

EU's commitment to promoting multilingualism under fire

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<https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/special-report/eus-commitment-promoting-multilingualism-under-fire>

Task 1 – Before you read: Guessing numbers

Answer the following questions.

Check your answers by scanning Part 1, 3, and 4 of the article.

- 1 How many languages were given official status when the EU was founded?
- 2 How many languages are recognised as official EU languages today (as in 2015)?
- 3 How many indigenous languages are spoken in Europe, and by how many people?
- 4 How many people speak Catalan in Europe?
- 5 What percent of the population of Wales speaks Welsh?

Proficiency level: B2 and above

With the help of this exercise, you will:

learn about regional and minority languages in the EU

expand your vocabulary

practice active reading

learn the difference between *multilingualism* and *plurilingualism*

Task 2 – Find synonyms of the following expressions in Part 1 of the article below.

data

to show

inspection

to finance

Part 1

As one MEP takes to holding a 'language strike', the EU's promise of promoting language diversity has come under renewed scrutiny. In the late 1950s there were four official EU languages, today there are 24 but figures provided by the European Commission reveal that 40 million people in the EU speak 60 indigenous regional or minority languages. While language policy is a member state competence, the European Commission "helps fund projects and partnerships designed to raise awareness of minority languages, promote their teaching and learning, and thereby help them survive".

Task 3 – Find synonyms of the expressions underlined in Part 2 of the article below.

Part 2

The commitment to language and cultural diversity is enshrined in the European treaties and was further enhanced by the Lisbon treaty when respect for linguistic minorities became legally binding. "Multilingualism in the EU will not be fully completed until languages such as Irish, Basque, Galician or Catalan can be used with normality in the parliament" - Josep-Maria Terricabras, Greens/EFA MEP

The issue of the EU's treatment has come to the fore recently following Irish GUE/NGL MEP Liadh Ní Riada's decision to begin a 'stailc teanga' (language strike) for the duration of seachtain na Gaeilge (Irish language week) to raise awareness of the status afforded to the Irish language within the EU institutions. Irish became an official working language of the EU in 2007 but was immediately granted renewable five-year derogations. This derogation exempts EU institutions from providing full translation and interpretation services, as is obligatory for all other working languages.

Task 4 – Fill in the blanks by using the correct form of the verbs missing in the text. The first letter of each missing verb is given to you.

Part 3

Catalan MEP Josep-Maria Terricabas **o**..... his full support to Ní Riada and said his language confronts similar "discrimination", despite Catalan not **e**..... full 'official' status. Estimates of the number of native Catalan speakers in Andorra, France, Spain and Italy **r**..... from between four and five million people. Terricabas told the Parliament Magazine, "Catalans have been **s**.....for the official recognition of our language in the European institutions for years" and is clear that Spanish representatives are to **b**.....for a lack of progress in this regard. Terricabas added that the fight for language recognition was part of the reason "we are working to have our own independent state".

Task 5 – **True of false?**

Read Part 4 of the article and decide whether the following statements are true or false. Underline the key expressions that helped you decide.

- 1 The president of the Parliament promised to take a critical look at the current status of the Welsh language in the European Parliament.
- 2 Multilingualism has gained an increasingly high profile in the European Commission.
- 3 Davyth Hicks questioned the legal base of how multilingualism is handled by the Member States in EU primary law.

Part 4

Jill Evans, a Welsh Greens/EFA MEP is keen to emphasize that, "Many so-called 'minority' languages are actually more widely spoken than some official EU languages." Welsh is spoken by approximately 500,000 people or 19 per cent of the population of Wales and Evans notes that this is higher than the numbers that speak Irish or Maltese. She highlights that, "Welsh is already a co-official EU language which means it can be used in meetings of the council and other EU bodies but not in the parliament. "This is a situation the parliament president Martin Schulz pledged to examine during his re-election campaign last year."

Davyth Hicks, secretary general of the European language equality network (ELEN) queried the legality of the current approach to language diversity being adopted: "How can the EU and the member states ratify the Lisbon treaty and the charter of fundamental rights, which clearly states that they must "respect" linguistic diversity and that discrimination is prohibited, when we see co-official, regional, and even official languages such as Irish, are being undermined?" He adds that Europe could be a leader in "reversing language endangerment" in what has become "a global crisis", but it must "act meaningfully to safeguard its own linguistic diversity".

While the Commission officially endorses a policy of language diversity, critics have pointed out that multilingualism has gone from a dedicated portfolio in the 2007 Commission, to forming part of Androulla Vassiliou's education, culture, multilingualism and youth portfolio in 2010, to being relegated to a unit within the commission's DG for employment, social affairs and inclusion in the Juncker Commission.

GOOD TO KNOW



Please note that in **EU** terminology **multilingualism** refers to both the diversity of the languages spoken by an individual and the languages spoken in a geographical area. In the terminology of the **Council of Europe**, however, two terms are used to describe these concepts. **Multilingualism** refers to linguistic diversity in a geographical region while **plurilingualism** refers to the linguistic repertoire and communicative competence of an individual.

Answer key

Task 2

data – figures
to show – to reveal
inspection – scrutiny
to finance – to fund

Task 3

to enshrine – to lay down, to determine
to enhance – to strengthen, to foster
to complete – to accomplish
to come to the fore – to gain importance
to afford something to something – to give
derogation - exemption

Task 4

offered
enjoying
range
striving
blame

Task 5

1. True : "Welsh is already a co-official EU language which means it can be used in meetings of the council and other EU bodies but not in the parliament." This is a situation the parliament president Martin Schulz pledged to examine during his re-election campaign last year."
2. False: While the commission officially endorses a policy of language diversity, critics have pointed out that multilingualism has gone from a dedicated portfolio in the 2007 commission, to forming part of Androulla Vassiliou's education, culture, multilingualism and youth portfolio in 2010, to being relegated to a unit within the commission's DG for employment, social affairs and inclusion in the Juncker commission.
3. True: ... Davyth Hicks, secretary general of the European language equality network (ELEN) queried the legality of the current approach to language diversity being adopted: