



INTERVIEW WITH PROF. PHILIPPE VAN PARIJS

(Photo: Nick Hannes)

Today I would like to talk with you about the use of English as a lingua franca, which you firmly advocate in your writings.

There is a nice anecdote which I like to recall about English as a lingua franca. Two of my children were attending one of the European schools and one day the director announced that Romano Prodi, then President of the Commission, would visit the school together with Guy Verhofstadt, who was the President of the European Council at the time, and the Swedish Prime Minister, who was going to take over. The meeting took place in the canteen, which was not equipped with interpreting facilities. Prodi said, “Well, we are not going to make speeches, we are going to make it interactive, so the pupils can ask questions.”

Several pupils came to the microphone and asked questions, among them a Greek pupil who asked: “Mr Prodi, what is the policy of the European Union, particularly the European Commission, as regards languages?” And Prodi answered, “Well, from the very beginning of the European institutions we have always wanted to assert the equality among all the official languages of the European Union, and we shall keep doing so”. But this was happening in a canteen and how could all these kids from all sections of the European schools manage? They could manage because both the pupils and the speakers used only one language — with the exception of a brief intervention by French Commissioner Barnier, who spoke in French. This anecdote summarises, so to say, my view about the language issue: Prodi was right both in what he asserted and in the choice of the language in which he asserted it. We must reconcile a symbolic assertion of equality — which becomes more and more tenuous as the number of languages and the competence in one of them increases — with the pragmatic need to be understood in a cheap way by everyone. There is a convergence that is already going on and must be accelerated towards English as a lingua franca in which all Europeans should be able to communicate.

In your latest book (*Linguistic Justice for Europe and for the World*, Oxford University Press, forthcoming) you establish a connection between the choice of English, on the one side, and democracy and justice, on the other one.

Yes I do, but the connection is not straightforward. If one particular language is privileged, at first sight you should rather speak of injustice, because the people who speak that particular language as their mother tongue are advantaged over all the others. I do believe that there is an issue of injustice and that it needs to be addressed. Indeed, this is precisely what I devoted a whole book to. But there is nonetheless a fundamental

positive connection between the spreading of English and social justice on a European and global scale. If we want our European Union and our world to function better and become more just, we absolutely need to communicate in an effective way. Of course we can find help in the competent and difficult work of translators and interpreters, but it is extremely expensive. Translation and interpretation are available to the powerful and the wealthy, but not to the poorest layers of our society, the people who have most to gain from a more just society, and the associations that represent them. Consequently, in Europe and in the world we need to democratise competence in English as a tool, a weapon that makes it possible to communicate, to disseminate ideas, to mobilize, instead of keeping it as a privilege for the more powerful and the wealthier. This, for me, is the fundamental connection between the spreading of a lingua franca and social justice. Needless to say, this has nothing to do with English “deserving” any privilege. It is simply that we absolutely need a cheap medium of communication and that the best option is the natural language — the language of a particular linguistic community — that is already most widely learned. In today’s Europe, this happens to be English. This is the tool we all need to master sufficiently and to use it for our purposes, in particular to argue with each other, to deliberate together about the sort of institutions we want.

It is often maintained that acquiring a good command of English is very expensive and in this perspective the connection between the use of English as a lingua franca and social justice appears problematic.

Yes, to acquire a good command of English is very expensive, very difficult in several European countries, but only if they keep handicapping their young people by having them watch television and cinema dubbed instead of subtitled. There is a very simple, cheap and effective way of getting the young to learn English at a very early stage, a method that is effectively used by most of the countries that have small languages like Sweden, the Netherlands, Estonia, or Greece. Since it is too expensive to dub American films into their local languages, they subtitle them and, as a result of that, children from all social classes not only learn English better and more quickly than in the countries with big languages, but they also master the written form of their own mother tongue more quickly than in countries with “big” languages such as France, Italy, Spain, or Germany. In these countries, children, especially children whose parents cannot afford to send them to Cambridge or Oxford to improve their English, are handicapped by the dubbing policy.

