

# Democracy and linguistic justice in the European Union

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First published: November 2012

Most recent version available at <http://www.livingreviews.org/lrd-2012-1>

*The European Union faces major difficulties due to the lack of participation by its citizens. The Union's commitment to multilingualism is often accused of being one of the obstacles to integration and many scholars think that one common lingua franca is the only practicable solution in order to grant fair participation to all the citizens in the EU. In this article, multilingualism and linguistic justice will be questioned under the aspect of democracy. It will be crucial to focus on social aspects of communication as well and to ask how they could favour the integration of citizens and their interest in their common democratic system at the EU level. Furthermore, the concept of a lingua franca will be investigated and the question will be posed whether such a language would really meet the needs of the citizens of Europe.*

## I. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Considering today's Europe, we have to say that the main goals of the founders of European cooperation, to develop a stable situation among the countries of the community and to expand cooperation, have been attained. Today, the European Union is in charge of broad economic areas as well as of political issues. Engagement with political issues has brought forward the claim for democracy at the European level and the installation of democratic boards such as the European Parliament. This democratisation has impacted language use: in the beginning of European cooperation, the equality of languages seemed mainly to have been motivated by the will to install a new system in which no one would have to fear being dominated by others and that could ensure peace. The democratic system of the EU, by contrast, has introduced a new dimension. Now, language equality is not a question of equality for the sake of peacekeeping, but of democratic citizen rights.

The subjects of language diversity and language use in the EU are vividly debated these days. The growing importance of transnational cooperation demands more than ever communication across continents and borders. In spite of all the success in the expansion of European cooperation, some critique is too loud to be ignored. The EU is faced with immense expectations. The democratic deficit, the Babylonian language situation, and the immense number of states and interests have to be united under one, democratically-organized roof.

The EU has increased the range of its political responsibilities and the number of member states within a very short period. While institutions and administrations have been successfully installed, a major problem has developed. Whereas citizens approved of European cooperation in the beginning, their scepticism has grown simultaneously with the ongoing engagement with political issues by the EU after Maastricht (Kraus 2004, 27). Their distrust and passivity peaked in 1999 with the low participation in the parliamentary election (Kraus 2004, 27) and in their rejection of the referendum on the European constitution in France and the Netherlands in 2005<sup>2</sup>. A

major gap between the citizens and the elites who have built up the EU has emerged<sup>3</sup>; now, the elites underline the necessity of a European identity, something that the EU is lacking at the moment. The absence of a European *demos* is seen by some scholars as the result of European language policy. In 2005 the European Commission published its commitment to multilingualism and affirmed the will of the EU to keep to the present regime of 23 official and working languages. Furthermore, the EU wants every EU citizen to learn two foreign languages in addition to her or his mother tongue (also called M+2 principle).<sup>4</sup>

In the following, the relationship between multilingualism, democracy and integration will be analysed. In the second chapter, the main arguments pro and contra having one *lingua franca* – namely English – will be sketched. This includes a closer look at the problems of the present regime as well as propositions for a fair and more efficient handling of languages in the EU. In the third chapter, multilingualism will be questioned under the aspect of democracy. It will be asked what a fair language regime would look like and whether having only one official language would be tolerable with respect to the democratic principles of the Union. Furthermore, linguistic and social aspects of communication will be investigated and the question of the meaning of mutual comprehension will be addressed. Finally, the main findings will be summed up in the conclusion.

## II. The debate about one lingua franca and multilingualism in the European Union

### 1. The rise of English

There are many contributors who want to reverse the present commitment to multilingualism and adopt English as *lingua franca* for the EU.<sup>5</sup> Not only is English considered to be one of

the question of European cooperation. I will stick to this interpretation, which I consider a plausible one. For this and further analysis see Haller 2009, 23-30.

3 For a detailed analysis of the gap between elites and citizens in the EU, see for example Haller 2009, 23-62.

4 See *A new Framework Strategy for Multilingualism*, Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, COM (2005) 596 final (Nov. 22, 2005): 1-30.

5 The understanding of the context in which the *lingua*

1 This article is based on research in the context of the SNSF Professorship „Justice and Democracy in Multilateral Integration“ of Prof. Francis Cheneval at the University of Zurich from August 2007 to July 2008.

2 These results are interpreted in different ways. One possible interpretation is that citizens wanted to benefit from the referendum in order to express their frustration vis-à-vis their national government and that this result is not related to

the two most useful languages to learn by 75 per cent of Europeans (Giordan 2002a, 9; Longman 2007, 190)<sup>6</sup>, it is also the foreign language that the majority of Europeans master best<sup>7</sup>, and at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the spread of English has been shown to be increasing at an unprecedented speed (Van Parijs 2008, 13; Giordan 2002a, 8). One quarter of the world's population indicates English as one of the languages they have mastered – either as mother tongue or as a second or foreign language (Longman 2007, 189) and the number of people who master English as a foreign language has exceeded that of native speakers.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, it would be most natural to choose this language as the *lingua franca* of the EU. Even though the EU tries to motivate people to learn more than one foreign language, the vast majority of them only study English (Giordan 2002a, 8-9; Longman 2007, 190-191). To expect Europeans to obey the wish of the European Commission and learn more than one foreign language would be to discriminate against the economically less favoured social strata, as people in modest circumstances cannot afford the expenditure of protracted language studies. Only the young and well-educated come close to realising the ideal of multilingualism.<sup>9</sup> Reality seems to show a development that is contrary to the target the EU sticks to out of “*blindness to reality*” (House 2008, 65). Language learning is beyond social control now, due to the fact that there has not been any overall coordination of language policy. Nowadays, people are prepared to spend time and money on English studies since they are most likely to profit from such skills at work and it has proven to be a most efficient language for transnational communication (Longman 2007, 199-200).

