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European Year of Languages

Reply to Recommendation¹: Recommendation 1539 (2001)
Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers has considered Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1539 (2001) on the European Year of Languages. Taking into account the evaluation to date, it noted the success of the European Year of Languages and the high level of interest in the forty-five participating countries. It further noted the importance of pursuing the long-term aims of the Year through appropriate follow-up activities to promote linguistic diversity and more diversified language learning.
2. In this context the Committee of Ministers decided to declare a European Day of Languages to be celebrated on 26th September each year. The Committee recommended that the Day be organised in a decentralised and flexible manner according to the wishes and resources of member states, which would thus enable them to better define their own approaches, and that the Council of Europe propose a common theme each year.
3. The Committee of Ministers invites the European Union to join the Council of Europe in this initiative. It is to be hoped that the Day will be celebrated with the co-operation of all relevant partners.
4. As for the particular recommendations put by the Parliamentary Assembly in the text of Recommendation 1539, the Committee of Ministers welcomes the Assembly's commitment to support and promote in the future initiatives developed as a result of the European Year of Languages. It refers to the Appendix to this reply which contains the opinion of the Education Committee on this Recommendation, to which the Committee of Ministers fully subscribes.

1. Adopted at the 776th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (6 December 2001)



Appendix

Opinion of the Education Committee

The Education Committee notes with interest [Recommendation 1539 \(2001\)](#) on the European Year of Languages adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly at its 32nd Session on 28 September.

The paragraph references relate to the text of the Recommendation.

[par 1-3]

The Committee welcomes the Assembly's support for the main aims of the Year, viz. raising awareness of the need to protect and promote linguistic diversity in Europe, respect for all languages as valid modes of expression for their users, and developing plurilingualism among individuals. It shares fully the Assembly's view that the opportunity to learn languages is a right for all and that lifelong language learning is increasingly important in today's Europe.

[par 4]

The Committee welcomes the support of the Assembly for the Council of Europe's European Language Portfolio as a tool to assist individuals in the development of plurilingualism at all levels in both formal and informal education contexts. Following on the successful Portfolio pilot scheme, and in accordance with Recommendation No (98) 6 of the Committee of Ministers and Resolution No 2 of the 20th Session of the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education of the Council of Europe (Cracow, October 2000), the process of dissemination has been initiated during the European Year of Languages. The Education Committee has set up, under its aegis, a European Validation Committee to co-ordinate and ensure quality in the general introduction of a Portfolio in member states.

[par 5]

The Committee notes the importance of promoting both mother tongue and learning the languages of others. In order to avoid increasing the risk of marginalisation *all* should have the opportunity to learn languages in today's increasingly interactive Europe. This is necessary not only to avail of opportunities for employment and mobility, but also to develop tolerance and acceptance of differences in our multilingual and multicultural societies. Language skills are necessary also for full participation in democratic processes at both national and European level. Accordingly, the development of language and intercultural skills is essential for democratic citizenship in Europe.

[par 6-7]

Consequently, and in the context of increasing globalisation, the Committee fully shares the Assembly's concern to ensure that economic factors are not the only criteria to be considered in formulating language policy. Other factors that should also be taken into account include the promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity, social cohesion, the integration of all sectors of the population, the development of openness to and acceptance of differences, and the improvement of international co-operation, including transfrontier co-operation between neighbour countries. The Education Committee's programme of activities in the follow-up to the European Year of Languages will focus increasingly on the need to take account of these different goals in developing language education policy to promote more diversified language learning,

[par 8]

The successful development of language policies for diversity requires the co-operation and commitment of a range of partners in different domains - political, social, legal and cultural as well as educational. The Committee welcomes the Assembly's proposal to have these important policy issues debated at national level, including discussion in national parliaments.

[par 9]

The Committee is pleased to note the active involvement of the Assembly in the European Day of Languages on 26 September, notably through the debate at the open meeting of its Committee on Education, Culture and Science, and the co-operation of members of the Assembly in completing the Language Passport (part of the European Language Portfolio).

[par 10]

With regard to the recommendations contained in paragraph 10, the Education Committee:

- supports the proposal to organise a European Day of Languages each year in order to pursue the essentially long-term aims of the 2001 campaign; the Education Committee, at its 24th Meeting (1-3 October 2001), while taking note of certain possible difficulties in the organisation of such a Day, recommended that this activity be decentralised and that a flexible approach be adopted, with the Council of Europe proposing a theme each year. The Committee also recommended that the question of the date for this Day of Languages be reconsidered. After preliminary consultation with National Co-ordinators for the European Year of Languages, it is proposed to hold the Day either in September or May. A final decision will be taken after further consultation with member states² [par 10.i];
- will review the different initiatives arising from the Year with a view to an evaluation of their potential for further development [par 10.ii];
- welcomes transversal projects in linguistic and cultural diversity, an area in which it is already involved and that it wishes to develop further, both within Directorate General IV and with other sectors of the Council of Europe, including the Parliamentary Assembly, the CLRAE, and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages [par 10.iii];
- fully supports the encouragement to member states to sign and ratify the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages which is the only legal and cultural instrument devoted exclusively to the protection and promotion of languages [par 10.iv];
- trusts that those countries which have not yet done so will join the Enlarged Partial Agreement of the European Centre for Modern Languages as soon as possible in order to benefit from European co-operation in training and networks of key multipliers [par 10.v];
- with regard to the Assembly's desire to have courses in languages and intercultural learning reinstated in the European Youth Centres, the Committee notes that courses on intercultural learning are still a regular feature of the Youth sector programmes and supports the reintroduction of language courses when the budgetary situation allows [par 10.vi].

With regard to the specific recommendations in paragraph 11, the Education Committee:

- notes with satisfaction the importance the Assembly attaches to the continuation of the Committee's successful language policy initiatives for promoting plurilingualism and linguistic diversity as a basis for improved mutual understanding among Europeans. These goals, as the Assembly notes, will be furthered by policy instruments developed as a result of the Committee's modern languages programmes, in particular the European Language Portfolio [par 11.i; 11.ii];
- welcomes the proposal to encourage the widespread use of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. This instrument, also developed through the Committee's modern languages programme, is now *the* standard setting instrument used by member states and institutions throughout Europe to ensure coherence and quality in language teaching and assessment; this Council of Europe reference Framework also provides a scientific basis for the mutual recognition of qualifications, thus facilitating educational and professional mobility [par 11.iii];
- supports the objectives set out in Assembly [Recommendation 1383 \(1998\)](#) on linguistic diversification which provides further support for the measures proposed by the Committee of Ministers in Recommendation (98) 6 concerning Modern Languages.

2. Consultation with member States undertaken by the Secretariat between October and November indicates that a majority wishes to retain the date of 26th September.