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## **Plurilingual Europeans – Foreign Learning and Language Politics**

### **Revised summary of replies to questionnaire**

The following countries have sent in replies:

Austria	Iceland
Belgium, Dutch-speaking community	Italy
Belgium, French-speaking community	Lithuania
Denmark	Malta
Estonia	Netherlands
Finland	Norway
France	Poland
Germany	Slovakia
Great Britain (only questions 6 and 7)	Sweden
Hungary	Switzerland

This is a revised version of the summary given in 2005. The revision is mainly due to replies coming in after the first version was published.

### **Comments on the questionnaire and the replies**

There are several difficulties making a summary of the replies to the questionnaire. The replies differ a lot. Firstly, they are not equally detailed. Furthermore, when figures and statistics are given, they are mostly not comparable, since they are not based on the same reference materials or the reference is not given. In some instances e.g. the percentage is of all pupils in school, sometimes it is of the pupils reading foreign languages. Therefore this kind of detailed information is left out in the summary.

Another problem is that the school systems differ between the countries. So does the terminology, which might be an effect of the differences of the situation. The term *secondary school* e.g. does in some replies refer to what in other replies is called *upper secondary school* or *gymnasium*.

This summary therefore must be very rough. Hopefully it still gives some indication of the situation.

Answers concerning university level are left out in this summary, since most replies do not include that level, and so are answers dealing with a national language taught as a second language to immigrants as well as answers dealing with education in immigrants' mother-tongues. (However, such education might be “hidden” in the information given in the original replies.)

**1. Which political and administrative bodies are involved in decisions concerning foreign (and second) language instruction in your country, that is, who decides which foreign languages are taught to what extent at the various public or state controlled educational institutions?**

Not unexpectedly the replies mention the *ministry* in charge of the education (or corresponding) or/and an institute directly under this ministry as well as the *parliament*. In Germany and Switzerland due to the constitution, there is no central ministry or central institute, but instead each federal state in Germany or canton in Switzerland plays this role. The freedom for regions and even individual schools seems to be greatest in Denmark and Sweden, but also Slovakia stresses this point.

In some countries, e.g. bilingual Belgium and Finland, there is a law stating what foreign languages are to be taught. In Malta no law is mentioned, but both Maltese and English are defined as “official languages”.

**2. Which foreign languages are being taught and learned by how many learners (in approximate percentages) on the various levels of your educational system?**

In all the countries a lot of foreign languages are taught or at least offered, mostly in the secondary school. Figures are given in most of the replies, but they are unfortunately seldom comparable. The fact that a language is taught, does not mean that every pupil is taking it. Some languages are obligatory, some optional, cf. question 3. About the most frequent languages, you can notice the following.

- *English* is taught as a foreign language everywhere. (In Malta it is the national language beside Maltese.) Everywhere except in the Dutch-speaking community of Belgium and Switzerland it is taught already in primary school. It is stated as obligatory in some countries, but not in France. From figures provided one can draw the conclusion that even in countries where English is just optional it domineers at all levels in having far more learners than any other language, except in the French-speaking community of Belgium.
- *German* is taught as a foreign language everywhere. Everywhere, except in the Dutch-speaking community of Belgium and in Malta, it is taught already in primary school. It seems mostly to rank as the second foreign language. But Denmark, France, Iceland and Sweden report a decreasing interest in German.
- *French* is taught as a foreign language everywhere. It is taught already in the primary school. In the Dutch-speaking community of Belgium, where French is obligatory, French is the most common foreign language. Denmark reports a decreasing interest in French. Sweden a small increasing interest.
- *Spanish* is mentioned as a foreign language in all countries but Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania and Switzerland. Mostly it is taught in secondary school. In France it is the most common foreign language. In Denmark, Germany, Iceland and Sweden Spanish has become more frequent, and e.g. in Sweden it has passed French – in secondary school it has even passed German.
- *Italian* is mentioned as a foreign language by many not but not in Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, Estonia, Finland, Hungary and Lithuania. Mostly it is taught in secondary school, with the exception for Austria, where it is taught already in primary school.