Van Parijs summarizes this mechanism as follows: Firstly, individuals who are expected to function in a certain language are more motivated to learn it. This motivation will create more opportunities to use the language in question and thus their motivation will increase as well. This is what he names *probability-sensitive learning*. Secondly, Van Parijs refers to the *maximin law of communication*, meaning that in a group of people with different mother tongues and different extents of language skills in various languages, one tends to select the language that is best known by the member of the audience who knows it least. The interaction of these two mechanisms has created many opportunities for people to practise English and this has increased the motivation for and interest in English studies (Van Parijs 2007, 218-220; Van Parijs 2008, 16).

All this reveals a gap between the EU's targets for multilingualism and people's everyday life. One possible reason for this is the fear of several powerful European nation states, as France, that they will lose influence. So the Union's commitment to multilingualism is not an emotional one, but is based on the economic and political advantages any country may expect as long as its own language is learnt all over Europe. This might come to an end if the EU makes the decision to introduce a single *lingua franca* (House 2008, 64-65). The goal of making EU citizens learn two languages in addition to their mother tongue is merely an attempt to support languages from small territories as well and to motivate the acquisition of more than just one foreign language. Here the target is sustaining

*franca* should be installed is not the same for all the authors. See part II. 3 in this article.

- 6 House even speaks of 77 per cent of the interviewees who name English as the language that should be learnt by their children (House 2008, 65).
- 7 According to the Europeans themselves, they master English better than any other second language (House 2008, 65).
- 8 The ratio is about 4 to 1, tendency rising (House 2008, 67).
- 9 The situation of people of lower social strata and their access to language studies and participation in the EU will be discussed with regard to one *lingua franca* in parts III. 3 and III. 5 of this article.

multilingualism rather than answering people's needs (Van Els 2005, 272-273). The Union avoided the subject of multilingualism from 1958 to 2005<sup>10</sup>, because their elites feared that this discussion could endanger the entire European project. Their generosity was – and is – motivated by the will to prevent nationalistic rivalries (Kraus 2004, 140-141). However, individuals will not learn a second language unless the benefit of such expenditure is convincing, as Wright concludes:

EU top down policy to promote diversity seems not to have been able to withstand bottom up pressure from parents and pupils who see the acquisition of English as necessary for the realization of educational and professional ambitions in a transnational world where English has become the medium of exchange. (Wright 2004b, 232)

## 2. Multilingualism: inefficient, unfair, disadvantageous, expensive and impracticable?

The Union's M+2 principle and its impracticability on the level of its citizens is not the only argument in favour of English as *lingua franca*. A further argument focuses on the efficiency of this regime within the institutions of the EU, like for example the European Parliament. The present rules, based on the democratic principles of the EU, allow any representative to use one of the 23 official and working languages<sup>11</sup> of the Union when holding a speech or intervening in the assembly.

In the European Parliament, all Community languages are equally important: all parliamentary documents are published in all the official languages of the European Union (EU) and every MEP has the right to speak in the official language of his/her choice. What better way to guarantee the transparency and accessibility of Parliament's work for all members of the general public. (European Parliament 2012)

This means that the EU employs a huge number of interpreters and translators in order to assure communication and language equality. The Parliament indicates that it employs 430 permanent interpreters and has a further 2500 freelance interpreters at its disposition. For a plenary session, there are 800 to 1000 interpreters at work and translation is done by 700 permanent translators. But to find an interpreter for example for the combination Maltese - Finnish seems nearly impossible. Therefore the EU uses a relay system for interpretation and translation if necessary. In the first step contributions are translated into one of the relay languages English, French or German (Italian, Polish and Spanish are also available as relay languages if needed), in the second step one into the official languages required (European Parliament 2012). This diminishes the number of interpreters and translators needed. Still, the supporters of one sole language for all EU affairs regard any

10 Kraus' book stems from 2004 and there is therefore no reference to 2005; 2005 refers to the Communication on Multilingualism of the Commission. See *A new Framework Strategy for Multilingualism*, Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, COM (2005) 596 final (Nov. 22, 2005): 1-30.

11 In European cooperation, there has never been a distinction between official and working languages; i. e. all official languages are working languages as well (Kraus 2004, 136; Longman 2007, 187).

translation or interpretation as an immense problem. Discussions are not spontaneous since the transmission of information suffers from delay. Papers which are indispensable for the preparation of debates and sessions are not ready for all the delegations at the same time, as their availability depends on the translation. Thus, the result is an unfair situation in terms of preparation time (Wright 2004b, 222).

A similar problem is put forward with regard to communication between the EU administration and its citizens. The Treaty of Amsterdam for example was not available in French until ten days after its ratification and – as the newspaper *Le Figaro* complained – contained a lot of errors and inaccuracies (Gubbins 2002, 48). In this example we find in addition to the drawback of delay, a further, closely related disadvantage: Translation always includes a certain danger of misunderstandings and imprecise formulations. Since translations are not marked as translations in EU cooperation, representatives could misunderstand information due to cultural differences they are not aware of (House 2003, 562). And because of the relay system, these errors are multiplied; this means a major loss of information (Kraus 2004, 144, 154-155). In order to get the information as soon as possible and to avoid misunderstandings due to translation errors, representatives who dispose of sufficient language skills read the more reliable original text in English. All this supports the reproach that translation work is only a living symbol for the ideal of language equality promoted by the EU. Quality and effect are not of interest (House 2003, 562).

