This article brings to light several inconsistencies within the narrative of the EU policy on institutional multilingualism. The EU has invoked fundamental EU principles of democracy, equality and transparent government, to publically bolster the need for its institutions to communicate and operate in the languages of its citizens. However, these principles do not allow for the pragmatic and budgetary arguments that the EU uses to justify the in reality limited number of official and de facto working languages of its institutions. The article argues that this disagreement could be resolved if the narrative of the EU's language policy would include the objective that all European citizens master any the languages that the EU institutions use. In that light, the article recommends that further research is done into the question whether the EU should accept or even encourage the spontaneous development of English as a de facto pan-European lingua franca.

URN: urn:nbn:de:0009-30-33384

1. Introduction

When it comes to language use, the European Union (EU) encompasses an exceptionally diverse region of the world. Amongst its 500 million citizens, more than 80 national, regional and minority languages are spoken (European Commission, 2008b, p. 5). The EU is faced with the question of under which circumstances EU institutions will employ which languages. This article will therefore examine the EU's policy on the EU institution's use of languages in both internal operations and outward communications, which academics refer to as institutional multilingualism (Mamadouh, 1999; Mamadouh, 2002; Phillipson, 2003).

This article argues that the current administrative policy of the EU on institutional multilingualism is a work in progress and requires further decision-making. This article brings to light a number of contradictions within this policy that need to be resolved in order to enhance coherence. EU institutions and officials have over the years publically invoked EU principles involving equal treatment, democracy, and transparent governance, in order to defend the need for institutional multilingualism. These principles are so fundamental in nature, however, that they provide little rhetorical room for the pragmatic and budgetary arguments invoked to justify restrictions on institutional multilingualism.

This article explores several solutions in order to enhance the coherence of EU policy on institutional multilingualism. It suggests that the most realistic solution may be for the EU to encourage European citizens to learn the languages that the EU in reality uses, specifically English. In this light, the article

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recommends that further research be done into the potential and disadvantages of a pan-European lingua franca, a common language that European citizens and business use in cross-cultural and inter-lingual communication.

2. Principles of Institutional Multilingualism

Various EU institutions and officials have devoted weighty language to describe its commitment to institutional multilingualism. This section explores the fundamental principles concerning EU policy on institutional multilingualism, on the basis of recent resolutions, official communications, brochures, websites and speeches.

2.1. Linguistic Diversity and Language Equality

Various EU institutes and officials over the years have invoked principles of linguistic diversity and equality to ground the policy of institutional multilingualism. First, Europe's linguistic diversity is said to be "part and parcel of the European cultural identity"; a "core value"; and a "founding" and "basic principle of the EU" (European Commission, 2003; European Commission 2005b; European Parliament 2006; Council of the European Union 2008). This emphatic language in support of linguistic diversity is closely related to the notion of language as an intrinsically cultural phenomenon. According to the European Parliament (2006, Recital I), language is a "unique way of perceiving and describing reality." The European Commission (2005b, p. 2; 2008b, p. 3) adds that language must be considered the "most direct expression of culture" and a potential "bridge" between cultures. This cultural account of language makes linguistic diversity an essential element of the EU's motto, "United in Diversity." As the Commission explained, while the EU is built from many diverse nations, communities, cultures, beliefs and language groups, it is also a mutual home in which this diversity is celebrated. According to the Commission, each of the many languages is therefore considered to add its own, unique facet to a shared European cultural background (European Commission 2002, p. 5; European Commission 2008b, p. 3).

