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Approaches to Dealing with Multiple Languages in the European Union: Could Esperanto be the Next Euro?

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Approaches to Dealing with Multiple Languages in the European Union: Could Esperanto be the Next Euro?

A Master's Thesis submitted to

The Faculty of the Master of Science in International Studies Program

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Master of Science in International Studies

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May 2002
Abstract

Currently the European Union has twelve official languages, and as new countries are added to the European Union, the number of official languages will increase. Through the Economic and Monetary Union, the European Union addressed the issue of multiple currencies in the union by adopting a single new currency. Could the adoption of a single language, such as Esperanto, as the official language of the European Union be as widely accepted in the European Union as the euro is in the Economic and Monetary Union? Through an analysis of historical precedents within the European Union, this paper explores the guarantee of national culture through language in the European Union. It concludes that the adoption of any one language would limit transparency and thus democracy in the European Union, contrary to the example of the adoption of the single currency which has enhanced transparency in the monetary union.
# Table of Contents

Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1
The Euro ......................................................................................................................... 4
Methods of Dealing with Multiple Official Languages .............................................. 8
  The Issue of Multiple Languages in Other Political Bodies ..................................... 9
    Latin in Europe ....................................................................................................... 9
  The United Nations .................................................................................................. 10
  The Soviet Union ..................................................................................................... 10
  Israel ......................................................................................................................... 12
Current Approach in the European Union ................................................................. 13
  Translation and Interpretation ................................................................................. 15
  Multilingualism ....................................................................................................... 23
Possible New Approaches for the European Union .................................................... 29
  Developing an Existing Language into a Universal Language ............................... 29
  Adopting an International Auxiliary Language, Esperanto .................................. 32
Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 36
Bibliography .................................................................................................................. 38
Introduction

The European Union began as the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951, with six member countries: Belgium, West Germany, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Italy. In 1958, the same six countries formed the European Communities with the adoption of the Treaty of Rome. Expansion of the economic union continued, and with the Maastricht Treaty the European Community became the European Union in 1993. The Maastricht Treaty also created the Economic and Monetary Union which defined a structure including a complete economic union with a common currency and central bank, and a political union through the Common Foreign and Security Policy. The European Union today has fifteen members: the original six plus Austria, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom. The former East Germany also became part of the European Union at German Reunification.

The European Union is founded on two principles which are tantamount to its definition of democracy: subsidiarity and transparency. Subsidiarity allows decisions to be made at the lowest level possible. This creates a strong local government where the citizens have a strong voice in decisions that will affect them. For example, if Sweden wishes to

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participate in the Economic and Monetary Union, the Swedish people must pass a referendum before the Swedish government may apply for membership. Communication in a member state's official language is critical to permit local government input and thus for the principle of subsidiarity to be upheld. Transparency is open information and communication from the European Union down to the citizens so they can make informed decisions. For example, prices in euros can be compared across countries without having to convert one currency to another. Again, being able to communicate in the member state's majority language is critical to the principle of transparency.

The European Union reached a major milestone in the development of economic union on January 1, 2002, when the euro became legal tender in the eleven member states participating in the Economic and Monetary Union. The next milestone will be the accession of some of the candidate countries that have been working during the past decade to meet the admission criteria to prove they are economically and politically stable enough to become European Union members. There are currently thirteen candidate countries: Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, and Turkey. Some of these countries could be admitted to the European Union as early as 2003. The number of additional official languages, if current European

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Union policy defining official languages is followed, would double to 24. The new languages would be Bulgarian, Czech, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Hungarian, Polish, Romanian, Slovene, Slovak, Turkish, and Maltese.

The language spoken by a group of people is part of its cultural identity, and thus the language spoken by a majority of the citizens in a country is part of its national identity. The cultural diversity of Europe is a major obstacle to true unity in the European Union, but it is also one of the assets of Europe. The European Union has found ways to preserve this cultural diversity, and thus preserve the identity of its citizens. It must take cultural identity into account when weighing the impact of its programs, in order to show that it values its cultural diversity. Preserving cultural identities of member states hinges on preserving the language. As the European Union grows, its citizens are becoming more concerned about the cultural preservation of their language. 63% of European Union citizens polled by the European Union agree that enlargement of the European Union means that the current languages must be better protected. Linguist Peter Trudgill states, “The attempted