Besides the quality of translation, the quality of discussion within the institutions is to be questioned. The fact that every speech has to be interpreted could lead people to simplify their speeches. Nuances could get lost. Furthermore, speakers of small languages might face a serious disadvantage. Participants in long meetings may decide only to follow the interventions they are able to understand thanks to their language skills and to ignore the speeches of contributors whose language they do not understand. Interpretation makes meetings much more tiresome and representatives from small language communities would be the first to be ignored (Van Els 2005, 274-275). Another crucial problem concerning interpretation and translation work is that of the cost. The increasing number of languages demands more staff which means that costs are constantly rising.<sup>12</sup>

Now the question whether the practice described on the web page of the European Parliament works all the time has to be brought up. In fact, the EU's commitment to multilingualism and its everyday practice do not at all coincide, as stated by Gubbins who refers to statements of people inside the EU Parliament. The *de jure* equality of all official languages in the EU is not granted for example in sessions of less official nature (Gubbins 2002, 47-48). Wright sees the same problem. The European Parliament keeps to multilingualism for plenary sessions only, whereas informal meetings are held in French or English, supported by some interpreters. And further institutions, such as the Council and the Commission, only publish formal documents in all official and working languages, the rest is done in French and English only (Wright 2004b, 221-222). In his contribution, Van Els fails to see a consistent language practice throughout the various institutions as European Parliament, European Commission or European Bank (Van Els 2005, 276). Thus, the promised principle of equality of languages is seen to be unworkable (Wright 2004b, 221) and the EU has already adopted a language use under the principle of *laissez-faire* in order to avoid the controversy in public by restricting language use in many situations to the *de facto* working languages French and English (Longman 2007, 187-188). While the EU has done a lot of work in various fields in order to prepare for the immense

expansion, it has constantly ignored the question of multilingualism. In all likelihood, this is due to the emotional and sensitive nature of the subject (Gubbins 2002, 47).

Only the larger language communities in the EU, such as the Germans and, rarely, the Italians and Spanish, have insisted on an improvement of their status. The Germans did so after 1990, having a relative share of native speakers in the EU of 18 per cent. Thus, they are the largest speech community and, in addition to this, the most important contributor to the EU budget. They have met the target of having German become one of the working languages for internal use within the Council and the Commission together with French and English. So, the actual working language regime must be seen as the result of the balance of power between the competing states while economic power has a crucial impact on this status – nevertheless, the use of German as working language is not always granted (Ammon 2006, 330-332).

Giordan asks whether the dominance of one language at European level is a real problem. The present situation shows that fairness is not granted through the commitment to multilingualism either. Some languages have still more influence due to their economic importance or because of their relatively higher share of native speakers (Giordan 2002a, 17). The EU has already followed the logic of the markets in its commitment to a multilingualism that includes national languages only. Regional and minority languages have merely symbolic status (Giordan 2002a, 6). The demands of economic development should furthermore be taken into account and Europeans should implement one *lingua franca* in favour of a better economic development (Giordan 2002a, 13) as language is responsible for a more efficient functioning of the markets (Longman 2007, 203). Otherwise, it will sooner or later not be up to them to decide on which language they use, as the Americans will profit from the European weakness caused by a wild language competition and will increase their influence in European markets. This American dominance would again favour English as *lingua franca*, so why not introduce it now and assure European independence? (Giordan 2002a, 13, 17)

Having English as the sole language would create more fairness and effectiveness and lead to a more direct and economical deliberative process. In addition, the introduction of English as *lingua franca* would avoid the EU becoming an exclusively elitist project. Quality interpretation will always be expensive and one common language would enable all the citizens to communicate directly and independently across borders and encourage them to improve their skills in this language. So, more and more of them would be able to participate directly in a shared European forum (Van Parijs 2007, 221-222). This might help to form a European identity as only English would be the language for all European citizens. The EU could become a community of communication and this could favour the emergence of a *demos* in the future (Longman 2007, 190-191).

### 3. Restricting language use: a closer look

So far, we have seen that many authors consider it indispensable to restrict language use in European cooperation. But it would be misleading to assume that they share the same idea of how and to which extent this language restriction should be implemented. In the following, some of the various concepts proposed will be presented.

The most radical proposition is to implement English as the sole language for all European matters. Not only should it be the means for communication within European institutions, but also among European citizens as far as the EU is concerned in order to achieve the goal of becoming independent from interpretation and translation (Van Parijs 2007, 221-222). In order to grant the functioning of democratic processes, it is crucial to have a community of communication (Wright 2004b, 225-229).

<sup>12</sup> The subject of cost is addressed by many authors: see for example Giordan 2002a, 15; Wright 2004b, 223; Gubbins 2002, 51-52; House 2008, 64.

House, by contrast, proposes ELF (English as Lingua Franca) as the sole language for all institutional communication and sees in this kind of language the future of European transaction (House 2008, 64).<sup>13</sup> Van Els agrees on this proposition. This restriction would only affect a few people who work within the EU and who mainly have to discuss social and political issues. So, English has to be mastered with respect to certain domains and by a small part of the European population only, whereas the number of citizens who interact in transnational or national debates in the language they choose is many times higher. This sort of interaction would have a much larger impact on language use among citizens than the relatively lower share of communication done with the EU. Documents on EU legislation and regulations put in force in the member states still should be translated into all working languages. Thus, the decision about language use in general remains in the hands of the citizens (Van Els 2005, 271-272, 277).<sup>14</sup>

This seems to correspond to Kraus' distinction of internal and external communication. Internal communication concerns any communication taking place within the institutions of the EU, while external communication refers to all communication carried out between the EU and its citizens (Kraus 2004, 134). He proposes the use of just two or three languages for internal communication, whereas it is in his view crucial to keep up the communication between the EU and its citizens in all the official and working languages in order to avoid discrimination. For internal communication, he sees English, French, and German being the appropriate candidates. This regime would sustain at least a symbolic character of European multilingualism (Kraus 2004, 157-158). Ammon puts forward a similar argument. In his view, and he underlines that he speaks as a German and might possibly be biased, having more than one working language within the EU would in a far better way correspond to the Union's commitment to multilingualism than a single one. He points out that the working languages should be chosen among the larger language communities with regard to their share of native speakers and foreign speakers among EU citizens while its international standing should be respected as well. No country should be allowed to pay its way into the selection of working languages (Ammon 2006, 334). Whether the international economic importance of a language and the relative contribution to the EU budget should be seen in the light of paying the way into this selection of working languages, as Ammon has described it in the case of Germany, is not specified in his article (Ammon 2006, 330-332).<sup>15</sup>

Van Parijs, by contrast, is sure that a range of official languages would not be an efficient solution. At present, English and French are the *de facto* working languages of the EU, a fact that is hard to accept for the Germans, the EU's largest native language community. It means that they have to acquire at least a passive knowledge in one and an active knowledge in the other idiom. But granting German the status of *lingua franca* as well would force the Spanish and the Italians to handle one more language. There will always be one delegation that will not be satisfied and therefore more than one *lingua franca* is not really a better solution and just comforts some native speakers, while the rest of citizens of the EU would have to shoulder the burden of language learning. Why should we learn several languages, if one is enough (Van Parijs 2007, 224-226)?