You have mentioned Greece as an example. However, in a country like Greece, where all films are subtitled, parents still spend a huge amount of money to offer their children a good education, especially in foreign languages. This limits the possibility of spreading English in all layers of the population.

It is true, but, according to the latest Eurobarometer on languages, the young Greeks, by their own assessment, speak and know English better than the young Germans, despite the great linguistic distance between Greek and English, far greater of course than between German and English. Today there is this great opportunity of using modern technologies, notably the Internet, in synergy with the school system. For this to work well, we need schools that do not make kids learn English or other foreign languages in the way in which we learned classic languages. If you have an intelligent school system that uses modern media in an intelligent way, then learning English is not expensive, especially because it triggers off a snowball effect. The better these kids know English, the more they will meet people with different mother tongues and speak English with them, thereby further improving their English.

I really think that we should not over-estimate the difficulty of acquiring a reasonable level of proficiency in the common language: as soon as you are beyond some threshold, you keep learning more and more. We should not be perfectionist and say, “Well, you can only start uttering sentences when you are sure that they are fully grammatical, that you can use the subjunctive and so on”. At school languages have always been taught in an inhibiting way which makes people lack the confidence to speak. But you learn the language by speaking it imperfectly as we are doing now, you and I, in this conversation. Nearly every time we speak it, we learn it a little bit better, we correct ourselves, we try new words which we have read but never used and, in order for people to understand what we say, we make an effort to repeat and pronounce them better. In this way there is a massive, constant learning process. What is needed is to lift people, especially young people, beyond some initial threshold and create opportunities to practice the language.

In this perspective the way of teaching the language should change radically. Even though now we tend to use English as a lingua franca, the objective in teaching and learning remains native speaker competence.

I fully agree and I think the European Commission has an important role to play in that respect. In French, English is often referred to as “la langue de Shakespeare”. This is crazy. The English we need to learn, and our kids need to learn, is not “la langue de Shakespeare” at all. Of course it is a language that gives us an easier access to the British culture, but this is not the point at all. We don’t care about British culture any more — nor less — than about Italian culture or German culture, and so on. It is just a tool for us to be able to communicate in an effective way with each other, mostly non-Anglophones. This must be the purpose of the teaching of English. We don’t learn English in order to read Faulkner or Henry James or whatever. We learn it in order to be able to communicate with the Germans and the Swedes, and with the Indians and the Nigerians.

This new approach concerns the purpose but also the methods. The main reason why English is far easier to learn, for our generation or the generation of our children or grandchildren, is that it is so massively accessible in the new media environment, as compared to artificial languages that are theoretically far easier to learn, like Esperanto. You have all that material easily available at the top of your fingers on your keyboard and that must be exploited by schools in order to motivate the kids and to give them the opportunity to constantly use it.

Let’s go back to the issue of subtitling. In order to spread English through television and the Internet, we have to promote American and English products even more, instead of offering a wider choice.

This is a legitimate concern. There are several things that need to be said to address it. Firstly, when American culture penetrates our own cultural universe in a dubbed form, it is more pernicious than when it comes in the original language. If you watch an American series spoken in Italian, it is far more corrupting, far more disruptive for the Italian culture than if you have something that is spoken in the original language. Secondly, keeping quality — however understood — constant, people understandably prefer to watch films in their own language. The less you allow dubbed American films, the more people will watch local products. And, of course, the more demand there is for local films, the more local films will be produced. So, getting rid of dubbing would foster the local culture.

Nevertheless, it is true that the spreading of English facilitates direct access to American or British products or to whatever is being produced in English. But, as we can already see at the level of European Union, non-native speakers of English increasingly express themselves in English. It is extremely important that websites, books, publications and other cultural products which, being in English, have the greatest potential of spreading around the world, should not be produced exclusively by Americans, Brits or citizens of other Anglophone countries. We should increasingly see English, or Globish as some prefer to call it, as our own language, as one of the languages we speak and one we should not be ashamed of speaking with our own peculiar accents. We must feel free to transform and to enrich it, and to use it in ways and for purposes decided by us, not by its native speakers.