6 The European Union: Still Enlarging, p. 6.


replacement of one language by another entails an effort (which may be well-intentioned of course) to obliterate whole cultures." 10  Gerry T.M. Altmann, another linguist, states:

To lose a language is to lose an entire history. Much folklore is passed down through the generations by word of mouth only... Lose a language, and you lose that past, and everything that its speakers’ ancestors struggled to achieve. 11

European Union expansion will result in growing concerns about how to preserve the principles of transparency and subsidiarity, and also how to preserve Europe’s cultural diversity. The population of the European Union will increase by almost fifty percent, and most of these new European Union citizens will speak a language other than one of the European Union official languages. Are the methods being used currently by the European Union to handle the large and growing number of official languages adequate, or could the adoption of a single currently unofficial language, such as the artificial language Esperanto, be as widely accepted in the European Union as the adoption of a single new currency, the euro, is in the Economic and Monetary Union?

The Euro

Until 1971, the Bretton Woods system specified the United States dollar for international payments, and other currencies were pegged against the dollar. When Bretton


Woods broke down in 1971, a new currency was needed in Europe against which to peg exchange rates.\textsuperscript{12} A chain of events, going from competition among the currencies to a coordinated monetary policy to a centralized fiscal policy, took place. The German \textit{deutsche Mark} was used as a de facto common currency because of its stability during the competition phase. Later, the European currencies were pegged against each other and revalued in order to conform to a monetary policy. Finally, a coordinated fiscal policy regulating national debt and payments was developed with a standard fixed exchange rate between the currencies.\textsuperscript{13} This lengthy process culminated in the creation of the euro, a single new currency to be circulated in the participating European countries, avoiding the cultural problems associated with any single national currency. Previously the German \textit{deutsche Mark} was used as a de facto common currency and the German monetary system furnished a model for the European monetary system. However, this temporary practice was possible because the \textit{Bundesbank}, or German Central Bank, is constitutionally independent of the German government.\textsuperscript{14} Cultural issues of identity prevented the acceptance of a German monetary system by the other European countries, even though the German system functioned as the de facto system.


\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 141-142.

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 154.
Economic integration in Europe culminated on January 1, 2002, when the euro became circulating legal tender.\textsuperscript{15} The Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) consists of all European Union members with the exception of the United Kingdom, Denmark and Sweden. On January 1, 1999, seven years after the creation of the Economic and Monetary Union by the Maastricht Treaty,\textsuperscript{16} the euro became an official accounting currency, and it was used on bank statements and price tags in addition to the local currency.\textsuperscript{17} The euro was not the official currency of any one country before monetary union. In addition to meeting fiscal convergence criteria, the member countries had to change their mints, price tags, cash machines, credit card systems, menus, and any other financial programs that used the old currency. Despite the great changes, on January 2, 2002, the first shopping day the new currency was in circulation, Europeans were eager to go out and exchange their old currency for the new. For example, in Germany, waitresses ran out of smaller currency because customers were paying in large Deutschmark bills in order to get euros as change. The phrase of the day in Germany was \textit{“Euro oder D-Mark?”}\textsuperscript{18} After two or three more shopping days, cashiers no longer asked the question, assuming the purchaser would be using euros.


\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 11.

\textsuperscript{18} Translated as \textit{“Euros or German Marks?”}
The adoption of the euro seeks stability in the European monetary system. The member countries are obligated to be fiscally responsible in managing public finances that will be defined and implemented by the European Central Bank. The single European market is expanded because internal costs, such as transaction and exchange fees, are eliminated, so trade and investment within the euro zone are facilitated.\footnote{See Davidson, Jonathan and Maeve O’Brien, eds. \textit{The European Union: A Guide for Americans}, p. 11-12.} Externally, the European Central Bank will handle foreign exchange, reserves and payments. The euro has the potential to account for 25\% of the foreign exchange reserves worldwide.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 12.}

Three weeks after the introduction of the euro as legal tender, the euro accounted for 90\% of the money circulating in the Economic and Monetary Union, and the director of the European Central Bank stated that the adaptation was almost complete in the first two weeks.\footnote{See “Europe Goes Euro”, http://dw-world.de/english/0,3367,1431_A_412399,00.html.} Europeans living in the Economic and Monetary Union member countries readily accepted the Euro, with 67.2\% polled stating they are happy or quite happy that the euro has become their currency.\footnote{See Gallup Europe. \textit{Attitudes sur l’Euro – Zone Euro} (Attitudes on the Euro – Euro Zone). http://europa.eu.int/euro/html/dossiers/00716/00716-fr.pdf, Table 31.} Additionally, the euro as a common currency in Europe has created a sense of unity and European-ness. 64.1\% of the Europeans living in the Economic and Monetary Union responded that they feel more European now that they are using euros than...
they did before.\textsuperscript{23} The euro has promoted a feeling of European integration among citizens, as well as truly creating a single market rather than a common market in the Economic and Monetary Union. The principle of transparency is preserved as now prices and rates between member countries can easily be compared since they are in the same currency.

