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Some of our partners sometimes perceive Europe as a mosaic of languages and cultures. Far from denying this diversity, Europe rejoices in it, regarding diversity as its wealth and pride. Every language, whether “large” or “small”, has its place and contributes to our common heritage. The principle of the equality of languages has been asserted since the beginning of the process of European integration. The fathers of Europe certainly did not foresee that in 2008, there would be 23 official languages alongside 60 minority or regional languages, but they did fully understand the whole political and symbolic value of linguistic diversity.

This plurality of languages, however, has never been an obstacle to European integration and dialogue between its peoples. Quite the contrary, multilingualism has allowed Europe “unity in diversity”, using its cultural and linguistic wealth to construct a Union ever more solid and bringing its peoples closer together. Contrary to the image too often put around, far from wanting to become uniform, Europe has turned its differences and diversity into an asset.

It is in this perspective that in September 2008, on my initiative, the European Commission adopted an ambitious communication entitled “*Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment*”. This text presents the general views of the Commission on language policy in the medium term. It covers subjects as diverse as the learning of languages, new

technologies, interpretation and translation, the role of languages in respect of integration, the external aspects of multilingualism, language and business, etc. This text brings special clarity to the question of multilingualism and the role it plays in all areas of the life of European citizens. Finally, in this communication, the Commission makes a number of innovative proposals, which it is up to us to put into practice in close collaboration with the member states. For we must remember that policy on multilingualism is first and foremost a national competence.

Three languages for everyone

Since Barcelona in March 2002, one of the prime objectives in Europe has been that all European citizens should be able to express themselves in their mother tongue and in two foreign languages of their own choice.

Young Europeans ought to have the option of being taught a large palette of languages and not just one *lingua franca* that creates as many problems as it solves. If the teaching of languages quite naturally occupies a special place in Europe's language policy, this is not limited to young people and students. It is really for all citizens, young or old, people taking vocational courses and training, people with few qualifications or out of work, senior citizens, and so on.

Learning foreign languages is certainly an intellectual pleasure, a door opening to new cultures, new countries. In addition to this personal dimension, linguistic skills are a precious asset in the business world. Recent studies show that European companies that do not have a sufficient level of linguistic skills lose contracts all over the world. For the Europeans, languages are a key giving access to work and development in the business world. The “business forum” chaired by Viscount Davignon has recently thrown light on the whole economic value of multilingualism for Europe. Because – pay attention! – English is not the answer to everything.

English is no longer enough

Clearly, the business world is largely dominated by English. It is true that this beautiful language does open many doors. But today it is no longer enough. Only the mastery of several languages gives real competitive advantage for people, for companies, and for Europe as a whole. Our linguistic diversity is an opportunity that must not be missed by neglecting the other languages.

We cannot neglect the other European languages without risking the loss of a large number of opportunities. Denmark and Scandinavia provide an edifying example: young Danes, Swedes and Norwegians are fortunate in speaking

languages that are closely related and which they can easily master or at least understand. But English continues its progress today, increasingly dethroning other neighbouring languages.

The ubiquity of English also reverberates in education. English is increasingly considered as a necessary knowledge, rather than a foreign language. In Denmark, as in many European countries, English is also a mandatory subject in school to the detriment of other languages such as German, French, Spanish, etc. But this tendency is not irreversible. On the contrary, recent figures show that the number of languages offered in primary and secondary education is on the increase and that young Europeans are learning more languages than before. The challenge for the whole of Europe is find ways of encouraging this tendency and turning the linguistic skills of its citizens to good account.

English is a real treasure for Europe. We must profit from this while respecting, valuing, and making good use of the other languages. For our multilingualism is really one of the cornerstones of the Union. There must be no question of losing this incredible cultural and linguistic wealth that gives Europe all its colour and life.

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