- *Russian* is mentioned as a foreign language by all but Dutch-speaking part of Belgium and Switzerland. Mostly it is taught in secondary school, with the exception for Estonia and Poland, where it is taught already in primary school, and in Hungary, where the numbers although are very low. In Estonia however, it ranks as number two.

<b>3. Does the educational system in your country distinguish between obligatory and optional foreign languages? If so, please specify.</b>
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### **Austria**

In the years 1–4 in primary school one foreign language (English, French, Italian, and Hungarian) is obligatory. In the years 5–8 it is possible to also to take Latin. In the years 9–12 two foreign languages are obligatory in programmes designed to lead on to further studies. A third foreign language might be chosen. In the technical-vocational schools the situation varies.

### **Belgium – Dutch-speaking community**

French is obligatory in primary school (from age 8 in Brussels or age 10 elsewhere). French and English are obligatory in first and second cycle of secondary education in some programmes. In other programmes either French or English is obligatory. In the third cycle French and English or French and German are obligatory in some programmes, in other programmes French or English is obligatory. More of these languages or other languages (Spanish) can be offered in the second cycle. In vocational schools foreign languages are not obligatory, but can be offered.

### **Belgium – French-speaking community**

In Brussels Dutch is obligatory. In the schools of Wallonia the first foreign language is either Dutch or German in the primary school. In the secondary school the choice is free between Dutch, English and German.

A second foreign language is obligatory in some programmes. A third foreign language is only obligatory for students attending programmes oriented to languages.

### **Denmark**

English is obligatory at all levels from year 3. German or French is obligatory from year 7. At the gymnasium one of the languages French, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish is obligatory beside English.

### **Finland**

Finnish is obligatory for Swedish-speaking pupils, Swedish is obligatory for Finnish-speaking pupils. These are not considered as foreign languages. English is obligatory for everyone. A second foreign language (French or German, Russian possible but not chosen) is voluntary in primary school. In secondary school a second language is obligatory (French or German, in some areas Spanish and Italian).

### **France**

No.

### **Germany**

English is obligatory. Another foreign language (French, Latin or other languages) is obligatory, mostly French. In some schools three foreign languages are obligatory (English, Latin and mostly French). In some schools the third language could be e.g. Japanese, Chinese or Swedish.

### **Hungary**

The choice is free. Foreign language teaching starts normally in year 4. In the general secondary school two foreign languages are obligatory, in vocational school one foreign language is obligatory. Languages being taught are in order of popularity English, German, French and Russian.

### **Iceland**

English and Danish (or Swedish or Norwegian instead of Danish) are obligatory in the primary school. These languages are also obligatory in the secondary school, attended by 85% of the population. One of the languages German, French, Spanish is obligatory in programmes giving admission to university. In other programmes additional languages are optional.

### **Lithuania**

One foreign language (English, German or French) is obligatory in the years 4–12, and two foreign languages are obligatory in the years 6–10. In the upper secondary school two foreign languages are obligatory in certain programmes.

### **Malta**

English is obligatory, since it is an official language beside Maltese. In the secondary school one foreign language (French, German, Italian, Spanish, Arabic, Russian or Latin) is compulsory beside English. More foreign languages are optional.

### **Netherlands**

English is obligatory, from year 4. German or French (or both) is optional in primary school. At higher levels French or German (or both) is compulsory in some programmes.

### **Norway**

English is obligatory from primary school. One more foreign language is obligatory in the upper primary school. Mostly German, French or Spanish; in some schools Italian, Sami, Finnish, Japanese, Russian or Latin.

### **Poland**

One of the following languages is obligatory in primary and secondary schools: English, French, classical Greek, Spanish, Latin, German, Portuguese, Russian, Slovak, Swedish, and Italian. English is de facto obligatory, since it is necessary for many academic studies. Additional foreign languages are optional.