\textbf{Methods of Dealing with Multiple Official Languages}

Just as the European economic union had to deal with multiple currencies, the political union has to deal with multiple languages. This issue is especially critical now, since the European Union is in the process of expansion.

Because the members of the European Union speak different languages, they need to overcome the communication barrier this presents. There are four ways of promoting communication within multilingual or international bodies: using translation and interpretation, fostering the growth of multilingualism, developing an existing language into a universal language, or adopting an international auxiliary language.\textsuperscript{24} The European Union is currently using variations of two of these approaches: translation and interpretation, and multilingualism. These approaches have been used with varying degrees of success by other international bodies throughout history. Various principles of cultural sovereignty and democracy are compromised with the choice of one approach over another.

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Ibid.}, Table 30.
The Issue of Multiple Languages in Other Political Bodies

Other political bodies and nations have faced the problem of official languages and communication when the diverse population of the nation or organization included many varied languages. However, no example appears sufficiently analogous to provide a solution for the European Union.

Latin in Europe

Historically, the use of a single language as a means of communication in Europe is not without precedent. As a result of the spread of the Roman Empire, Latin became the *lingua franca*, or common language throughout Europe.\(^{25}\) It was used for international communication, science, education through the eighteenth century, and by the Catholic Church until the twentieth century.\(^{26}\) Its decline coincides with the rise of democracy. The elite in the Church, governments, or universities spoke Latin whereas the common people spoke vernacular languages. This is analogous to the importance of transparency in the European Union, and explains why the European Union has emphasized the necessity of multiple official languages in order to preserve democracy.


\(^{25}\) See Trudgill, Peter. *Sociolinguistics*, p. 158.

The United Nations

As a worldwide political body, the United Nations has had to deal with the issue of international communication. With almost 160 languages spoken by its delegates, it selected six official languages: English, Chinese, Russian, Arabic, French and Spanish. It relies on interpreting as its method for dealing with such diversity. However, the United Nations is a supra-national political organization which has no citizens, whereas the European Union is an economic and political union with a concern for its individual citizens. The European Union must make its legislation and communications accessible to its citizens, whereas the United Nations only has to make its communiqués accessible to its delegates. It is up to the member nations to convey the information to their citizens.

The Soviet Union

The former Soviet Union promoted an existing language, Russian, as the official language of the country. The centralized authority imposed Russian to promote solidarity and ideological assimilation. In 1970, 142 million Soviet citizens stated Russian was their maternal language, and another 42 million stated they spoke Russian as a second language.

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29 Ibid., p. 366.

However, about 130 languages were spoken in the former Soviet Union, and half of them were also written.\textsuperscript{31} The policy of enforcing uniformity and the Russian language over minority languages began under Stalin. It was politically correct to study Russian and to send one's children to Russian speaking schools. Also, the percentages of minority language speakers decreased in some areas as Russian speaking government officials moved into remote areas and did not learn the local language.\textsuperscript{32} This example is not analogous to the European Union, however, because the Soviet Union enforced a strong central government, which is the opposite of the goal of the European Union. The European Union promotes subsidiarity, or decision making being taken as close as possible to the citizens.\textsuperscript{33} The lack of success of enforcing Russian as the official language in the Soviet Union is evidenced by the fact that the former Soviet Republics applying for European Union membership do not consider Russian their official language. Rather, Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian will be new official languages when these countries are admitted to the European Union. If Russian were made an official language at the accession of the Eastern European candidate countries instead of their official languages, transparency would still exist because Russian is a widely spoken second language due to the former Soviet Union's policy. However, the principle of

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., p. 357.

\textsuperscript{32} Trudgill, Peter. Sociolinguistics, pp. 154-155.

subsidiarity would suffer because these countries have chosen to use their original cultural languages as their official languages rather than Russian. The European Union has decided to preserve the tenets of democracy despite intensifying the issue of dealing with multiple languages.