#### 4. What is a *lingua franca*?

After having discussed the concept of a *lingua franca*, its exact

13 House's understanding of ELF will be looked at later on in part II. 4.

14 Here we have to add that Van Els does not share House's concept of ELF, but that he agrees on the restriction to English for institutional communication.

15 This example has already been mentioned in part II. 2.

meaning is still to be investigated. The original sense stems from Arabic *lisan al farang* and designates a simple contact language, a rather stable variety used, for example, when Arabic speakers had to cope with travellers from Western Europe (House 2008, 66), a hybrid language, based on Italian and diverse elements of roman languages, mostly spoken in the harbours of the Mediterranean (Dubois et al. 2002, 285). In its original meaning, *lingua franca* is not more than an auxiliary language. It is certainly neutral but for a discussion beyond just elementary topics its quality would be very low (Lüdi 2007, 131-132). House agrees that a *lingua franca* on such a level would not correspond to the present needs of its users. In her view, English has already developed into a new type of *lingua franca* that she names ELF. This variety is very flexible, a special type of inter- and intracultural communication which always depends on the level of the respective interlocutors. It is governed immediately by its users; it is they who define it according to the situation through varieties of proficiency levels, degrees of code-mixing, degrees of pidginisation and so on. ELF fulfils different functions and users can model it with respect to their needs. The basis of communication always has to be bargained on each particular occasion since there is no overall norm (House 2008, 66-68). The data have revealed that in ELF communication between people with diverse mother tongues leads to fewer errors and misunderstandings than in native-non-native communication. Moreover, there is a high degree of solidarity among participants as they are all aware of being in the same situation as non-natives (House 2008, 70-72). ELF should, according to House, be understood as a co-language and not as a language that endangers other European idioms. She proposes to learn ELF as a second language and a third language with respect to national, regional or local linguistic necessities (House 2008, 79-80). The question is whether this sort of *lingua franca* could meet the needs of communication at the EU level or whether nothing more than a modest form of exchange of information would be possible, called BSE (Bad Simple English) by Stickel (Stickel 2002, 26).

Lüdi offers three possible interpretations of the term *lingua franca* which might help to understand it more precisely. The first interpretation is that of an auxiliary language mentioned above; this would just help us to manage basic plurilingual situations. This form of *lingua franca* would not challenge the national languages, but its maximum level of communication is highly questionable (Lüdi 2007, 131-132).

The second interpretation is that of *lingua franca* as a universal language following the example of Latin in medieval Europe. Everything would be translated into English; thus Anglophones would enjoy a major advantage over speakers of other languages. English could undoubtedly fulfil the function of a universal language that could be employed in order to discuss even complex topics. But the other national languages would face a loss of importance. National elites would no longer use them in social contexts and those languages would become the languages of an underclass in contrast to English that - due to its use in the media, the sciences etc. - would become the language of the upper class. This kind of *lingua franca* would endanger multilingualism and could lead to linguistic diversification according to social strata (Lüdi 2007, 132-135).

Lüdi's third understanding of *lingua franca* is in the sense of an associated language ("*Verkehrssprache*" (Lüdi 2007, 135)). This would be more sophisticated than the auxiliary language and therefore allow communication even about complex topics. But in opposition to the universal language, it would only be a language of transaction without any cultural values included, a language for communication and not for identification. Consequently this would not be the appropriate medium for intercultural understanding. And Euro-English, as Lüdi names this variety for communication, learnt alongside other languages, would ultimately replace the other languages because it would

prove to be the most useful one (Lüdi 2007, 135-136). A more promising fact is that for interaction in plurilingual groups people make use of all their language knowledge and even bargain over which language to use in order to achieve the best possible mutual understanding (Lüdi 2007, 140-144). This proves that personal dedication is of high importance for communication and that this kind of commitment can produce further positive effects.<sup>16</sup> In summary we can say that the concept of *lingua franca* is elusive and that its potential depends on how this very concept is interpreted.

### 5. The nation state as a role model?

Within the debate on multilingualism, quite often reference is made to the nation state as being an appropriate role model. Seen as the democratic ancestor of the EU, the nation state and the experience of governing it strongly influence the handling of European cooperation. There are many languages that are not granted official status at the EU level due to their previous exclusion in the course of nation state building. At that time, language restriction was undertaken for different reasons. First and foremost, it was based on the conviction that for the newly emerging democracy a community of communication would be indispensable; citizens had to understand and be understood – in contrast to the subjects of the former feudal age (Wright 2004b, 219-220, 225-226). The fear of a possible return of the *ancien régime* was a further motivation to unite the people as quickly as possible (Holt and Gubbins 2002, 6). During the French Revolution language diversity was seen as hindering the changes from taking place; one method of assuring unification was the schooling of all people on the territory in the new universal language, which was French. A further intention of the installation of monolingualism was to cut the ties to counterrevolutionary forces from abroad – all languages apart from French were considered counterrevolutionary and bound to foreign conservative forces (Trabant 2008, 181-184).

Another aspect of the debate is that language pluralism in Europe is much more complex than what is displayed by the EU and is going far beyond the number of those 23 languages recognised as official languages (Longman 2007, 187; Van Els 2005, 264-266). There are 70 to 100 languages spoken on the territory of the EU (Stickel 2008, 116).<sup>17</sup> State sovereignty is obviously more important for the EU's language regime than democratic citizen rights and individual language rights (Wright 2004b, 224). Thus, minority languages have a symbolic place thanks to the 'Charter of Regional or Minority Languages'; otherwise the EU tolerates their exclusion at the national level (Giordan 2002a, 6).