You mean that we should distinguish two different Englishes, one for information, an English that does not belong to anyone, and an Anglo-Saxon English.

There is already something that can be called an Indian English, a Nigerian English and so on. But there is not a single homogeneous international English. There is a wide variety of ways of speaking the same written language that should all be steered by a concern to be understood, not to speak it the way native speakers do.

Paradoxically — and I am sure you have witnessed it in the European Commission — to speak English as a second language rather than a first language can be a real advantage, if the audience you have to talk to is international. When you have a meeting and interpreting is provided, some non-native English speakers now often use English rather than relying on interpretation in order to communicate directly and most people don't use earphones and listen to them directly. Then a British person starts speaking and immediately part of the audience reaches for their earphones because Brits — unless well adjusted to international environments — tend to speak without making allowance for the fact that they are not talking to other Brits: they make jokes that are only funny for their own folk or use idiomatic expressions that are not understandable for people who don't belong to the same culture.

However, several studies show that in certain situations — mainly competitive situations — the good command of the language remains an important form of power. Non-native speakers do not feel confident — or feel less confident — when forced to speak in English and feel disadvantaged in putting through their ideas.

There are many cases illustrating inequality of that sort. Of course, if there is a job where English is constantly needed for communication, you prefer to recruit someone who can communicate properly in English, rather than someone who speaks English with great difficulty. A similar complaint is often heard among academics — more in the human sciences than in the natural sciences or in mathematics. You can have two articles that are equally good as far as the content goes, but one is turned down simply because it is written in bad English, given that nearly all scientific journals are now in English. There are many situations of that sort but, in my view, there is only one solution: promoting competence in English among non-Anglophones. In the long term, the big losers will be the native speakers of English, not the others. The more opportunities we all have to speak English, the more our English will improve, because the best way of learning a language is not to follow courses but to keep practising it with other people, natives or non-natives. At the same time, the more English is used in all sorts of communication, the more difficult it will be for us to learn and keep languages other than English. In the long term therefore the outcome of this process will be that we all in Europe — where this process is well advanced in the younger

generations — and increasingly in other parts of the world shall be bilingual or more, with English as one of our languages. With one exception: native English speakers, who will be condemned, whatever their goodwill, to speak English and only English, precisely because all the others will know English so well that there will be very few opportunities for Anglophones to use languages other than English. The result is that tomorrow the Anglophones will be the only monolinguals, and therefore those who suffer from a linguistic handicap.

What you imply is that, even if we all use English as a contact language, multilingualism will become the rule and is indeed an asset.

What follows from what I have just said is that bilingualism, rather than multilingualism, will gradually become quasi-universal because of the mechanisms that are at work in what I call the maxi-min dynamics: in any gathering of people with different mother tongues, the language that will tend to be used is the language best known by the person who speaks it less well. In more and more gatherings of this sort, this maxi-min language is English. Being used more often, it keeps spreading more widely, thereby making more and more people competent in a language distinct from their mother tongue. Multilingualism, instead, will be difficult to achieve and maintain. It can only be expected to become and remain the rule rather than the exception in specific contexts. In Belgium, for example, trilingualism can and should be aimed for. The Flemish should maintain the high level of French that they currently have, and more Francophones should become competent in Dutch. But this will not be easy, and is not made easier by competition with English.

Being bilingual for someone who is not an Anglophone will be like being able to write or being able to use the Internet: it will really be the minimal qualification that you need for whatever you want to do in life. In this sense English is more than an asset, it is a precondition for doing practically everything and it will be increasingly so. Though difficult to maintain, multilingualism can of course be an asset too. It will certainly remain an advantage, not only in economic terms but also for the nature of the relationships you can have with other people. Speaking someone's mother tongue makes for a relationship very different from the one you can have if you impose your own language on the other or if you both speak a lingua franca.