Second, institutional multilingualism is further described as being founded on the principle of language equality. The Commission, the Parliament and the Council of the European Union have declared that all European languages are an integral part of its culture and civilisation. Each European language must subsequently be considered equal in value and dignity, they argue. The equality of languages applies also to Europe's regional, minority and migrant languages (Council of the European Union, 2002, p. 2; European Parliament, 2006, Recital K; European Commission 2008b, p. 5). Such an all-inclusive view is in line with the 1992 European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages and the 1996 Universal Declaration on Linguistic Rights of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which declare that the right to use a regional or minority language in private and public life is an "inalienable right" (European Charter, third recital of the preamble), that all language communities have equal rights, and that necessary steps must be employed to prevent discrimination (Universal Declaration, Article 10). Language equality in the EU means, as the Group of Intellectuals for Intercultural Dialogue (2008a, p. 8) summed it up, that no language is superfluous, and no European citizen feels that his or her language is marginalized or disrespected.

2.2. Democratic Legitimacy

The EU policy on institutional multilingualism further includes principles that involve democracy and transparent governance. First, democratic entitlements of EU citizens play a role in the external element of institutional multilingualism, that is, in the external communication and interaction of EU institutions with European citizens and stakeholders. The EU policy here aims to ensure that EU citizens have equal access to EU institutions and the legislation that they adopt, without language barriers. Without equal access for all Europeans to EU institutions, the Commission explains, the institutions cannot be transparent and accountable (European Union 2004, pp. 17-19). The Commission (2005, p. 12) therefore affirmed that EU institutions need to inform the public on current policies and legislation being

formulated. This requirement is founded on Article 1 EU (European Commission 2010, p. 53), which stipulates that decisions by the EU are taken as openly and closely to citizens as possible. On its website the Commission therefore calls institutional multilingualism an "entitlement", such that citizens can communicate with EU institutions in their own language. The Commission (2008c, p. 13; 2009, p. 2) also considers it a "fundamental right" of EU citizens to fully understand in their own language the content of the law that binds them. This follows from Article 288 of Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), which stipulates that regulations and directives that are adapted by EU institutions are legally binding and directly or indirectly affect the life of every EU citizen. Consequently, as the Commission (2005b, p. 12) declares, the policy on institutional multilingualism rests on the principles of "democratic legitimacy and transparency."

Second, democratic entitlements of EU citizens are a factor in the internal element of institutional multilingualism as well, that is, in the internal operations and procedures of various EU institutions. The EU policy aims in this regard to ensure that EU citizens are represented equally within EU institutions without language barriers. The European Parliament (1995, p. 91; 2007, p. 2) declares that "the right of an elected representative to express himself and to work in his own language is an inalienable part of the rule of democracy and of his mandate." The Commission (2005b, p. 13) seems to suggest that this right of equal representation does not merely apply to members of the European parliament but also extends to any national representative or delegate operating within the EU. Leonard Orban (2008), Commissioner for Multilingualism between 2007 and 2009, confirms that all decision-makers within the EU institutions must have the opportunity to gain a perfect understanding of often difficult, technical matters, and thus are enabled to speak in their mother tongue. Here, too, the equality of languages comes into play; with regard to the equal democratic representation, there can be no "double standard" against the lesser-known languages (European Union, 2005, p. 19).

3. Inconsistencies of Institutional Multilingualism

The previous section demonstrated that EU policy on institutional multilingualism is founded upon various fundamental EU principles involving equal treatment, democracy, and transparent governance. Yet, as this section will demonstrate, the ways in which institutional multilingualism is actually given shape in reality, does not fully match the policy narrative. This section explores the pragmatic approach to, and underlying budgetary and practical constraints on institutional multilingualism. Here the attention will be on the key legislative EU bodies: the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union.

3.1. The Relatively Limited Number of Official EU Languages

3.1.1. The Status of Regional and Minority Languages

The first practical restraint of institutional multilingualism involves the ultimately limited number of European languages recognized as official EU languages. As pointed out in the introduction, the citizens of the EU together speak more than 80 official state languages, and numerous regional and minority languages. Yet, the EU institutions do not communicate and operate in all of these tongues. Article 1 of the Council's first Regulation, Council Regulation 1/1958/EEC, stipulates that the EU currently has 23 official languages and EU institutions consequently have 23 working languages. As a result, as stipulated by Articles 2 and 4 of the Regulation, EU institutions are required to communicate with citizens and publish its legislation in these 23 languages.

Unquestionably, 23 is a historically and internationally unprecedented number of languages for any administration to communicate in. Moreover, as Mowbray (2010, p. 16) and the final report of the High Level Group on Multilingualism (European Communities 2007a, p. 19) observe, it would probably be practically impossible and too costly to have all languages spoken in Europe as official and working EU languages. Nonetheless, 23 is still less than a third of the 80-some languages that are spoken by European citizens.

The European Parliament (2007, p. 2) writes that many citizens speak only one language, so that the EU must ensure access to the EU in their national tongue. But that does not apply, as Creech (2005, p. 151) and Mowbray (2010, pp. 9-15) point out, to Europeans who only speak a regional or minority language and not the official language of the Member State in which they live. These include European citizens that happen to only speak, inter alia, one of the northern-European Saamic languages; the southern-European Catalan, Basque or Sardinian languages; or one of the various dialects of the European Domari or Romani languages; and so forth. Considering the current selection criterion for official EU languages, these Europeans are thus not granted access to the EU in their mother tongue, nor to full comprehension of EU legislation that binds them. One may find that the problem indicated here should not be exaggerated. After all, these citizens only represent a small portion of Europeans. However, as discussed in the previous section, the EU has made a strong commitment to have parity between all European languages and to include every European in the EU's democratic process. Hence, the present language regime of 23 official EU languages is in effect not in accord with its declared fundamental principles of democracy, transparent government and equal treatment.

3.1.2. The Selection Criterion for Official EU Languages

In light of the principles underlying the policy of institutional multilingualism, one would expect that scarce resources are at least spent on using the languages that are spoken by as many European citizens as possible. Critics point out, though, that the current selection criterion does not have this effect (Weber 2006, p. 5; Spongenberg, 2006; Diezemann (2008); Smith, 2007; "Babbling On – How more official languages could eventually mean less diversity", 2006). The Commission explains on its website that hitherto each new Member State selected its official EU language when it joined the EU. That choice has normally been based on which national language is the state-wide official language of the Member State concerned (European Commission, 2010, p. 54). This selection criterion, however, sometimes results in favouring languages spoken by relatively few Europeans, while excluding languages spoken by a substantial number of Europeans. For example, Irish is the official first state language of Ireland and was granted the status of official EU language in 2007. Yet, reportedly only about 4% of the Irish, some 1.6 million Europeans, speak Irish. Similarly, Maltese is spoken by less Europeans than Irish yet has nonetheless also become an official EU language. In contrast Catalan, the second official state language of Spain, is spoken by about 10 million people, which, as Creech (2005, p. 153) mentions, constitute more Europeans than those who speak Irish and Maltese as well as Danish, Finnish, Swedish, Latvian, Lithuanian, Slovak, or Slovene. Still, since Catalan is not Spain's first official state language, it has not been granted the status of official EU language.

Advocates of regional and minority languages have been requesting that all regional languages that enjoy an official status in Member States be granted the status of official EU language (European Communities 2007a, p. 19). The Council has met these demands only halfway. In 2005 it created special arrangements for communication with EU institutions in non-EU languages that are recognized in the requesting Member State's constitution as an official state language (Council of the European Union, 2005, pp. 14-15). However, these arrangements leave both the initiative and its implementation costs to individual Member States. Consequently, the EU itself does not guarantee that there are no European citizens in effect discriminated on the basis of speaking only a minority or regional language. Again, this is at odds with the aforementioned fundamental EU principles that underlie the policy on institutional multilingualism.

3.2. The Limited Number of Languages Informally Used Within EU Institutions

3.2.1. The Predominant Use of English

A second pragmatic limitation of institutional multilingualism is the limited number of languages generally used within the EU institutions. In fact, approximately 95% of legislation adopted in the co-decision procedure is drafted in English (Dragone, 2006, p. 100; Frame, 2005, p. 22). This includes draft-amendments of the Parliament (Court of Auditors, 2006, p. 17). Furthermore, legislation is

normally not only drafted in English, but generally also debated, scrutinized and revised in this language. It is true that the Commission, Council and Parliament may only adopt a legislative proposal or their respective formal positions, once the document in question has been translated and is available in all 23 official EU languages. Yet, as the European Court of Auditors (2006, pp. 5-7) observed in 2006, for practical reasons English has become the primary language used in everyday operations within EU institutions.