Kraus inquires into the fact that there are official languages as Maltese with only 300'000 native speakers, whereas Catalan with about 5 million native speakers is excluded from the range of European official and working languages (Kraus 2004, 149-150). The expectations of speakers of minority languages with regard to the EU are huge. Some of their idioms enjoy a certain official status within their nation state, others do not. Many of them now hope to get the recognition and support they lost during the process of nation state building. This wider perception of diversity will not be possible as long as the EU sticks to the 'one state, one nation, one language' vision of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century (Longman 2007, 197).

Wright sees language equality as a case of intellectual dishonesty. Why should linguistic diversity be something

positive at the EU level, while it is declared to be segregating and economically disadvantageous at national level? This has nothing to do with citizens' rights but shows the importance of the state sovereignty of the member states. An equal treatment for all languages is neither practiced today nor will it be practicable in the future (Wright 2004b, 224). Limiting the number of languages within a nation state to one national language is seen as a normal phenomenon and is justified by the unity of the nation. So why, Van Els asks, should this not be a valid argument for the EU as well (Van Els 2005, 275)? It is not plausible that the nation states that once implemented one language on their territory are now the ones preventing such a development at the EU level (Wright 2004b, 228).

The nation state is interesting when looked at from another point of view as well. Living in a nation state is an experience that all European Union citizens share and that they bring to the comprehension of supranational cooperation at European level (Wright 2004b, 220). One crucial aspect of this common experience is that these nation states are all democratically organised polities. Thus democracy is the experience that all EU-Europeans share at the moment (Questiaux 2000, 21).

But what will happen to languages which would lose their status at the EU level due to the introduction of a single *lingua franca*? Contributors voting for one *lingua franca* in the EU generally agree that the national languages have their territory and their status as far as their country is concerned. They would neither lose much, nor would they seriously be threatened. And they will still be better off compared to the speech communities which were excluded from power during the emergence of the nation state (Van Els 2005, 270). English will be a language without identity, provided for communication only, while the national languages still will remain as idioms of identification (see for example Lüdi 2007, 135-136). This auxiliary language, a denationalised one, could hardly do any harm to an established national language under which people were socialised (Wright 2004b, 229; Longman 2007, 200).

The language question must be handled rationally and the choice should be made for the sake of efficient communication. Undoubtedly, some languages will lose a part of their international recognition; but this is the price to be paid for language peace. The fusion of creativity, thanks to one common language, will be the best protection against the impending domination by the Anglo-Americans (Giordan 2002a, 17). Thus, Van Parijs concludes:

Those saddened by the fact that it [the language] is not the one they learned as infant will have to come to terms with it. Their narcissism should not jeopardise the satisfaction of our urgent communication needs, in Europe and in the world. (Van Parijs 2007, 226)

### 6. Multilingualism and the chance for recognition

Before entering the discussion, I would like to address a point that is crucial for understanding the close relationship of language and political integration. It is strongly connected to what was mentioned in the chapter on understanding of the term *lingua franca* with regard to Lüdi. He says that in a plurilingual situation people generally activate all the language knowledge they have in order to assure the best possible level of communication within a respective group (Lüdi 2007, 143-144). Kraus states a positive outcome of multilingual situations, too. The use of the language of the interlocutor shows respect for him or her and, additionally, the will to use a foreign language in order to assure the success of this interaction helps to build up common ties (Kraus 2004, 197-200, 214-215). I show vis-à-vis the other that I recognise the fact that her or his language is as

<sup>16</sup> The positive outcome of plurilingual communication will be addressed later in part II. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Van Els even speaks of some hundreds of varieties of these languages in Europe (Van Els 2005, 265). The difficulties of defining "language" will be addressed later in this article in part III.1.

valuable to her or him as my language is precious to me (Stickel 2002, 32). The outcome of this is that people who have experienced respect for and recognition of their language<sup>18</sup> will be more probable to open up towards people of other speech communities. They will be motivated to recognise the others with their language and cultural identity as well (Kraus 2004, 197-200, 214-215). But could this effect not be caused by the use of one neutral language to which the interlocutors are not attached as well? English as *lingua franca*, for example? As we have seen, House argues that in ELF non-natives show a high degree of solidarity as they are all in the same situation: They have to communicate in a foreign language.<sup>19</sup> Is this not a proof that people recognise each other with their peculiarities? Here we should keep in mind that English will always remain the language of a certain group of native speakers. They will benefit from their proficiency. Moreover, due to the sole implemented *lingua franca* an important aspect of plurilingual situations would get lost.

The plurilingual situation Lüdi seems to have in mind where people activate all language knowledge they have in order to assure comprehension has the advantage that various languages may be employed. Their use is negotiated by the interlocutors. And they are, according to the figures we have seen in part II. 1, most likely to choose English. Not to choose English as a supposed neutral language they are forced to use but as the best means of communication in the respective situation. They are free to opt for any other language with respect to their particular skills and needs. This very process of bargaining and interaction is the crucial point that brings people closer together and may develop a feeling of recognition that is not achieved through interaction in one sole language implemented by authorities.

Furthermore, studying a foreign language, and more than one foreign language, is more than just being able to use it as a means for communication. It allows the insight into another structure of language and thought, as well as into social and cultural practices that do not coincide with personal experience in one's own language and society. Due to this interaction mutual understanding improves, not only linguistically, but also in terms of cultural awareness (Kraus 2004, 140, 197-200, 214-215). We experience the relativity of our own language and thought by being in contact with the other (Ehlich 2002, 50, 55). This knowledge may also cause a higher sensitivity for the interests and arguments of other people in general (Kraus 2004, 140).

Therefore, language learning means much more than a time-consuming acquisition of a means of communication in certain situations. It means studying a different structure and learning about the background and the thinking of others. Acquiring language skills in this understanding is like putting on glasses: Through them we see the world more clearly. And the greater the variety of glasses we possess, the more subtle our understanding of the world will become as each acquaintance with a so far unknown culture will open up new perspectives (Berthoud 2008, 191).

Multilingualism has the positive effect of mutual recognition. In a plurilingual context comprehension will not be possible without a cooperative attitude, a commitment people must make in order to assure the functioning of their exchange. This may be useful for the cohesion of the EU, too (Kraus 2004, 140).