**Israel**

In Israel, the approach of championing the revival of a dead language and adopting it as the official language was followed. This is similar to the approach of adopting an artificial language, since neither a dead nor an artificial language is spoken on a daily basis as a native language by anyone. Hebrew was selected as a unifying language in Israel in 1948 to unite the heterogeneous population which spoke diverse languages but held a common religious heritage, part of which was the Hebrew language. The ancient Hebrew language was not spoken after about 250 B.C., although it was still used for prayer in the Jewish religion. Modern Hebrew was reborn in the 19th century, and is now spoken by about 3 million people. On the surface this seems analogous to the situation in the European Union: a political body has formed voluntarily of citizens who speak many diverse languages. Rather than selecting one of the languages spoken by a group of citizens, the founders of Israel selected a formerly dead religious language as the official language. However, the choice of

Hebrew was based on religious and cultural reasons, rather than on the avoidance of political conflict. Israel was founded as a religious state, and the language unified the people of that religion. There is no analogous language in the European Union that unites its citizens in some religious, cultural or social manner.

**Current Approach in the European Union**

The European Union has eleven official languages: English, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Greek, Finnish, Italian, Dutch, Danish and Swedish. Irish Gaelic is considered an official treaty language, but it is not always included in the list of official languages. Current European Union policy recognizes the majority language spoken by each member country, although additional minority languages are spoken by citizens of the member countries. Therefore, a compromise has already been made by the European Union in not allowing all languages spoken by its citizens to be official languages.

The European Union defines multilingualism as “equal status for the official languages.” The legislation of the European Union must be accessible to all its citizens for debate and discussion.\(^{36}\) The European Union follows a multilingual approach in that it supports multiple official languages into which it translates all its laws and official documents. However, it has not truly followed the approach of multilingualism since it does not assume its members or citizens can understand more than one of the official European
Union languages.

In 1958, the first regulation adopted by the European Community (now the European Union) established the right of citizens to use their official language. This set a precedent for the official language of each member country as an official European Union language. The European Union recognizes as a basic tenet of democracy that all these official languages are equal because the European Union legislation has to be comprehensible to its citizens. The Amsterdam Treaty adopted by the European Union in 1997 reinforces this precedent; it confers the right on the citizens of the European Union to be able to write to a body of the European Union in any one of these twelve official languages and receive a response in the same language. This allows the citizens of the European Union to communicate with the government in their own language, thus preserving the culture associated with that language and keeping communication open.

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Translation and Interpretation

The European Union currently uses translation and interpretation as its main approach to multiple official languages. Legislation requires that all official documentation of the European Union, including the entire body of law, be translated into all the official languages.

Written translation is handled by the Translation Service of the European Commission. See Table 1 for the budget and staff of the Translation Service. In addition, the European Commission employs 42 lawyer-linguists. This is the largest translation staff in the world, yet it still needs to employ additional freelance translators to assist with the workload. Fifteen to twenty percent of the text for translation is sent to freelance translators. In 2001, freelance translators translated 258,005 pages, and edited 10,468 machine translated pages. In 2001, 6,749 pages translated by the Translation Service were into or out of a language other than one of the eleven official European Union languages.

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43 Ibid.
In addition to manual written translation, machine or computerized translation is also used, including voice-recognition software\textsuperscript{44} and the Systran system, which is an internal system developed by the European Commission over the past 25 years.\textsuperscript{45} Freelance translators edited the machine translated pages.\textsuperscript{46}

Simultaneous interpretation in the European Union is handled by the Joint Interpreting and Conference Staff. See Table 1 for the budget and staff of the Joint Interpreting and Conference Staff. The staff relies heavily on external interpreters, with a ratio of 51\% permanent staff interpreters to 49\% contractors. In 2001, the staff worked 146,249 interpreter-days at 11,767 meeting days,\textsuperscript{47} which averages over twelve interpreters per day-long meeting.


12.5% of the European Commission staff work in the language services. The total costs for translation and interpretation were 0.3% of the total European Union budget of 85.5 billion euro. The European Commission promotes the fact that “Multilingualism cost each European citizen only two euros a year.” The figure is actually just under two euros a year, and even if the budget for translation and interpretation were doubled with the accession of the candidate countries, the cost per citizen would be less than 2.6 euros per year. Thus the costs for translation and interpretation are minimal and the benefits for a democratic union with the preservation of transparency, subsidiarity and cultural diversity are relatively inexpensive.