The predominant use of a single language in the internal operations of EU institutions, is strictly speaking not in agreement with the EU's aforementioned principle of equal democratic representation. For example, as Athanassiou (2006, pp. 17-18) and Phillipson (2003, p. 20) observe, full multilingualism in the Parliament only applies to Members of Parliament, and only during the Plenary Sessions as the Court of Auditors (2006, p. 25) describe. As Hakala (2006, pp. 154, 159) describes, informal meetings, discussions and negotiations in the Parliament – which may be politically equally significant as Parliaments Plenary Sessions – are mostly conducted in a single language on the basis of a single language version of the text of the amendment. Consequently, as Wagner, Bech and Martinez (2002, p. 136) cite one Member of Parliament as saying, being able to understand English or French is an essential precondition of being an effective MEP.

The danger of preparing new legislation in a single language is, as Phillipson (2003, pp. 21, 131) and Forrest (1998) argue, that, those who speak this language as their mother tongue have an advantage over those for whom it is a foreign language imperfectly mastered. Moreover, the Group of Intellectuals for intercultural Dialogue (European Commission 2008a, p. 5) argued, that allowing a de facto supremacy of one language over others in the daily operations of the EU, would be contrary to the respect for Europe's diversity of linguistic and cultural expression.

3.2.2. Cost-cutting Measures

In light of the democratic principles underlying the EU policy on institutional multilingualism, one might expect that the internal language rules of various EU institutions are designed to offset the practice of limited multilingualism. In reality, however, the actual policy on institutional multilingualism thrives on this limited multilingual practice and thus justifies it.

Translation and interpretation services are vital for institutional multilingualism, since these are the only ways in which to facilitate the preparation and processing of internal documents and deliberations in internal meetings (European Commission 2009, p. 2; 2010, p. 55; Lönnroth, 2008, p. 7). Translation and interpretation services are also costly. The European Parliament states that in 2006 the costs of translation in all EU institutions was estimated at €800 million, and the costs of interpretation in 2005 at €190 million (2007, p. 1). Lönnroth (2008, p. 13), Director-General for Translation between 2004 and 2011, declared that, despite the fact that the number of official EU languages has doubled in recent years due to the accessions of 2004 and 2007, the EU budget for translation and interpretation services in the EU institutions has remained the same.

The EU justifies its sober budgetary policy for translation and interpretation based on the argument of efficiency and practicality. Lönroth is reported to argue that "cost would explode" if every modification to a legislative text would have to be translated. He concluded that it would be easier and in the best interest of the taxpayer if everybody would simply accept that English and French were the main EU languages ("EU Translation Policy 'here to stay'", 2008).

As a result of the limited financial resources that the EU made available, EU institutions have rationalized and streamlined their translation and interpretation services (European Union, 2004, p. 20). Different strategies were implemented, aiming at limiting interpretation and translation services to, first, situations in which translation and interpretation is legally required and, second, only to those situations in which these services are actually needed (European Council, 2006, pp. 27-29; Bureau of the European Parliament, 2008; European Union, 2004, p. 20).

Here, too, one may question the severity of these cost-cutting measures. There seems to be no legal rules that prevent them. The language rules of Council Regulation 1/1958/EEC only apply to written

communication, leaving verbal communication unregulated (Athanassiou, 2006, p. 10). The Regulation thus indirectly affects the use of translation services; not interpretation services. Furthermore, with regard to the language use for written communication, Article 6 of the Regulation leaves it to the discretion of the respective institutions to implement their own procedural rules and determine under which circumstances certain languages will be used. Yet, cost-cutting measures actually facilitate a limited internal institutional multilingualism. In fact, since a preference for English characterizes the language needs within the institutions, the need-based budgeting strategies end up rationalizing the predominant use of English. In this way, despite the apparent legality, the sober internal language regimes of the EU's main legislative institutions is not in accord with the appeal to a fundamental EU principle of equal democratic representation.