18 I understand language here as the language individuals learn during socialization in order to function in a national political and administrative context (Stickel 2002, 20). This will be addressed in part III. 1.

19 See part II. 4 of this article.

### III. European multilingualism under the aspect of democracy

#### 1. There is language and language: a linguistic and political approach

In order to understand some of the difficulties that lurk in the term 'language', I would like to approach it from a linguistic as well as from a political perspective.

In the present debate the term 'language' is constantly used without being specified. Even the 'Charter for Regional or Minority Languages' neither defines the term 'language' nor the term 'dialect' (Grin 2003, 60). Thus, a brief and rough definition is provided here: A language is an instrument for communication, a system of specific vocal signs used by members of a community. Its functioning is determined by rules and constraints (Dubois et al. 2002, 266, 270). 'Language' has to be distinguished from 'dialect'. A dialect consists of a system of signs and rules of the same origin as the other system which is considered a language. It has not acquired the cultural and social status of the related language, even though its development has taken place independently. This means that in a country, such as France, dialects permit a relatively easy comprehension between people who only know the dialect and people who solely speak the standardised language (Dubois et al. 2002, 143).

This definition enables us to take a closer look at the differentiation of languages according to internal and external criteria.<sup>20</sup> The internal criteria include the degree of differentiation between existing varieties. Someone who has not learnt French will not understand it spontaneously in its spoken form, not even as a speaker of another romance language. French is seen to have a certain linguistic distance with regard to its neighbours' languages. It is an "*Abstandssprache*"<sup>21</sup> (Glessgen 2007, 40) or "*une langue écart*"<sup>22</sup> (Glessgen 2007, 40).

The external criteria for standardisation include several factors that are related to the social aspect of language: a certain cultural and written tradition, a standardisation of terminology, official recognition and a linguistic consciousness of the speakers who use this language in various contexts. A standardised language, an "*Ausbausprache*"<sup>23</sup> (Glessgen 2007, 40) or "*une langue d'élaboration*"<sup>24</sup> (Glessgen 2007, 40), possesses these three characteristics. Although the internal and external criteria help to clarify various situations, there is no clear rupture within a language continuum<sup>25</sup>, i.e. speakers of neighbouring dialects generally understand each other.

National languages dispose of both distance and elaboration. They have a written tradition and internal autonomy with respect to other varieties as well as political recognition. Languages such as Catalan belong to this group too, even though their systematic standardisation only began in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and their political status is restricted to a certain regional territory.

20 In the following, I keep to Glessgen's proposition of internal and external criteria (Glessgen 2007, 40-43).

21 "*Abstandssprache*" stems from the terminology introduced by Heinz Kloss in 1952.

22 "*langue écart*" is part of the terminology proposed by Glessgen.

23 "*Ausbausprache*" stems from the terminology introduced by Heinz Kloss in 1952 as well.

24 "*langue d'élaboration*" is part of the terminology proposed by Glessgen.

25 A language *continuum* means an entity within which neighbours understand each other's dialects, i. e. it is an entity without clear internal linguistic rupture. Dialects along a continuum (one speaks of a Romance, a German or a Slavic continuum) are mutually comprehensible (Wright 2004a, 21).

Languages such as Sardinian, Occitan or Friulian have autonomy, but not a high degree of elaboration. They have developed a clear distance from other varieties but generally lack a written tradition and standardisation, for example a grammatical system. Some languages which have only reached an elaborated level are very near to a “*langue écart*” that is well established with regard to the internal criterion. Their elaboration generally follows political processes. An example is Moldavian, which is historically identical with the Moldavian dialect in Romania, but which has developed a certain difference in comparison to the latter due to its belonging to the USSR and its later autonomy. There are many more varieties which claim the status of languages, but neither show the necessary distance from established languages nor dispose of a sufficient degree of written tradition or standardisation. This differentiation can only be a rough one. No clear distinctions can be drawn, but they might help to develop a hierarchy of what is named language and of what has to be called a dialect (Glessgen 2007, 40-43).

This shows that from a linguistic point of view at the EU level it is justified to exclusively deal with national languages as a situation that includes minority languages could hardly be handled. Considering this great complexity, it is very difficult to draw a line. How could the inclusion of one minority language be justified while others are excluded? Even though Catalan seems to be an indisputable candidate possessing elaboration, political recognition, and linguistic autonomy, it would be difficult to argue why other minority languages should not be granted the same right; this could become a never ending dispute. Finally, it would not make sense to include languages that do not provide the necessary standardisation for the range of issues dealt with at the EU level.

The ‘Charter of Regional or Minority Languages’ shows that the EU is well aware of this problem. It neither clarifies the term ‘language’ nor the term ‘dialect’. It only says that the regional or minority languages are traditionally spoken by citizens who are part of a minority group within the respective country and that the Charter does not include dialects and languages of recent immigrants (Grin 2003, 20). I think that from a linguistic point of view, including only national languages makes sense; only this provides the appropriate vocabulary and degree of standardisation necessary for use at the EU level.

Now, I would like to discuss the political approach. As we have seen, there is no clear distinction between ‘language’ and ‘dialect’ in the ‘Charter of Regional or Minority Languages’. The Charter delegates the problem of how to define the regional and minority languages to the nation states. By signing it the nation states themselves guarantee that they will define the minority and regional languages on their territory and propose measures of support in order to assure their survival.<sup>26</sup> The Charter further states that it cannot be seen as a permission to ignore the principle of sovereignty and territorial integrity of states.<sup>27</sup> The fact that certain members of the Council of Europe have not yet signed the Charter shows how delicate any subject connected to languages is.<sup>28</sup>

However, Wright and further contributors might argue - as we have seen earlier - that the EU only follows the nation states and excludes minority languages. To this I counter that the EU is a very recent construct that cannot be held responsible for language policies of nation states followed during past decades

and centuries. Furthermore, we have to recall one decisive fact: The EU is based on a sovereignty granted by its member states, i. e. it only has certain competences and only as long as the nation states delegate them to the Union. The nation state is the main political entity in Europe and the parts of its sovereignty delegated to the Union cannot be turned against its own authority.