### **Slovakia**

Recently it is decided that one foreign language should be taught in primary school. In the Gymnasium two foreign languages are obligatory.

## **Sweden**

English is obligatory from primary school. Other languages are optional. Most popular of the other foreign languages in 2004 were in that order: German, Spanish and French. Other languages taught in 2004 were Finnish, Italian, Chinese Portuguese, Russian, Sami and Sign Language.

Two more foreign languages beside English are obligatory in the upper primary school in the programmes giving admission to university. Most popular in 2004 were in that order Spanish, German and French.

## **Switzerland**

Two of the national languages (German, French, and Italian) as foreign languages are obligatory. In some cantons English is obligatory.

<b>4. Have there been remarkable changes in foreign language learning during the past ten years?</b>
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## **Austria**

- The introduction of a foreign language in the first school year in 2002.
- The use of English as a working language and bilingual school-forms.
- The expansion of foreign language education as a result of more autonomous schools.
- The possibility to choose a second foreign language in the year 7 as an experiment in some schools.
- The successful implementation of the European quality seal for innovative language projects and the creation of a network for innovative language projects.

## **Belgium – Dutch-speaking area**

- Implementation of Specific Final Objectives in general secondary education.
- The communicative teaching approach is stressed.
- Since 2004-2005 things have changed towards ‘earlier’ foreign language learning. French, second language, is compulsory from year 5 (= age 10) in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium (not the Brussels area) and language awareness lessons of French and other languages are allowed from nursery school onwards.

## **Belgium – French-speaking area**

- The decree from 1997, which focused on the communicative capability as a goal for the foreign language learning.
- The use of a foreign language as a teaching language (language immersion) has been successful, but now it seems to be somewhat out of hands.

## **Denmark**

- English now starts in year 3.
- Spanish has come strongly into the ‘Gymnasium’ (tertiary/upper secondary level) system, rivalling French and German; other languages are offered at a limited number of schools (e.g., Italian).

- The new Gymnasium system (which started in August 2005) threatens to cause a major reduction in the teaching of languages other than English. This is an unintended effect caused by the structure of the “choice” mechanism.

### **Estonia**

- English has become the first foreign language in school.
- Russian is no more obligatory in school.
- Foreign language instruction has been given more hours in school.

### **Finland**

- A trend towards strong English. Almost 100% take it as the first language instead of Swedish. No diversity.
- Girls take more languages than boys.
- There are more pupils taking two foreign languages in the upper level.
- The amount of those who study three or four languages in the upper level is going down.
- Teaching in the foreign languages (mostly English or French) is increasing.

### **France**

- In the primary school language education now is introduced in the latter two years. In the secondary school the amount of teaching hours has increased.
- In reality English and Spanish have become domineering, and other neighbour languages, German and Italian, have consequently lost.

### **Germany**

- More foreign language teaching.
- The number of schools where English is taught from year 8 or year 6 is increasing.
- Teaching in other languages, especially French, Russian and Latin, is going down.
- Spanish has a small increase.

### **Hungary**

- A national language education strategy was presented in 2002.
- Government support employers to maintain the language competency levels of their employees.
- In 2003 an extra year (year 13) is offered for language education.

### **Iceland**

- Spanish is very much increasing.
- German is decreasing.
- Since 1999 English is the first foreign language and has been strengthened in the curricula, some say at the cost of Danish.

### **Italy**

- Measures have been taken to introduce a second foreign language, and to allow experimentation in the instruction. The choice is French, English, Spanish and German.
- The European Portfolio of the Languages has been adopted.

### **Lithuania**

- There have been a lot of remarkable changes in foreign language policies, curriculum content, attitudes towards language learning etc. since 1990, when Lithuania gained independence.

### **Malta**

- A gradual but steady shift from Italian to the other languages, especially French and German.
- The last major change occurred in 1987 when three new languages (Spanish, Russian and Arabic) were offered as options.
- Noteworthy is the presence of Arabic (a non-European language) among the foreign languages offered.