4. Possible Solutions to Reconcile Principles with Practicality

The foregoing demonstrates that EU policy on institutional multilingualism contains a discrepancy between principles and practicality that needs to be resolved if the policy is to be more coherent. Next, several possible solutions for this predicament are explored.

4.1. Solution 1: Increasing the Budget for Multilingualism

One solution to solve the inconsistency between the fundamental principles and pragmatic restrictions, is simply to make more financial resources available in order to fulfil the promise of the principles. These additional resources could then, first, make possible the inclusion of all 80-some European languages to the list of official EU languages – or at least all languages that have an official status in the EU member states. Second, extra funding could facilitate unrestricted interpretation and translation services available within the internal operations of the EU institutions. As a result no European or his or her national representative in the EU, would be linguistically disadvantaged in the democratic process.

At face value, the Commission and the Parliament gave cause to assume that increasing the budget should not be a problem. The Commission and Parliament rationalized that the total costs for translation and interpretation for all EU institutions and bodies comes down to a "fairly small" amount; merely the "price of a cup of coffee" (European Parliament 2007, p. 2; European Union, 2004, p. 20; European Commission 2005b, p. 13). Orban argued that these costs are in effect the costs of democracy ("Orban: Multilingualism 'cost of democracy' in the EU", 2008). The question then rises, if the costs of translation and interpretation must indeed be thought of as moderate, why not spend two cups of coffee on democracy, or three? In fact, according to a public consultation conducted by the European Commission in 2007, the majority of participating European citizens believed the costs of institutional multilingualism are justified or should even be increased.

However, even if money would be no object, it remains to be seen whether having 80-some languages, for both external communication and internal operations, would in reality not become unmanageable and detrimental to the quality of everyday communication. Wagner et al. (2002, p. 71) and Phillipson (2003, p. 120) for example argue that allowing all participants in the institutions to speak and write in their respective mother tongue, hence, requiring translation and interpretation along every step of the way, would prove unworkable, unnecessarily costly and simply too time-consuming.

In all, there seem to be a strong economic and practical argument in favour of a limited number of official EU languages, and of a slimmed-down multilingualism for the EU institution's internal operations. If this is so, then the solution for a more coherent EU policy on institutional multilingualism may be found in modifying the principles that underlie the policy.

4.2. Solution 2: Relegating the Principles of Multilingualism

A second solution for resolving the inconsistencies between the principles and practicality of institutional multilingualism, is to reformulate the significance of the fundamental EU principles that underlie this policy. This section will argue, however, that lowering policy rhetoric may turn out to be just as difficult

as raising the budget.

4.2.1. An Attempt to Bridge Principles and Practicality: the "Kik-Solution"

The most illuminating attempt to relegate the principles of institutional multilingualism in favour of considerations of practicality, is offered by the judgments of the Court of First Instance (CFI) in *Kik v. OHIM* (2001) [1] and the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJ) in *Kik v. OHIM* (2003). [2]