In her inspiring book on the lingua franca, Jocelyne Dakhlia maintains that, besides being a common tool, the lingua franca used in the Mediterranean till the 19th century also functioned as a tool to mark a difference and underline that the interlocutor did not belong to the same community. The same may apply for English: if I make an effort, for instance, to speak French with you or you Italian with me, it means that we make an effort to be accepted in the community of the other, whereas if we speak a language which is foreign for both of us, we place the exchange in a sort of no man's land.

A lingua franca may be more impersonal, but it doesn't mean that you can't create personal relationships through it. Indeed, sometimes the use of a lingua franca as an alternative to each speaking their own language can make a great contribution to the quality of personal relationships. In this respect, I am struck, for example, by the experience of the Re-Bel initiative — www.rethinkingbelgium.eu —, an initiative launched in April 2009 in order to get academics from all over Belgium to think and debate together about the future of the country. We decided from the start that we would use English for all our public and less public meetings, as well as for all our publications. This makes pragmatic sense, because the knowledge of English for

Belgians under 50 is on average higher than the knowledge of the second national language and because we want to associate to our debates some of the many non-Belgian EU-linked Brusselers who are not fluent in either Dutch or French yet also have a stake in the future of this part of the world. But in addition the choice of English creates a different relationship between Belgian participants, precisely because of what you said, this neutral ground. The very fact that we accept not to speak our own language, that is either Dutch or French, indicates that we want to talk equally to all and not primarily to our own community. We make the effort of using a language that is more difficult for us to speak and write than our own in order to be better understood by the others.

This should not be understood as denying that it would be a great loss here in Belgium if we could only communicate in English across the language border. To understand well what is going on in the other part of the country, understanding and reading its language is essential. But even with only two languages this is difficult to achieve and maintain. When you have 23 languages, as is the case in the EU, knowing the language of all the others is, of course, impossible. Consequently, the resolute adoption of English, which may make sense under some conditions in the Belgian context, is inescapable in the EU context. As Abram De Swaan puts it, “the more languages, the more English”.

Do you see this convergence towards English as a natural development or is it an ideal which you should strive towards?

Both. There is a powerful mechanism at work, to which I have already referred. It is the interaction between what I call probability-sensitive learning — we have both a greater opportunity and a greater motivation to learn a language when there is a high probability of using it — and maxi-min-driven choice — in interactions among multilinguals, we tend to systematically use the language for which the lowest level of competence is higher than for any other, in other words to choose the language that excludes less people than any other would.

So, if there is at least one person who does not know Dutch, at least one person who does not know French or at least one person who does not know Italian, but everyone knows at least some English, you settle on English as the maxi-min language — in this case the only language which everyone knows at least a little bit — even if, say, Italian is the native language for nearly all the participants in the conversation and English for none of them. This is what drives the very quick spreading of English.

In chapter 1 of my *Linguistic Justice* book I have used the database of the latest Eurobarometer on languages and decomposed the data according to age groups. They show a stagnation of the average number of people who say they speak German or French well or very well, some increase for Spanish, stagnation for Italian and explosion for English in the younger generation. This is not the outcome of a plot, a big conspiracy by the CIA, the American government, the British Council or whatever, but the necessary consequence of the micro-mechanisms which I call the “maxi-min dynamics”.

This is why English spreads. Moreover, I believe that this spreading should be accelerated. Competence in English should be democratised far more deeply, so that good confidence in English will not be restricted to the people who can pay a lot of money to send their children to good English courses or to spend some time in the US or in Britain. English learning should really be democratised the way in which it is

democratised in Sweden, in the Netherlands, or in Finland. Let's take Finland. There is no country in Europe where the national language is more remote from English than Finland, and yet there you have a very high level of proficiency in English in all social classes. If it is possible for Finland, it must be possible for Italy, for Spain, for France, and so on. This is what we should aim for.