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49 Ibid.
The approach of translation and interpretation being used by the European Union assumes that no two members of the European Union may speak a common language. This approach allows all citizens to use their maternal language as long as it is one of the official languages. If the current thirteen candidate countries (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, and Turkey) all become European Union members, current policy mandates an increase in the number of official languages to 24. The new languages would be Bulgarian, Czech, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Hungarian, Polish, Romanian, Slovene, Slovak, Turkish, and Maltese. For each new member country added to the European Union, the European Commission’s Translation Service will need to find approximately one hundred qualified translators. In addition, every year and with every new official language, the number of pages translated by the Translation Service will increase by 10%. This could more than double the translation load on the European Union to over 3 million pages per year requiring a staff of over 4,300 translators.

There is evidence that the European Commission seeks to alter current policy due to the economic burden encountered by the commitment to translation. The European

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50 See The European Union: Still Enlarging, pp. 5-7.
51 See “Enlarging the European Union”, p. n/a (map).
52 See The European Union: Still Enlarging, p. 6.
Commission has proposed that patents submitted to the European Patent Office (EPO) only have to be translated into one of the three EPO working languages: English, German or French, rather than into all the official European Union languages. To date, half the cost of a patent went to translation, making European patents more expensive than American or Japanese patents.\(^{54}\) Thus this compromise of the well established precedent for all official languages is due to cost and international economic competition.

Translation costs appear equally burdensome for candidate countries preparing for European Union membership; each is required to translate the entire body of European Union law (the *acquis communautaire*) into its official language. The *acquis* contains about 60,000 to 70,000 pages. Through the Phare program, the European Union assists candidate countries with this translation.\(^{55}\) This assistance is administered through TAIEX (Technical Assistance Information Exchange Office). The TAIEX budget for 2000 was 12 million Euro, of which 250,000 euro was budgeted for assisting the candidate countries with their translation and interpretation efforts.\(^{56}\) Beyond this subsidy, the candidate countries are responsible for the additional translation costs. These vary greatly, depending on how much the country could


budget and how much it determined needed to be budgeted for translation. For example, the Hungarian Ministry of Justice has allocated 1.15 million Euro for the 2001-2002 budget for this translation.\footnote{See Commission of the European Communities, “2001 Regular Report on Hungary’s Progress Towards Accession.”, p. 95.} By comparison, the Translation, Documentation and Information Centre in Lithuania has a budget of only 190,000 Euro.\footnote{Commission of the European Communities, “2001 Regular Report on Lithuania’s Progress Towards Accession.” November 13, 2001, p. 105.}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Official Journal (Primary and/or Secondary)</th>
<th>Primary Treaties</th>
<th>Secondary Law</th>
<th>Pages Revised</th>
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<td>3000</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>45000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>30000</td>
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<td>25000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>28500</td>
<td></td>
<td>20000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Malta</td>
<td>all</td>
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<td>Poland</td>
<td>48000</td>
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<td>all</td>
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Malta and Slovenia both require “urgent” further efforts to meet the goal of translating the *acquis* before their accession.\(^{60}\) Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania require “considerable” further effort.\(^{61}\) Poland set a national goal to complete the translation six to seven months before accession, however the European Union has stated that Poland must make “significant additional effort” to meet this goal.\(^{62}\)


Both Hungary and Latvia use terminology databases to assist with the translation.\textsuperscript{63} Latvia's database includes English as well as Latvian terms.\textsuperscript{64} Estonia is also translating its law into English.\textsuperscript{65} Malta uses both English and Italian versions of the \textit{acquis} for its translation into Maltese, and computer software is helping with the effort.\textsuperscript{66}


According to the 2001 regular reports for the Eastern European accession candidate countries, all of them must pay due attention to the necessity of conference interpreters in order to meet the accession criteria and become European Union members.\(^{67}\)

**Multilingualism**

The European Union considers itself to be multilingual. This is accurate insofar as multiple languages are spoken in the European Union. However, the members of the European Union are not necessarily multilingual as most member states only recognize one official language, yet many minority languages are spoken in Europe. Thus conflicting signals do exist in European Union efforts to preserve minority languages and to encourage European Union citizens to learn other languages.

Because even a limited number of official languages is a daunting problem, requiring

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massive administrative and educational initiatives, no one suggests that all European Union languages be recognized as official or even working languages. However, in view of the European Union commitment to the preservation of cultural heritage and diversity, programs and groups work to preserve these languages.