The appellant in the *Kik v. OHIM*, Christina Kik, contested the language regime of the Office for Harmonisation in the Internal market (OHIM), an EU agency that uses merely English, French, German, Italian and Spanish as its languages. Kik argued that this language regime was in conflict with the fundamental principle of equality between the official EU languages contained in Council Regulation 1/1958/EEC. This principle, she reasoned, does not allow infringement based on pure convenience or economic considerations such as translation costs (*Kik v. OHIM,* 2003, par 51-55). Both the Commission and the Council intervened and argued against the existence of such a principle of multilingualism. The Council argued that Article 342 TFEU delegates the power to determine the rules governing the institutions to the Council. The Council reasoned that the subsequent discretion allows it to derogate from Council Regulation 1/1958/EEC on the basis on a reasonable balancing of the interests involved, including budgetary interests (*Kik v. OHIM,* 2001, par 51-54; *Kik v. OHIM,* 2003, par 74). Both the CFI and the CJ agreed with the Commission and the Council. They reasoned that neither the EC Treaties nor Council Regulation 1/1958/EEC provide any evidence of a general principle of Community law that in all circumstances entitles citizens to obtain a language version of any document that may affects his or her interests (*Kik v. OHIM,* 2001, par 82). The overall message of Kik v OHIM seems, strictly speaking, to diverge from the weighty language that various institutions and officials had used to defend institutional multilingualism.

In *Spain v Eurojust* (2004) [3] , the Advocate-General undertook an attempt to reconcile the *Kik*-rulings with the current policy on institutional multilingualism. He contended that an "all-embracing linguistic pluralism is in practice unworkable and economically intolerable." Therefore, he argued, the principle of linguistic diversity and language equality needs to be weighed against a "principle of administrative efficiency." One needs to account for the practical constraints of institutional and administrative life, as long as these constraints are limited, justified, appropriate and proportionate, he argued (*Spain v Eurojust*, 2004, Opinion, par. 40, 44-49). He concluded that all EU institutions may therefore deviate from Council Regulation 1/1958/EEC for the purpose of their internal operational needs (*Spain v Eurojust*, 2004, Opinion, par. 48). He also added that linguistic diversity and language equality plays less of a role within the internal operations of the EU institutions, as long as the internal language regimes do not affect the entitlements of those communicating with the EU (*Spain v Eurojust*, 2004, Opinion, par. 46).

The reasoning of the Advocate General in *Spain v Eurojust* has found support in academic circles. Inter alia, Mowbray (2010:7) and Urrutia & Lasagabaster (2007:482) agree that the *Kik*-rulings demonstrate that the principle of language equality in the EU is not an absolute but a relative principle. Further, the High Level Group on Multilingualism (European Communities, 2007a, p. 16) agreed that for reasons of practicality and efficiency, the European institutions are justified to internally employ streamlining strategies, as long as they take their "political priorities" in due regard.

4.2.2. Why the Kik-Solution does not Convince

The *Kik*-rulings and the interpretation thereof by the Advocate General in *Spain v Eurojust* appeal to common sense: what is in reality not possible or reasonable simply can or should not be done. However, the attempt to relegate the fundamental EU principles that have been invoked, raises serious doubts as to the policy's remaining credibility. An attempt to downgrade fundamental principles in order to appease practical and budgetary considerations may be in any event unconvincing on three accounts.

First, the argument that EU Treaties do not demonstrate a fundamental EU principle of multilingualism

may very well be outdated due to recent developments. Since 1 December 2009, the date of entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union has been attributed the same legal status as EU Treaties. [4] As a consequence, the 'fundamental' language rights that it contains are currently legally binding upon EU institutions. [5] These rights entail that linguistic diversity will be respected (Article 22); any discrimination on the basis of language is prohibited (Article 21.1); and that every person may write to the EU institutions any of all official EU languages and must have an answer in that language (Article 41.4). Although it is impossible to predict how the ECJ interpret these provisions in the future, from now on it will likely be more difficult to relegate fundamental language rights contained in a EU Treaty, than it is the language rules of Council Regulation 1/1958/EEC.

The second reason why the solution of the Kik-case is not convincing is its negation of the previously discussed policy rhetoric. The suggestion that the principle of language equality is not absolute but relative, is not consistent with what EU institutions and officials have been telling the public After all, time and again they have emphasized that both linguistic diversity and language equality are founding principles of the EU and core elements of European cultural identity. Moreover, even if one is capable of putting linguistic diversity in perspective, how does one persuasively make principles of equal treatment, democracy, and transparent governance relative to practicality and cost-efficiency? In other words, when exactly will it ever be "justified", "appropriate" or "proportionate" to exclude any European citizen from communicating with their EU government and understanding the law that binds him or her, on the basis of language?

