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Establishment of a European linguistic community based on the application of Anglo-French bilingualism

Report
Committee on Culture, Science and Education
Rapporteur: Mr Christopher HOLLIS, United Kingdom

A. Draft Recommendation

The Assembly,

Considering that, of all the obstacles which stand in the way of the establishment of closer relations between the citizens of the different European nations, linguistic barriers are certainly among the most important;

Considering that a common language would stimulate the development among the different Member States of that elementary understanding of one another, which is essential to the formation of any human community;

Considering that 'the Conference for the Organisation of an Atlantic Community', meeting at Oxford from 9th to 13th September, 1952, unanimously adopted in the names of the 14 representatives of the Atlantic nations a motion recommending the use of French and English as a means of fostering better understanding between the New World and the Old;

Considering that Anglo-French bilingualism appears to be the only solution which is calculated to improve the relations between the Continental Community and the other Member States and at the same time carry over that improvement into the relations among all the countries of the Atlantic Treaty and of the free world,

Recommends to the Committee of Ministers that all Member States be invited

a. formally to recognise a common auxiliary language for everyday use, which will be French or English according to choice, the adoption of both languages together being optional, such languages to be taught on essentially practical lines and without prejudicing in any way either the study of other modern languages or, in a general sense, that diversity which makes for the wealth of European culture;

b. to ensure that this agreement in principle should be given practical effect as soon as possible, so that both in French and English-speaking countries and in all other Member States of the Council of Europe instruction be given in either French or English in such a way as to enable every pupil to attain proficiency in one or other of these languages at some stage during his or her school career.

B. Explanatory Memorandum

1. A study of the possibility of establishing a European linguistic Community based on the application of Anglo-French bilingualism was initiated on 29th May, 1952.The Cultural Committee had before it a motion for a Recommendation[1]for the introduction of this measure.

1. First draft Recommendation. Discussion

This draft emphasized the necessity of a common language to establish " a unity of outlook and of culture such as is essential to the formation of any human community", as well as the importance and qualities of the French and English languages respectively, and recommended the conclusion of :

a. bilateral agreements aimed at spreading the use of English in French-speaking countries and, conversely, of French in Englishspeaking countries, in particular by introducing the teaching of the two languages into the curriculum of elementary schools,

b. an international convention by which countries whose native language is neither French nor English will adopt one or the other of the following suggestions : to encourage on their territory the general use of both English and French or to select, preferably by joint agreement, one or the other of these languages, and thus be able both to communicate among themselves and to participate in the Anglo-French linguistic community.

From the outset of the deliberations the sponsors of. the motion emphasized the fact that the introduction of the French and English languages into the curricula of all primary schools would in no way prejudice the teaching of other European languages and that pupils would be more prepared to learn German and Italian in the secondary schools if they had already acquired some knowledge of English and French in the primary schools.

Some members of the Committee, however, drew attention to the cultural importance of the German language, and the fact of its predominance in Central and Eastern Europe; they suggested various amendments, the import being to introduce the choice of German, as a second language on the same footing as French or English.

After some discussion the Committee considered that the draft Recommendation raised too complex a problem to be settled without further examination. It decided, by a majority, to defer this examination till the second part of the Fourth Session and instructed the Secretariat-General to assemble in the meantime the necessary documentary material on present practice in respect of the teaching of languages in the primary schools of the Member States of the Council of Europe and of Switzerland.

The Committee also decided, at this second meeting, to hear a statement by M. Bressand, Secretary-General of the Association pour le Monde bilingue, on the programme of that Association. The main feature of this programme, it will be recalled, is the introduction of French as a compulsory language into the primary schools of English-speaking countries and of English as a compulsory language in the primary schools of French-speaking countries, while countries where neither English nor French is spoken would have the choice between these two languages.

The Committee studied the considerable documentary material which was collected on the subject, as well as a further draft amendment proposing that Italian as well as German should be placed on the same footing as French and English, and after two further meetings held in September, 1952, the sponsors of the original motion realising that they were not supported by that large majority of the committee which they considered essential, withdrew their draft Recommendation. The question was, however, retained on the Agenda for reconsideration in a different form at a later date.

2. Second Motion for a Recommendation and Amendments thereto

In accordance with the wish expressed by the Committee on 30th September, 1952, a new version of the motion[2]was tabled in the Assembly by some sixty Representatives. This new proposal differed from the previous one in that all considerations about the respective status and qualities of the French and English

1. See 4th Session, 1952 : Doc 19.
2. See 4th Session, 1952, Doc. 92.

languages were omitted and, moreover, it was stipulated that in no case should the adoption of the measures proposed be allowed to prejudice the study of other languages whose diversity " is fundamental to the wealth and development of European culture ".

This proposal, however, was made subject to further modification. In ^view of the uncertainty in professional circles as to the advantages and possibilities of introducing a second language at the primary school stage, and having regard to the special situation of the educational systems of certain countries such as the United Kingdom whose system is not under the direct control of the Government, two Amendments were submitted, the first aiming to prevent the compulsory introduction of a second language at the primary school stage, and the second to make the measures recommended applicable within the framework of all the various types of educational systems, whether centralised or decentralised.

Before the new draft Recommendation and these two Amendments were submitted to the Committee, however, agreement was reached between those concerned, and the Committee was presented with a single text which was finally adopted.

3. Adoption of the final draft Recommendation

The Committee resumed its study of this question on 11th May, 1953, when a large majority expressed its approval of the proposed text. A minority still opposed it, however, emphasising the danger to which in their opinion the adoption of such a proposal might lead, namely that, certain sectors of European public opinion might regard the proposals as an attempt to establish a Franco- British supremacy in the cultural field and to make use of the Council of Europe as a means to this end.

Nevertheless, the Committee decided by thirteen votes to two with two abstentions to submit the following Motion for a Recommendation to the Assembly :