The European Commission, the administrative body of the European Union, recognized the necessity of preserving cultural identity. It stated:

... that if it is to secure its place and future in the world, Europe has to place at least as much emphasis on the personal fulfillment of its citizens, men and women alike, as it has up to now placed on economic and monetary issues. That is how Europe will prove that it is not merely a free trade area, but a coherent political whole capable of coming successfully to terms with internationalization instead of being dominated by it.  

The European Union initiated the Lingua program as a way to encourage citizens to learn more than one language, and to promote multilingualism. As a part of the Socrates cooperative education program, Lingua encourages standards that would have everyone in the European Union learn three languages. The program promotes the potential of using tools

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such as the Internet, and foreign language instruction at the pre-school level. The European Commission has proposed that a quality label be given to schools which are most proficient at teaching language. These schools would be networked, allowing mobility of teachers. The reasoning behind this initiative is freedom of movement of labor, which today is stifled by the language barrier between member states. If every European Union citizen were able to communicate in three languages, the chances of being able to communicate in at least one language with any other citizen are much greater, although both may be speaking in a foreign language. There is evidence of support for this among European Union citizens, for 71% of European Union citizens polled agreed that every one in the European Union should be able to speak one other European Union language in addition to his or her native language. However, the Lingua program only deals with official European Union languages, therefore, even if a minority language is spoken by more people than one of the official languages, it

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will not be taught in this program. Even the current policy of defining official European Union languages is seen by some as harshly restrictive as it excludes languages such as Catalan, Basque, Yiddish and Breton.

Several institutions are handling the promotion of minority languages. The European Parliament has passed resolutions favoring minority languages, the Council of Europe ratified a Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, and the Maastricht Treaty pledged to respect the linguistic diversity of members states.

Of the 5000 languages in the world, half will become extinct by 2047. A majority of Europeans who speak a minority language tend to be bilingual, also speaking their country’s official language out of necessity. There are approximately 370 million citizens of the European Union, and almost 50 million of them speak a language other than one of the eleven official European Union languages. Over forty languages are spoken on an everyday basis in the European Union. With expansion of the European Union, the number of speakers of a minority language will increase.

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76 Newark, Quentin. “Eurotongue.” Print 54 (March/April 2000): 141.
78 See Altmann, Gerry T.M. The Ascent of Babel, p. 231.
79 See Trudgill, Peter. Sociolinguistics, p. 142.
Minority languages are viewed by some governments with suspicion as they can be linked to separatist movements. Minority languages can be used for political means when the speakers of the language seek cultural autonomy and political independence. Breton separatists asked for recognition of the Breton language that was banned for hundreds of years but now is enjoying a great revival. Despite this, extremists allegedly murdered a woman by bombing a McDonald’s in Brittany, and on the same day a thwarted attempt was made to bomb the central post office in Rennes, the capital of Brittany. Another example of a European Union member with separatist problems is Spain. The Basque separatist movement is very violent, although it is more concerned with autonomy than recognition of the Basque language. This is understandable, for Basque is spoken by only about half of the people living in the Basque provinces. By contrast, Catalonia is the most successful economic region in Spain, the Catalans enjoy a great deal of autonomy, and they insist on using Catalan. However, theirs is not a violent movement as they enjoy a level of ethnic and linguistic acceptance already.

The European Bureau of Lesser Used Languages, although an independent organization, resulted from a resolution passed by the European Parliament and has consultative status with both the Council of Europe and the United Nations. Its purpose is “to

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82 See Trudgill, Peter. Sociolinguistics, pp. 149-150.
promote and defend the autochthonous regional or minority languages of the countries of the European Union and the linguistic rights of those who speak these languages." Dónall O Riagáin, its Secretary General, requested in an address to the European Community that the Committee of the Regions further assist with the communication gap. He also called for the European Union to practice subsidiarity on this issue, and let the member states and regions, and thus the citizens speaking these languages, have authority in the area of minority languages.86

The importance placed on minority languages is evidenced in legislation passed by Slovakia in anticipation of European Union membership. Previously, Slovakia had very strict regulations about Slovak as the only official language in the country. However, there has been pressure from other European countries to ease up on these regulations, especially in regards to the Hungarian minority.87 One of the determining factors to EU admission is the Slovak government’s acceptance of Hungarian as an official language, thereby loosening up on ethnic restrictions.88 On July 10, 1999, the Slovak Parliament passed a minority language

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law.\textsuperscript{89}

The European Union guarantees the usage of each member state’s official language as a tenet of democracy. This historical precedent outweighs the movements to simplify the use of diverse languages due to costs.