Third, the argument that linguistic diversity and language equality are less significant within the *internal* operations of EU institutions, is at odds with the manner in which institutional multilingualism has been consistently presented. As discussed, an informal limited internal institutional multilingualism does not correspond with the proclaimed equal democratic entitlement of all citizens to be represented in the EU by their national representatives without language barriers.

4.3. Solution 3: Language Learning and the Possible Value of a European Lingua Franca

The two previously discussed solutions do not seem satisfactory or convincing. On the one hand, the financial burdens and practical limitations of institutional multilingualism are unyielding and difficult to ignore. Simply put, it is in reality difficult to live up to the sometimes utopian promise of institutional multilingualism. On the other hand, once fundamental EU principles are invoked as the foundations of institutional multilingualism, the proverbially cat is out of the bag; it is difficult to back peddle from fundamental principles of equality, transparency and democracy, without the risk of the policy as a whole losing credibility. De Swaan (2005:25) contends that the fundamental principles and the everyday practice of the EU policy on institutional multilingualism needs to be bridged by an "effective dose of hypocrisy." That is perhaps too cynical a conclusion. Yet, to some extent the narrative of the EU policy on multilingualism does seem to be trapped in a self-contradictory gridlock. However, there is a third possible solution that may achieve more success.

The question that remains is how to concede to practical and budgetary reality without giving up on the pledge to include all European citizens and their representatives in the democratic process, equally and without language barriers. The simple answer suggested here is as follows: if the EU institutions are not able to use all languages that EU citizens speak, then it should work towards having citizens speak the language or languages that they use. For in light of the relatively limited number of official EU languages, it could be sufficient if the EU includes in its narrative that all European ultimately master any of the official EU languages. Yet, in light of the predominant use of English within the EU institutions, perhaps the EU should ultimately go as far as to aim for all European also to at least master the English language. If the EU would publically encourage and promote learning English, it could enhance the coherence of its policy on institutional multilingualism. After all, the EU may then safely uphold its budgetary restrictions, without simultaneously having to relinquish its pledge that every European citizen is equally included in the democratic process of the EU without language barriers.

This solution may sound simple, though in reality it comes with its own hitches. The matter of a lingua franca for Europe is a multi-faceted, contested and a politically sensitive topic (European Commission, 2010, p. 57; "EU Translation Policy 'here to stay'", 2008). The subject of language learning and the role of a European lingua franca in Europe, falls within the Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme. Up to now this programme has not demonstrated the same pragmatic tolerance for English as pan-European lingua franca, as EU institutions have shown for the predominant use of English within their internal operations. Various policy documents demonstrate that the EU considers a European lingua franca to threaten Europe's linguistic and cultural diversity (European Commission, 2008c, pp. 12, 15l; Committee of the Regions, 2004, par. 1.6). The reason is the previously discussed emphasis on language as an intrinsic cultural phenomenon. A lingua franca is considered to be insufficient in allowing for any true mutual understanding of other cultures (European Commission, 2002, pp., 4, 24; European Commission, 2005a, p. 3; European Commission, 2008b, pp. 5-6). [6] The Commission therefore considers learning lesser-known languages more appropriate (European Union 2004, pp. 7, 22; European Commission, 2002, p. 6; European Communities, 2007b, pp. 5-6, 9-11).

