



Recommendation 1740 (2006)¹

The place of mother tongue in school education

Parliamentary Assembly

1. In the Parliamentary Assembly's view, considerations of various kinds influence the place of the mother tongue in schools. There is the question of rights, both the right to education and the right to a cultural identity; there is the preservation of linguistic heritage, at both European and world levels; there is the promotion of dialogue and exchange through linguistic diversity; and there are pedagogical factors, to say nothing of the political use which is often made of the issue.

2. The Assembly has often concerned itself with language matters. [Recommendation 814 \(1977\)](#) on modern languages in Europe, [Recommendation 928 \(1981\)](#) on the educational and cultural problems of minority languages and dialects in Europe, [Recommendation 1203 \(1993\)](#) on Gypsies in Europe, [Recommendation 1291 \(1996\)](#) on Yiddish culture, [Recommendation 1333 \(1997\)](#) on the Aromanian language and culture, [Recommendation 1353 \(1998\)](#) on access of minorities to higher education, [Recommendation 1383 \(1998\)](#) on linguistic diversification, [Recommendation 1521 \(2001\)](#) on the Csango minority culture in Romania, [Recommendation 1539 \(2001\)](#) on European Year of Languages, [Recommendation 1688 \(2004\)](#) on diaspora cultures and [Resolution 1171 \(1998\)](#) on endangered Uralic minority cultures are examples.

3. The Assembly recalls the importance of the instruments adopted by the Council of Europe such as the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ETS No. 148) as well as those adopted by other bodies, such as the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

4. It would be desirable to encourage, as far as possible, young Europeans to learn their mother tongue (or main language) when this is not an official language of their country.

5. At the same time, every young European has the duty to learn an official language of the country of which he or she is a citizen.

6. The language which is the vehicle of instruction has a crucial role in that it is the key to classroom communication and consequently to pupils' acquisition of knowledge. A great deal of research has confirmed that types of education based on the mother tongue significantly increase the chances of educational success and can even give better results.

7. In European societies, everyday use of the official language is the main precondition for the integration of children whose main language is different from the official one of the country or region. However, a large amount of research yields common results on one point: immediate schooling of such children in a language they do not know well, or not at all, seriously jeopardises their chances of academic success. Conversely, bilingual education based on the mother tongue is the basis for long-term success.

8. Recent studies have shown that the ideas that every language is linked to a particular culture and that bilingualism ultimately excludes the individual from both cultures are mistaken. The view that bilingualism or plurilingualism is a burden on pupils is also incorrect – they are assets.

1. Assembly debate on 10 April 2006 (9th Sitting) (see [Doc. 10837](#), report of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education, rapporteur: Mr Legendre). Text adopted by the Assembly on 10 April 2006 (9th Sitting).



9. There are various ways in which bilingualism in children can be supported by education systems. They can be distinguished by their political objectives: maintaining a minority language, revitalising a less widespread language or integrating children who speak a foreign language into the dominant society. There are appropriate bilingual educational models in all cases. Which is chosen will depend on prior reflection and a transparent decision on objectives, negotiated with those directly concerned.

10. "Strong" bilingual educational models which aim to equip the future adult with real bi/plurilingual proficiency have many advantages over "weak" models which treat bilingualism as an intermediate stage between mother-tongue monolingualism and official-language monolingualism rather than as an end in itself. These advantages concern both the people who benefit from such models and the societies that provide them. In all cases, however, the condition for success is that bilingual educational programmes should last several years.

11. Particular attention should be paid to the case of regional languages exclusively spoken in a country with a different official language or which are spoken in more than one country but are not official languages in any of them, as well as in the case of deterritorialised or diaspora languages. Significant support by educational systems can be the condition upon which the very survival of these languages may depend.

12. The Assembly accordingly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

12.1. inventory the different models and types of bilingual education in Europe;

12.2. promote exchange and meetings between practitioners involved in bilingual education;

12.3. prepare a recommendation inviting the governments of member states to:

12.3.1. develop bilingual and plurilingual education on the basis of the principles set out above;

12.3.2. foster development of children's plurilingual repertoires and give substantial support to all languages in children's repertoires;

12.3.3. propose, whenever appropriate and useful, strong support in their mother tongue for children for whom it is not an official language of the state;

12.3.4. promote threatened languages with parents and communities so that their commitment to their language receives support and reinforcement;

12.3.5. develop and implement policies for the use of languages in education, in open dialogue and permanent consultation with the concerned linguistic groups;

12.4. invite those member states that have not yet done so to sign and ratify the relevant instruments adopted by the Council of Europe and UNESCO.