### **Netherlands**

No.

### **Norway**

- Norway seems to be in a transition stage, from experiencing English as a foreign language to regarding it as a second language. Cf. the curriculum, where English simply is labelled “English”, and all other languages are labelled “foreign”.
- In the new curriculum (2006) one foreign language, in addition to English, is obligatory in the upper primary school.
- Instruction in non-European languages will be given in schools from 2006.

### **Poland**

- Orders of the Minister of National Education in 2001 determining the list of foreign languages and Orders in 2002 introducing standards.
- A drastic decline for Russian after 1989.
- A growing upraise of the English at the cost of French and German.

### **Sweden**

- The willingness to start or to continue studies of optional foreign languages has gone down both in the compulsory school and the upper secondary school.
- German has gone down most, while there is a small rise for French and Spanish.

### **Switzerland**

- Bilingual instruction (immersion).
- Debate of the status of English versus the national language.

**5. Can you specify one or two problems connected with foreign language learning in your country?**

**Austria**

- The lack of diversity in choice of the first foreign language: 98-99% take English. One reason for this is that in the secondary school it is hardly possible to continue studies in other languages than English.
- The social resources of multilingual children are not used, since the means aimed to teaching of all the immigrant languages are small and even are being cut down.

**Belgium – Dutch-speaking area**

- The practice of the communicative approach is still a problem especially with respect to assessment/school exams.
- The lack of continuity in the transition from primary education to secondary education.
- Lack of communication and co-operation between language teachers of different languages at the same levels and of the same languages at various levels.

**Belgium – French-speaking area**

- The situation of language immersion now it seems to be somewhat out of hands.
- The shortage of teachers of foreign languages.
- Many schools can not offer any choice between foreign languages.
- The lack of competence in foreign language and methodology in teaching foreign language.
- Bad continuity between foreign language teaching in the primary and secondary school.
- Difficulties for the student to make his or her choice among the foreign languages.

**Denmark**

- Opportunities for in-service training and updating of language teachers are not sufficient.
- Students no longer want to do so much homework, and are no longer interested in arduous forms of language training such as complex grammar and vocabulary.
- The loss of prestige for foreign language.
- The steadily increasing importance of English as an international language has made it less obvious why anyone should bother with other foreign languages.

**Estonia**

- Lack of qualified English teachers.
- The small number of students studying German and French as first foreign language. The small print-run of study material is very expensive.

**Finland**

- English is de facto the only opportunity in many schools in the primary education.

- The Finnish education system is like a supermarket: the pupil goes and chooses what he or she wants. The first years are fixed. The levels 7–9 and the upper secondary school give more freedom to choose between arts, academic studies, languages and “hobbies”. This makes it difficult to form groups that are big enough to start a new language.

### **France**

- The contradiction of the official language policy, which aims at language diversity, and the social demand of “all-in-English”.
- According to the Council of Evaluation of School it is important that France continues its policy of language diversity. One language should not be given monopoly, therefore English should not be declared as an obligatory language in school.
- All language education ought to be more oriented towards communication than it is now.

### **Germany**

- The foreign language instruction in the primary school has still a too small portion. Also the experiments with foreign languages in the kindergarten should be expanded.
- The foreign language acquisition is too strongly focused on English. This can lead to a situation of diglossia, where English takes over more and more domains.

### **Hungary**

- Awareness raising: The central level (curricula requirements) meets EU recommendations, however, the process at the level of schools is often too slow.
- Motivation of children, students to learn languages.

### **Iceland**

No comments.

### **Lithuania**

- A shortage of English language teachers.
- The lack of other languages' teachers does not allow diversifying the offer of other than English, German, French, Russian languages.

### **Malta**

- The lack of motivation. Since English, a world language, has a long tradition in Malta and most Maltese can communicate in it, learning a foreign language tends to be felt as an unnecessary effort, even more so since most of our tourists used to come from the British Isles.
- Lack of information regarding the European plurilinguistic attitude and about the practical utility/advantages of learning languages.