Furthermore, citizens are the political instance in democracy and nothing should be done against their interest. Minority means that there is a majority as well. I do not think that we can assume the approval of the majority for privileging the minority languages at the EU level. They would realise that a subsequent impact on national politics could not be prevented, since minority languages cannot be official languages at the EU level without being official languages at the national level. As the linguistic majorities would fear the implementation of a further language as national language in their own countries due to the inclusion of minority languages at EU level, they would not agree to it. Moreover, the question of who will decide on the inclusion of certain non-national languages will have to be discussed. Would all member states decide by majority which languages to include? I do not think this is feasible. The French for example would definitely not accept a dictate by EU member states to accept Breton or Corsican as EU languages – and according to all the principles of mutual recognition of sovereignty and territorial integrity since the Treaty of Westphalia (Wright 2004a, 27), they would be right to do so.

From a political angle as well, it is not possible to justify an EU dictate, of whatever kind, on the use of non-national languages. The member states would always regard this as interference by the Union that would and should not be tolerated. Rules for the interaction at the EU level have – due to its commitment to democratic principles – to be made from bottom-up and not from top-down.

The question of small and large speech communities can be briefly commented here as well. As mentioned before, Kraus states that Maltese is included in the range of official EU languages, whereas Catalan with an exponentially higher number of speakers is not.<sup>29</sup> The answer to this question is twofold. First, the critique has to be countered by the argument we have already seen. As the EU’s power is delegated power only, the nation state is still the crucial entity. The EU is not authorized to interfere in national language debates or dictate the status of certain languages. Thus, the decision on language use at EU level remains with the nation states. Second, the nation states are equal members of the Union, regardless of their number of citizens.<sup>30</sup> Making the number of speakers a criterion for hierarchy would not at all correspond to the parity idea of the EU. Furthermore, we would have to ask whether other criteria such as the expansion of their territory must be accepted as consequence of this thought.

Finally, I would like to discuss the expression ‘mother tongue’. It has already been mentioned that the language a child learns during its education and childhood, i.e. its socialisation process, does not have to be a national language. Stickel admits that people use different languages or dialects due to the respective situation (Stickel 2002, 16-18). I think we have to state more precisely that there are several socialisation processes, for example the first within the family in a dialect, then at school in a national language, at work some will have to function in a foreign language while others will not have to use more than a local variety. Thus, not everyone will need foreign languages in everyday life. Wherever people have to participate in a democratic policy-making process outside their nation state they

26 Charter of Regional or Minority Languages, Part IV, Article 15 (Grin 2003, 217).

27 Charter of Regional or Minority Languages, Part I, Article 5 (Grin 2003, 209).

28 France might be the most prominent example of a country that has signed the Charter but not ratified it yet. For the list of all countries involved, the state of ratification, and detailed information see Council of Europe 2012.

29 See part II. 5 in this article.

30 One example to underline this we have already seen in the quotation at the beginning of part II.2 in this article.

must have the opportunity of functioning in the language they are used to, e.g. the language they have learnt for this purpose at school, *a* or *the* national language. I would like to point out again that the nation state is the decisive instance for EU citizens. Political interaction is learnt within this structure and therefore the relevant language should be granted to them for European participation too.

## 2. How to close the gap?

As I mentioned in the introduction, European citizens show a passive attitude towards all EU matters. This sheds light on a serious gap between the citizens of Europe and the institutions of the EU that I think most important to be discussed before entering into a further debate on the EU, democracy and multilingualism. Most of the authors who are participating in the present debate do not consider the passivity and the disinterest of the people in the EU. They claim more opportunities for citizens in a European public space to exchange information and opinions, like Van Parijs or Wright<sup>31</sup>, and believe this to be made feasible just by installing one common language. To my understanding they either assume integration to be much more advanced than it actually is or they think the European public space to be the best means to promote integration. I argue, by contrast, that as long as the EU is confronted with the passivity and disinterest of its citizens, it is preferable to analyse the present relationship of the EU and its citizens and to find measures to bring them closer together.

The EU has developed very fast and has produced a complex system of institutions and administration. In addition, the number of member states has grown rapidly and the field of issues dealt with has increased. All these developments have taken place at the institutional level, while it seems that the European citizens were not included and thus have not had access to European cooperation. Kraus states the cause of this to be an insufficient flow of information from the institutions to the citizens. This is the reason why the EU administration has not been able to motivate its citizens for political participation (Kraus 2004, 161).

So, the EU institutions and the citizens lack connection. This stands in opposition to the EU's claim to be democratic. Here, I would like to come back to Wright's argument: She says that all Europeans share the experience of living in a democratically organised nation state. And Questiaux concludes that democracy is what Europeans have in common at the moment.<sup>32</sup> I propose a more differentiated description. It is certainly true that people living in EU member states generally have in common that they live in a democratically organised polity. But can we deduce from this that they really have had the same experience? The democracies in Europe are very different: there are member states with a long democratic history, such as France, and others that developed democratic constitutions more recently, such as some of the new member states. Moreover, considering all the various shapes democracy can take, we see that Europeans in general have a similar understanding of the organisation of a democratic polity, but live in different traditions of self-governance in their respective country. I underline this, as I think it important to avoid the impression that European citizens are only different with regard to their languages. European diversity is not only a question of languages but of political tradition and experience as well.

From all that has been said we can conclude that the essential component that democratic polities embody is self-governance by citizens. This implies responsible individuals who are able to evaluate the decisions of their representatives. In order to fulfil these duties and to know their citizen rights, people depend on a

sufficient education that gives them the possibility to act as responsible members of the system.<sup>33</sup>

Assuming this, democracy at EU level should value the citizens as the core of the system. Due to the immense number of people and the multitude of languages on the territory of the EU, it might be objected that it will not be possible to address citizens in the same way as in a nation state. To some extent, this is plausible. However, in this context, we should approach the problem from a different angle as it is not the citizens' claim for more participation, but their indifference in capitalising on the participatory options they have. The situation is that the most important factor of the political system of the EU has withdrawn from the European political process or has even never entered it.<sup>34</sup> It is understandable that a supranational polity's call on them for more participation in the Union's matters makes people feel alienated from their customary political frame.

