Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1539 (2001)[1]
Final version

European Year of Languages

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly welcomes the European Year of Languages 2001, an initiative of the Council of Europe taken up by the European Union. It recalls in this respect its own Recommendation 1383 (1998) on linguistic diversification and its reports on minority languages.

2. The Assembly fully supports the objectives of the Year, which is intended to raise public awareness of the need to protect and promote Europe's rich linguistic heritage. It is also aimed at achieving public recognition of the fact that each language has unique value, and that all languages are equally valid as modes of expression for those who use them.

3. The Assembly welcomes the fact that the European Year of Languages is not just the year of European languages and that it advocates receptiveness to the whole world, including all the languages and cultures represented on the European continent

4. A central focus of the campaign is the development of plurilingualism, which should be understood as a certain ability to communicate in several languages, and not necessarily as perfect mastery of them. The Year also provides an opportunity to emphasise that all people can and should have the chance to learn languages throughout their lives. The European Language Portfolio, officially launched by the Council of Europe this year, will enable each citizen to keep a record of and maximise the language skills (including partial skills) that he or she has already acquired and will continue to acquire, both within and outside the formal education system

5. All have the right to speak their own mother tongue and to learn other languages of their choice; the ability to exercise this right freely is a prerequisite for personal and career development, the mobility of people and ideas, and the promotion of dialogue, tolerance, understanding and mutual enrichment of peoples and cultures. Communication skills in other languages are essential in order to respond to cultural, economic and social changes in Europe.

6. The choice of languages learned is strongly influenced by economic and geopolitical factors. However, the Assembly is convinced that the process of choosing should not be based entirely on this type of consideration and recalls in that regard the Committee of Ministers Declaration on cultural diversity. States should demonstrate their political will and continue to implement cultural and language policies aimed at developing plurilingualism and protecting all languages spoken in their territories from the risk of extinction

7. Linguistic diversity has many facets, from the protection of minority languages, many of which are dying out, to the advantage of learning the languages of neighbours and neighbouring cultures and the protection of culture and cultural works in all European languages in the context of globalisation. The Assembly hopes that the Year will act as a stimulus for the development of language policies encouraging, above all, cultural and linguistic diversity and promoting the integration of minorities and immigrants, social cohesion in general and human rights

8. The Assembly encourages national parliaments to pay greater attention to language issues by holding special debates on the subject and urging their members to table parliamentary questions.

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1. Assembly debate on 28 September 2001 (32nd Sitting) (see Doc. 9194, report of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education, rapporteur: Mr Legendre. Text adopted by the Assembly on 28 September 2001 (32nd Sitting).

9. The Assembly notes that 26 September 2001 has been designated European Day of Languages and will make its own contribution to the Year on that occasion.

10. Accordingly, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

10.1. organise a European Day of Languages each year in order to pursue the aims of the Year, as they are essentially long-term objectives;

10.2. review the many interesting initiatives designed to promote and improve language learning that have been the direct or indirect result of the Year, with a view to continuing to develop them and report back on this to the Assembly;

10.3. implement cross-sectoral projects on linguistic and cultural diversity, concerning, for instance, the future development of European language cultures in the context of globalisation and the role of language policies in furthering social cohesion and inter-ethnic tolerance;

10.4. encourage member states to protect and promote regional, minority or lesser used languages in order to guarantee linguistic and cultural diversity and to prevent their extinction, in particular by urging member states to sign and ratify the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages;

10.5. urge member states parties to the European Cultural Convention that have not yet become part of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on the European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz to do so as soon as possible;

10.6. urge the Joint Council, the Advisory Council, the European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ) and the Programming Committee of the Directorate of Youth and Sport, to reinstall “courses in languages and intercultural learning” for European youth leaders in the European Youth Centres’ regular programme of activities.

11. The Assembly also recommends that the Committee of Ministers call on member states:

11.1. to maintain and develop further the Council of Europe’s language policy initiatives for promoting plurilingualism, cultural diversity and understanding among peoples and nations;

11.2. to encourage all Europeans to acquire a certain ability to communicate in several languages, for example by promoting diversified novel approaches adapted to individual needs and encouraging the use of the European Language Portfolio;

11.3. encourage the relevant institutions to use the Common European Framework of Reference drawn up by the Council of Europe to develop their language policies, so as to ensure the quality of language teaching and learning and improve international co-ordination

11.4. to pursue the objectives set out in Assembly Recommendation 1383 (1998) on linguistic diversification, and in particular the acquisition of satisfactory skills in at least two European or world languages by all school-leavers and diversification of the range of languages offered, which should meet the needs of personal, national, regional and international communication.