There is a growing concern, precisely in Nordic countries, about young researchers or scientists losing the ability to speak about their areas of study in their own languages.

This concern is understandably expressed in a growing number of countries, as the pressure for more and more English as a medium of higher education gets stronger. As far as scientific developments as such are concerned, I would say "who cares?", or rather "who should care?". It is like in the Middle Ages, when all scholarship was in Latin and the whole community of scholars was involved, whatever their mother tongue. The same is happening now, far more massively, with English. There are great advantages with having a language in which everyone can communicate, explain, discuss, criticise, correct, improve, and so on. However, there are two problems, which echo the reasons why Latin was abandoned in the 18th century. These reasons can provide justifications for the shift to national languages at all levels of education, and not just explanations, on a par with the demands of nation building.

The first reason is that, if you use the language of the people, you can democratise higher education more than would otherwise be the case. As long as it operated in Latin, higher education was restricted to people who had had the opportunity to attend Latin-medium secondary schools, and this was a very small elite. The more you could rely on the national language, the broader the range of people from all social classes you could hope to reach. This argument is used today too. People say: "If we impose English for the master and even bachelor degrees, we will have an even more unacceptable level of social selection that we have now".

The second reason for using national languages is that the knowledge that is developed in universities and in higher education should irrigate society. The more this is done in a language that is not understood by the rest of society, the worse it is in this respect.

These two arguments against the use of Latin in the 18th century and against the use of English in the 21st have some force. The more English spreads from an early age in all social classes, as has been happening in the Nordic countries, the weaker both of these arguments become. But they never become entirely irrelevant.

This brings us back to the connection between more English and more democracy.

There is a connection between the spreading of English and democracy, but democracy in two very different senses. When I speak about the democratisation of competence in English, I simply mean its dissemination through all the social classes. That is what is needed. And what is it needed for? Among other things, it is needed to make the functioning of supranational entities, like the European Union, more democratic. Thanks to this common language, more people can take part in what happens at the European level than would be the case without it.

Don't you think that if English were the only language of the European Union, then people would feel the Union as something even more remote and difficult to accept than if it speaks to them in their own language?

On the contrary. The gap is undeniable. However, the only serious way of bridging it is not by making the institutions function multilingually, at a very high cost, but by spreading competence in the common language. It is an illusion to believe that the institutions can be brought closer to the people by functioning in different languages, just as it is an illusion to believe that Europe can be brought closer to the people by having several capitals. On the contrary, paradoxically, it is linguistic concentration — and similarly the geographical concentration of its political institutions — that will bring Europe closer to the people. If you have a centre that communicates at great expense in 23 languages with the citizens but does not enable all the people on the ground, all the people in the *demos*, to communicate with each other, then you have a vertical relationship. The people still cannot communicate smoothly with each other directly. At the European level, just as happened at national levels in the past, you need this convergence towards a common language, so that all the people can communicate, coordinate, cooperate, mobilize with each other in a cheap and effective way. My view is that something analogous to the acquisition of common national languages in the past must happen at the supranational level in Europe and in the world. But the lingua franca must not supersede the national languages, in the way in which national languages displaced local languages in the past.

What we need — and this is in a nutshell the central claim of my book — is to combine a quick dissemination of the lingua franca with a firm protection of other languages in line with what is commonly called the “linguistic territoriality principle”: this principle demands that anyone settling in one place should be expected to learn, if not already known, the official language of the place. In this way English will spread as the lingua franca which we all need to know, but without replacing the national or sub-national languages.

The relation between the lingua franca and the national or local languages is becoming a problematic issue in areas of Europe with strong separatist movements, which may see the spreading of English as a good opportunity to get rid of the national language: “We can get along very well with English and our local language and we no longer need the national language”.