Nonetheless, the EU's policy on multilingualism may leave some room for a public support of a pan-European lingua franca. In line with the conclusions of the Barcelona summit of the European Council on 15 and 16 March 2002, the main policy goal of Androulla Vassiliou, the current Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, is to encourage Europeans to learn *two* foreign languages in addition to their mother tongue (Vassiliou, (n.d.); Vassiliou, 2010; European Commission 2002, p. 7). The High Level Group on Multilingualism and the Group of Intellectuals for Intercultural Dialogue suggested that one of these languages could very well be a lingua franca. It reasoned that one may choose to learn a foreign language that is the expression of a particular cultural identity, but also a language that simply functions as means of communication (European Communities, 2007a, pp. 7-8; European Commission. (2008a, p. 7). In fact, a lingua franca for Europeans may even be welcomed in the light of EU's current objective of further European integration, cross-border mobility and the value of cultural exchange (e.g. Phillipson, 2003, p. 7; Mowbray, 2010, pp. 8, 10, 13; De Swaan, 2005; Salverda, 2002, p. 2). After all, language it is easier to move across the EU when one does not need to learn each and every local language.

One not need to necessarily endorse English as lingua franca. In theory it could be any language. Yet, the practical benefit of supporting English is that it has already become the most commonly used "non-mediated, intra-European vehicle of direct communication" for European citizens and businesses (European Communities, 2007a, p. 7; European Union, 2004, p. 5). Moreover, this trend is likely to continue since nearly all pupils in secondary education in the EU currently learn the English language (European Commission, 2002, p. 7). Moreover, advocating the use of English would not replace the EU institution's current use of the 23 official EU languages. The institutions would simply have a *default* or *fall-back* language for instances in which institutional multilingualism in reality cannot live up to policy promises.

For the sake of coherence and integrity of EU policy on multilingualism, the EU may be advised to follow up on the recommendation of the High Level Group on Multilingualism. The Group proposed hat further research be done into the potential and downsides of a European lingua franca (European Communities, 2007, p. 20). Indeed, it seems that the Commission has taken a first step in this direction. It contracted a study on the topic of a pan-European lingua franca. In 2011 it organized the Translation Studies Days in 2011, during which this study and other studies on multilingualism were publically debated (European Commission, 2011). [7]

5. Concluding Remarks

Most will likely acknowledge the EU's remarkable achievement in successfully managing to operate in an increasing multitude of languages for decades. This article demonstrated that, nonetheless, the EU policy on institutional multilingualism is still evolving and that further choices need to be made in order for it to be coherent, credible and convincing. The policy ideally should be capable of acknowledging considerations of efficiency and practicality without simultaneously treading on fundamental principles

of linguistic diversity, language equality, equal democratic representation and transparent governance.

Possible solutions for enhancing the policy's coherence include increasing the budget and reformulating the fundamental nature of the invoked EU principles. This article argues that a third solution may ultimately prove to be most effective, namely that the EU aims to ensure that European citizens master any of the languages that the EU uses. In fact, considering the accepted predominant use of English within the EU institutions, the EU may in the same way recognize and perhaps even encourage English as pan-European lingua franca. If all Europeans would learn this language from an early age on – in addition to their mother tongue when applicable – they would have at least a default language in which to communicate with each other and with EU institutions; to understand the law that binds them; and to be adequately represented within the institutions.

Nonetheless, the question of whether the EU should embrace a European lingua franca, let alone specifically English, not an easy one to answer. Yet, the promotion of a lingua franca – *in addition* to the promotion of linguistic and cultural diversity – may ultimately be simpler to justify coherently than increasing the budget for translation and interpretation, or compromising fundamental principles of equal treatment, democracy, and transparent governance. In this light, this author recommends that further research be conducted into strengths and weaknesses of a European lingua franca, and specifically the potential of English.

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7. Footnotes

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[4] Article 6 Treaty on European Union (EU).

[5] Article 51 Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

[6] This stance recalls Rundle's (1946:158) argument, that language and culture are so closely connected, that the suppression of all but one European language would be a "cultural disaster" and a "major tragedy" for the overall European culture.

[7] More information on this and other reports, as well as on the Translation Studies Days, is available on the Commission's Directorate-General for Translation's website: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/translation/publications/studies/index_en.htm .

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Recommended citation

Baaij CJ (2012). The EU Policy on Institutional Multilingualism: Between Principles and Practicality. Language & Law, Vol. 1. (urn:nbn:de:0009-30-33384)

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ISSN: 2194-7414