**Possible New Approaches for the European Union**

The European Union is neither currently developing an existing language into an official language, nor using an international auxiliary language. Both approaches could reduce European Union translation costs, which have already been shown to be minimal, but both approaches would violate transparency until such time as all European Union citizens could speak the official language. Subsidiarity would also be violated as the European Union would be forcing a decision on local communities to communicate in a language other than their official language.

**Developing an Existing Language into a Universal Language**

Hypothetically the European Union could select one existing official language for use as the only official language. This would eliminate the need for the large translation staff, as only one-way translation would be required. Candidate countries would no longer need to translate the *acquis* as part of their accession criteria, as it would already be translated into the

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.
official European Union language. However, the transparency that currently exists where European Union citizens can understand European Union legislation would be compromised.

The first difficulty to this approach is selecting the one language to make official. Although any language could be selected as the official European Union language, English, French and German are the three most widely used in the European Union. German is the most widely spoken first language in the European Union, with over 88 million speakers. French and English both have about 60 million native speakers in the European Union.\footnote{Building Babel in Brussels,” The Economist (US) 332 (6 August 1994):44.}

However, since World War II, there has been a tremendous increase in the use of English internationally, and it is the language with the best chance of becoming a universal language.\footnote{See Katzner, Kenneth. The Languages of the World, p. 37.} English is already used worldwide for air traffic control, business communication, science, and tourism.\footnote{Bauer, Laurie and Peter Trudgill, eds. Language Myths. (London: Penguin Books, Ltd, 1998), p. 9.} Malta, Latvia and Estonia are using English to help translate the acquis.\footnote{Commission of the European Communities, “2001 Regular Report on Latvia’s Progress Towards Accession.”, p. 108, Commission of the European Communities, “2001 Regular Report on Estonia’s Progress Towards Accession.”, p. 86, Commission of the European Communities, “2001 Regular Report on Malta’s Progress Towards Accession.”, p. 76.} English, French, and German are the three working languages of the European Commission, but German is used only one-third as much as the other two.\footnote{“Europe's languages: Service compris”. The Economist (29 August 1998): 50.} Even
though German is the most widely spoken first language in the European Union, German translations are handled the same as Greek or Danish. German is not used actually as a working language by European Union officials who tend to work in French or English, since these are more common as second languages.\(^{95}\) German is a more common second language for older people in eastern Europe, but by the time these countries join the European Union, English will be the predominant second language.\(^{96}\)

The majority of pages the European Commission’s Translation Service receives for translation are in English (55% in 2000), followed by 33% in French, with only 4% in German. The other languages ranged from 1 to 2 percent. However, the languages into which documents are translated show a more even spread, ranging from 7 to 13 percent across languages.\(^{97}\) This is consistent with the current practice of translating all primary and secondary law and most communications into all eleven official languages.

Selecting any one language as the sole official language would require a large training effort as all those who did not yet speak the selected language would have to learn it, or risk not being able to understand government communications. This would require a large monetary effort as well as time commitment. The selection would also promote political rivalry, as members argued whose language should be selected. The number of minority


languages in the European Union would increase, and the issue of language preservation would have to be addressed to preserve cultural diversity, since all the speakers of the formally official languages would become minority language speakers.

**Adopting an International Auxiliary Language, Esperanto**

Another method of dealing with the issue of multiple languages, which the European Union is not currently following, is the adoption of an international auxiliary language for use as the official working language of the European Union. Although any language could be used as an auxiliary language, the artificial language of Esperanto seems a good choice because it is based on European languages, it is easy to learn, and as an artificial language, it is non-political. As an auxiliary language, only essential material and negotiations would be officially written or conducted in Esperanto. With this method, the political issue of favoring one language over another is eliminated, as was the case with the adoption of the euro. The issues of an increased number of minority or unofficial languages and the issue of education in order to preserve transparency and subsidiarity still exist. However, only European Union officials and staff would have to be trained by the European Union to speak Esperanto. This would reduce the effort of education and the cost to the European Union in comparison to the method of adopting an existing official language as the sole official European Union language. However, the member states would have to make provisions to translate the

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European Union laws and communications for their citizens, and thus there would be no overall cost savings, just a shift of costs from the European Union to its member states.