### **Netherlands**

- The different levels of proficiency in the English language of pupils coming from primary school.

- Interest in French and German is diminishing in favour of English. Therefore the minister of education has developed projects in 40 schools for primary and secondary education to promote the interest in those languages.

### **Norway**

- How can the curriculum meet the needs of the not so motivated and not so gifted learners, who now will have to learn both English and maybe French?
- The problem of grouping very talented learners with the not so gifted ones in the Norwegian unitary school system is another conflict.
- The dominant position of English as a foreign language. Other foreign languages than English are seen as boring, “difficult” and “theoretical”. Students learn their English outside school, through the media; and the almost complete absence of linguistic input from other cultures gives other languages a “schoolish” status.

### **Poland**

- Shortage of qualified teachers at the schools in villages and small towns.

### **Slovakia**

- The high percentage of unqualified teachers due to low wages.
- Non-existing conception of language instruction.
- The lack of continuity in the transition from one stage to another.
- According to the Eurobarometer ([http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm)) 69% of the Slovaks can make themselves understood in a foreign language. However, English is not mentioned among the three most used languages.

### **Sweden**

See question 4.

### **Switzerland**

- The status of English versus the national languages, in particular the order in which the languages should be introduced as foreign languages.

### **Additional questions**

The following questions (6 and 7) were additional, and they were answered only by the following countries: Denmark, Germany, Great Britain, Italy and Norway.

**6. What does your government do to promote or support the official language(s) of your country abroad?**

### **Denmark**

- There are government-supported Danish lecturers in many European countries and in the United States.

### **Germany**

- The Foreign Ministry supports 100 German-speaking schools in other countries and to a large part the approximately 120 Goethe Institutes.
- There are approximately 300 lecturers for the German language and literature at foreign universities.
- Foreign students and researchers who want to study at German universities are given support.
- There is also the Humboldt donation for the elite of scientists.

### **Great Britain**

- The British Council taught English to 300,000 learners in 53 countries in 2004/05.
- It also delivered over 600,000 English language qualifications each year and provides on-line access to English for over half a million learners and teachers worldwide every month.

### **Italy**

- The Italian Institute of Culture organizes courses with more than 55,000 participants.
- Abroad around 30,000 persons attend to courses in Italian.
- The Foreign Ministry supports Italian lecturers at the university levels abroad.
- The Dante Alighieri project.

### **Norway**

- The Norwegian Government does little to promote Norwegian abroad. However, at 140 universities in Asia, Europe, Latin America and North America, Norwegian is taught as a part of Scandinavian studies. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs administrates some of the bilateral cooperation with these universities.
- Some 30 institutions for higher education receive more direct linguistic and financial support, since a full-time lecturer from Norway is paid by the Ministry to teach Norwegian at both beginner courses and advanced levels in universities.

<b>7. What opportunities exist for adults to learn foreign languages in your country?</b>
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### **Denmark**

- Adults may attend night school, or they may take gymnasium level single language subjects.
- Also many forms of further education (universities, teacher-training colleges, etc.) offer possibilities for learning foreign languages.

### **Germany**

- Individual companies with trade relations abroad offer instruction in foreign languages for their employees.
- All adults have the possibility to attend to language courses in “folk high-schools” or commercial language schools.

### **Great Britain**

- Language learning is very popular amongst adults in UK. However it is not free and depends on local provision. It is usually offered at local Further Education colleges, schools (in the evening) or adult education centres.
- In addition the Open University has recently added Languages to its curriculum and has had thousands of enrolments.

### **Italy**

- There are courses in foreign languages in the regional Educational Centres for the Adults.

### **Norway**

- At private institutes, which are supported by foreign governments to promote a certain language.
- The so called “Folk Universities” are supported by the state and offer courses for adults in 18 different foreign languages. These “universities” are non-academic and situated in the main cities in the whole country.

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