There are probably cases like this. Catalonia is probably the region where we come closest to this phenomenon. In Flanders, for example, this does not happen, and in September 2010 a hint in this direction by the current Flemish Minister of Education aroused strong protest. French is still the obligatory second school language before English, even though Flemish pupils end up more proficient in English because of television. Even Catalan nationalists do not seriously want to get rid of Spanish either: it is clearly an advantage for them to know Spanish. In the end, having a common currency is more of a pro-secession factor than having a common language: you can secede from Belgium or from Spain, but you still have the euro.

Another issue with an impact on linguistic regimes is machine translation. Machine translation is improving at such a rapid pace that in the future it might prove the best solution for our communication problems, making a lingua franca superfluous.

You could only dispense with the common language if you had two software linked to each other. One recognises the sounds you produce, and associates them with a written text. Another transforms the outcome of the first transformation into sentences in another language. We have software of the first type and we know the difficulties they face. Even in the best acoustic conditions, when there is no background noise, when it is

always the same voice producing the same sounds, when no proper name or foreign word is used, when there are no references to a local culture, voice recognition software is already quite laborious. When instead you have background noises, different voices, different accents, neologisms, etc., the quality of the outcome quickly becomes extremely low. And this poor outcome supplies the input for the second software that translates from one language into another. With a highly standardised language, full sentences, etc. computers can help a lot. But as soon as you have colloquial expressions, cryptic allusions, foreign words, and so on, it becomes extremely unreliable. In addition, both softwares often have to wait for the end of the sentences before proposing interpretations, which means significant delays in addition to significant uncertainties when trying to guess, after these two transformations, what the original might have been.

This applies to oral communication. As for written communication, do you think that machine translation would contribute to keep multilingualism?

Obviously there are less difficulties with written texts, as only one of the two steps is needed, and I am certainly not denying the great help that is already provided and can be further expected from machine translation. But the more stilted, the less casual the writing, the better it works. If you know that the machine is going to translate what you write, you have to constrain the way in which you write, so that the machine can make sense of it. If you write in a spontaneous way, using proper names or neologisms that the machine is not be able to recognise difficulties begin. But I fully agree with you that if humans were more writing beings than speaking beings, it would be far less difficult for the machines to ensure multilingual communication.

One last question. Nowadays, side by side with the massive spreading of English, we witness also a trend to keep and push multilingualism. On the Internet the number of pages in different languages is increasing — the efforts for localisation made by Microsoft, for example, are impressive. Could we say that we are witnessing a two-way development: on the one hand, English is more and more used as a lingua franca and, on the other one, multilingualism keeps developing, even in traditionally monolingual countries like the United States, where Spanish now plays a major role.

The two phenomena you mention are very different. The fact that Spanish is more present than ever in the US, is by no means evidence for the spreading of Spanish to more people. Quite to the contrary, it is a correlate of one of the ways in which English is spreading to more people. All these Hispanics who live in the United States learn far more English than they would have done had they stayed in Mexico and there is very little learning of Spanish in the US by those who do not have Spanish as their mother tongue. The geographical dissemination of Spanish on Anglophone territory is part of a process of substitution of English for Spanish, not the other way around, albeit one that proceeds more slowly than in the past.

Do you not think, however, that this phenomenon forces the Americans to accept the existence of bilingualism, whereas up to now they have been used to living in a monolingual environment?

The US have never been a monolingual country, even irrespective of Spanish. Half the people in the city of New York do not have English as their mother tongue, but speak all sorts of languages. Multilingualism has been the rule in the country since the first settlers. More people went to the US as immigrants from Italy or Germany than from

England, but they all ended up speaking English with each other. With the Hispanics, however, there is a new challenge for a number of reasons. One is that they are far more numerous to come. Secondly, they come from nearby and do not lose touch with their place of origin. And thirdly, they come at a time when all these new media are available which they can develop in their own language locally from the very beginning. So they keep watching Spanish-language television or hearing Spanish-speaking radio in their homes and in their bars, whereas in the past migrants were immersed in the Anglo-Saxon culture more quickly and more fully.