Esperanto is a European-based artificial language\(^9\) that was invented in 1887 in Poland by Dr. Ludwig Lazarus Zamenhof.\(^9\) Esperanto is spoken by about 2 million people at a conversational level and an additional 8 million who are somewhat familiar with it.\(^10\) The World Esperanto Society has 31,000 members, most of whom live in Eastern Europe.\(^11\)

Because of its intentional simplicity, Esperanto is easier to learn than natural languages. It has sixteen grammar rules, and a vocabulary of 15,000 roots, which can be combined to increase the vocabulary.\(^12\) The Esperanto League of North America claims a person can achieve a fluency in Esperanto in a quarter of the time it would take to achieve the same fluency in studying other languages such as German.\(^13\)

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\(^13\) Horvitz, Leslie Alan. “Advocates of Esperanto Continue to Lobby for Their Lingua Franca.”, p. 42.
One of the ideals of an artificial language is that its use eliminates any political advantage of official language speakers; it is unbiased. Another advantage of this method is that the translation and interpretation costs would be lower for the European Union, since there would be only a one-way translation from other languages into Esperanto. However, this cost savings would be offset by the cost of educating all European Union citizens, or at least all European Union staff and officials, in the Esperanto language, and the cost and effort of hiring and training qualified interpreters and translators.

In 1966, a proposal to officially make Esperanto an international language was rejected by the United Nations, although it was signed by almost one million people from 74 countries. Politically, Esperanto has been objected to because of its roots in Eastern Europe, and it has opponents who would rather see English as a universal language. Historically, Esperanto has been seen as a political threat by autocratic governments; Stalin executed or banished its speakers, Hitler opposed its use, and speakers during the cultural revolution in China were imprisoned.

34% of European Union citizens polled by the European Union are not willing to devote any time to learning a foreign language, and 21% do not wish to learn any foreign

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105 Ibid., p. 354.
language or wish to improve their skills if they have already learned a foreign language.\textsuperscript{108} 38\% have never tried to learn a foreign language.\textsuperscript{109} However, 71\% agreed that everyone in the European Union should be able to speak one other European Union language in addition to his or her native language.\textsuperscript{110} Even though a majority of Europeans believe learning another language is a good idea, there is still a large number who have not tried to learn another language and who are not willing to do so.

Another potential problem with Esperanto is that it is not used widely outside the European Union. Most Esperanto speakers live in eastern Europe and Japan.\textsuperscript{111} Therefore, European Union communications would not be understandable to people in other countries without being translated out of Esperanto. It would be up to those countries to provide the resources to translate European Union law and communications into their official language, and they would have to also find Esperanto translators. Because there are few speakers of Esperanto, there is little incentive for anyone to learn it. If it were used as an auxiliary language in the European Union, more people would see the benefit of learning it, in order to communicate easier with European Union staff.

\textsuperscript{108} \textit{Ibid.}, Section 6.2.1.1.
\textsuperscript{109} \textit{Ibid.}, Section 5.1.1.1.
\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Ibid.}, Section 7.1.1.
Conclusion

The European Union holds the principles of transparency and subsidiarity as basic foundations of democracy. The only way to preserve these in light of communicating with citizens who speak many different languages is for the European Union to continue its approach using translation and interpretation. If one or a small number of official languages were selected, some member states’ official languages would not be recognized, which is contrary to transparency. In addition, there would be no true economic benefit, as the burden of the translation and interpretation would fall on the member states. Multilingualism at a member state or citizen level is not possible because the burden would also fall on the citizens to learn a second language in order to understand European Union law and communication. The use of Esperanto as an auxiliary language might help ease the burden of translation and interpretation for some European Union activities and internal communications, and could be used as a tool along with translation and interpretation and multilingualism. However, the adoption of Esperanto or any other language as the sole official language would violate transparency, and this is not analogous to the case with the adoption of the euro, which increases transparency in pricing throughout the Economic and Monetary Union. The euro enhanced transparency whereas Esperanto would limit it.

To date, European Union policy has promoted the autonomy of each official language. To reverse this policy with the addition of new member states would contradict the historical tradition which integrated the current member states. By changing the precedent of allowing a member state’s official language as an European Union official language, the traditional
guarantee of cultural preservation and the principles of transparency and subsidiarity would be breached.
Bibliography


