



*European Communities
Commission
Background Report*

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THE TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES
IN THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

Summary

In February 1976 the Council of Ministers agreed an Action Programme in the Field of Education¹.

This programme laid stress on the importance of enabling as many students as possible to learn the languages of the Community. The Commission has now approved a plan proposed by Commissioner Guido Brummer to improve the teaching of foreign languages within the Community and to promote greater educational mobility for pupils up to 18 years of age.

If the plan is approved by the Council, 1979 will be spent in preparing to implement it. The cost of the various actions proposed is estimated at 6.5 million EUA in 1980 rising to 8.275 million EUA by 1982.

The plan covers nine points which are summarised below.

1) **Initial training of foreign language teachers**

The Commission considers it important that all future foreign language teachers should be required to spend a period of study and preparation in the country whose language they intend to teach. At present students or young foreign graduates act as language assistants in giving conversation classes in their own mother tongue to a small group of students. In 1973/4 there were 7,032 assistants in the Community², and the Commission proposes the establishment of a Community-wide scheme for such exchanges.

2) **Continuing training of foreign language teachers**

Practising foreign language teachers should be able to spend regular and officially recognised periods of re-training in the country whose language they teach. The Commission proposes to give an impetus to this by creating a Community scheme for exchange of foreign language advisers and inspectors and for one term or one year periods of service abroad for practising teachers.

¹ ISEC/B7/76

² European Parliament. Answer to written question 797/77

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3) Mobility and exchange of pupils

The Commission proposes a three part scheme of Community support for individual and group exchanges. This is aimed firstly at enabling member states to overcome the difficulties which financial and geographical circumstances put in the way of such exchanges; secondly at organising vacation activities (either conferences or field studies) in which senior pupils from different member states can participate using one common language; and thirdly at launching pilot projects to explore the exchange needs of handicapped children, the possibilities for the exchange of pupils in technical and vocational education, and the problems of associating all countries, particularly those whose language is not in wide use.

4) Early foreign language teaching

Joint action is proposed to examine the varying experience of member states in introducing the teaching of a second language during primary education.

5) Teaching foreign languages to less able pupils

There is common concern about the many young people who end school with virtually no capacity in a second language. A number of pilot projects are proposed to explore the problems and approaches to the teaching of languages to children of modest ability or those with little interest in languages.

6) Teaching of modern languages for the 16-25 age group in full-time education

Arrangements should be made to place greater emphasis on the provision of language learning opportunities combined with other disciplines for students entering vocational and higher education.

7) Teaching of languages to adults for vocational purposes

As a first step in the field of adult education, a special study is proposed of the language needs of certain professional groups, such as doctors, nurses and architects.

8) Encouragement of schools teaching through the medium of more than one language

The Community has already established European Schools designed to develop a specific European identity. These are, however, primarily for the children of Community officials. The Commission proposes to set up a European Community Schools Scheme to adapt some existing schools to fulfil a similar role. This European network of experimental schools would promote good practice in the learning of foreign languages, bilingualism, and the creation of greater European consciousness in the schools system.

9) Information and documentation services on language teaching

Information about language teaching must be widely diffused to those concerned, and this should be made a priority task for the Community's Information Network on Education which will be established in 1979.