This new situation has forced the US to think about language policy in a way that they have never had to do before. The spreading of the English-only movement and the declaration of English as the official language in an increasing number of states is a reflection of this completely new challenge for the United States. As a consequence we now witness a pressure to give up accommodating policies of a type that never existed in Europe, such as printing voting ballots in many languages as long as there is a sufficient number of people asking for voting ballots in those languages. Firmer signals are being sent to the effect that everybody should learn English. Yes, language policies are changing in the US, I fully agree with that, but it is not due to multilingualism, in the sense of Americans choosing to learn languages other than English.

However multilingualism is spreading rapidly, for example, on the Internet.

Yes, that is true too. When you look at the presence of the various languages on the Internet, you can see that the relative share of English on the Internet is declining, but this is not difficult to understand if we keep in mind that the Internet initially developed in the United States and then spread to many other countries. Hence, it is not surprising that the relative — not the absolute — presence of English on the Internet is shrinking. But the key thing is that the growing content in Japanese is read by Japanese people only, the growing content in Finnish is read by Finnish people only, and so on. On the contrary, the growing content in English is read by people all over the world. What is meant to spread beyond borders is more than ever in English. It is therefore important to distinguish between these two aspects. The lingua franca is of course not the language spoken by people who share the same mother tongue. Its relative overall presence on the internet gradually decreases, while its relative presence *qua* lingua franca in internet communication grows quickly.

By way of conclusion, how do you judge the EU linguistic policy?

As far as language use by the EU institutions themselves is concerned, I believe the largely implicit policy is evolving slowly and cautiously in the right direction. In the years to come it will have to constantly adjust to the fact that English will be further and further democratised even in those countries in which it is least known now. The more and the better people know English, the more often the question will be raised whether it is really necessary to translate documents, even official documents, even directly applicable technical legislation for example, into 23 or more languages. Is it worth paying the cost of checking and double-checking that the job properly done implies, bearing in mind that this legislation may never be read or used, say, in Maltese or in Estonian, and that, even were it to be used, people may still want to go back to the source language in order to make sure they understand what the text actually says? This means that English will gradually replace multilingualism not only on the huge posters that hang from the Berlaymont building, but also in highly sensitive contexts such as directly-applicable legislation or plenary session interventions by members of the European Parliament. It will require some courage to move resolutely in this direction,

and away from the symbolic assertion of the equal worth of all national languages and cultures. But this is the path one must dare to openly tread.

However, the EU's linguistic policy, implicit or explicit, is not confined to the linguistic practices of its own institutions. There is, for example, a significant risk that insensitive interpretations of the honourable principles of free movement or of non-discrimination might undermine the capacity of some member states or regions to protect their own language against the invasion of stronger ones. The EU will have to make sure that national or regional constraints on the medium of education and of public communication do not get overridden by a narrow-minded obsession with the operation of a single market.

At the same time, more can and should be done, in the spirit of the Maalouf Commission's report to Commissioner Orban, to encourage the learning of a variety of other European languages. Far more should be done to ban or tax dubbing and to promote subtitling on TV, on DVDs and in cinemas, so as to use the visual medias more intelligently, all over Europe, to improve competence in English and other foreign languages. Far more should be done to support experiments and mutual learning in multilingual schooling, especially in difficult situations in which immigrant children form a significant part of the school population.

In 2001, the Eco-Koolhaas-Hayek report to Romano Prodi on "Brussels Capital of Europe" had as one of its main recommendations that Brussels should house an "Institute for Multilingualism". More than such an institute, the capital of Europe needs multifarious, carefully monitored experiments in multilingual education. With over half its school population consisting of children of foreign nationality or of recent foreign origin, with two national languages to be learned in order not to be handicapped on the labour market and with English essential at the heart of Europe, there is a formidable and urgent challenge here. But also an opportunity for the EU to invest intelligently in its capital city, with benefits accruing not only to the children of its own employees and of the people working for the countless European civil society organizations present in Brussels, but also, if the experiments are well designed, monitored and publicized, to the language-learning efficiency of every member state.

Thank you very much.

Thank you!