European citizens need more time to find their place in this new system and they will ask for further information and transparency, as soon as they have realised the impact the EU has on their lives. It is of the highest importance to spread information and to explain the Union's work in order to allay diffuse fears. This could be seen as part of education that is – as shown before – a most important component in order to enable citizens to interact as responsible individuals.<sup>35</sup> Europe, as Ehlich formulates it, shall become a Europe of the citizens, this means of those who form the future of this continent through their democratic decision-making (Ehlich 2002, 49).

## 3. English as *lingua franca*: the people's choice or a means for potential political exclusion?

As we have seen, the spread of English has increased rapidly. The vast majority of European citizens consider English to be one of the two most important languages to learn and it is mastered by a large number of them.<sup>36</sup> This seems to lead many authors to the conclusion that people would accept the restriction to one *lingua franca* for all European matters. In my view, there is another possible interpretation of these facts. The close ties between individuals and their national language should not be underestimated. It is uncertain that somebody would accept English as the sole official language in the EU just because it is accepted as a useful language in everyday life. There is a difference between an officially implemented language that we are forced to use and a language that we use voluntarily to be understood at work or in other circumstances of life. Under such conditions, I do not think that we ought to take the citizens' approval for granted.<sup>37</sup> The goals of contributors like Giordan,

33 Kraus states that well-educated citizens according to surveys show much more interest in intervening with respect to the EU and its transnational public sphere. This shows that self-government is closely related to a general knowledge that is acquired through education (Kraus 2004, 186, 189-190).

34 See the possible interpretation of the referendum on the European constitution in France and the Netherlands in note 2 and further aspects in part I of this article.

35 See note 33.

36 See part II. 1 in this article.

37 As we have seen in part II. 2, the Germans for example have made an immense effort in order to strengthen their language's position in the frame of Union's institutions. Another hint of the sensitivity of the subject of language use and language skills can be seen in the fact that in 1994 after the elections to the European Parliament, there was the intention to examine the language skills of representatives. This project was stopped after the negative reactions of representatives (Kraus 2004, 169). As the cooperative attitude concerning the use and skills of one common language is not granted with regard to people who already

31 See part II. 3 in this article.

32 See part II. 5.

Van Parijs or House are too far away from people's everyday concerns. In addition, it requires a certain degree of identification with the EU that has, as I have pointed out before, not yet been reached. At the moment, people are not willing to make the sacrifice of their national language in favour of the community, or in other words, they are not willing to pay this price.<sup>38</sup>

The fact that people are prepared to spend time and money on the learning of this particular language, as put forward by Longman<sup>39</sup>, means nothing more than the already described phenomenon that people adjust their language use to the skills of their respective interlocutors. This is not a process generated by political intervention but by people's own interest in a moment they do not feel their own language challenged. It is hard to foresee how they would react in a situation with one language being the one and only means of communication while they have just been deprived of their national languages. As we have seen in note 37, even people representing their countries within the EU defend the status of their language and seem to feel alienated by the present language situation.

The idea of English as a neutral language just for EU matters that would not endanger the status of national languages within the nation states might be doubted. Van Parijs for example already wants highly qualified people to be granted the right to function in any European country in English as they are moving from one country to another for their jobs and cannot always be expected to learn the language of the respective country (Van Parijs 2007, 243-244). This would mean that all EU member states would have to provide them with any information in English and that they would not really integrate into the society of the respective country. This kind of coexistence of English and national languages on the national territories will certainly not remain without effect.<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, the reduction to one *lingua franca* at EU level would discriminate against poorer or less developed member states. Their citizens would not have the same access to English lessons as citizens of other member states, and therefore they would neither get the necessary information on EU topics in

work within or with the EU, the approval of the citizens is highly questionable. This subject would be certainly deserve further attention examination, but cannot be covered in the frame of this article.

38 See part II. 5.

39 See part II. 1.

40 The example of Switzerland, even it is not a EU member state, might help to sketch the effect of the growing importance of English with regard to its status at national level. In 2007, a member of the Swiss Parliament proposed the extension of the supply of formal documents and decrees in English and that the idea of English as further official national language should be considered. He argued that the attraction of Switzerland as a country with international contacts in science, economy and culture could be raised since potential highly skilled employees and investors as well as tourists would appreciate this kind of information and service. The answer of the Federal Government was that the extension of the number of decrees and documents of the Government translated into English should be increased with regard to the international connections the country was situated in, but not with regard to the English speaking inhabitants of Switzerland. I.e. English should be accepted in order to make information on Swiss politics and policies internationally accessible, but not in order to establish it as a further official language. This is justified for financial, political and cultural reasons (Die Bundesversammlung 2012). On the one hand, this example shows the effects of the coexistence of 'global' English and national languages and, on the other hand, the reaction of national governments that protect their national traditions and habits.

their language nor could they participate in the forum shared by all Europeans.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, they could not be elected into the European Parliament without a sufficient command of English. The principle of allowing any citizen to participate in the democratic process would be violated and the countries that can afford this language education would dominate in the EU. Under Title V, 'Citizens' Rights', in 'The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the Union'<sup>42</sup> we find the following article II-99:

Right to vote and to stand as a candidate at elections to the European Parliament:

1. Every citizen of the Union has the right to vote and to stand as a candidate at elections to the European Parliament in the Member State in which he or she resides, under the same conditions as a national of that State.
2. Members of the European Parliament shall be elected by direct universal suffrage in a free and secret ballot.

The issue of interaction within the European Parliament leads us to a crucial distinction that has been mentioned before. Kraus distinguishes between internal and external communication and states that the language regime has to be different for these two fields of communication. Furthermore, he states that employees and officials of the EU may be expected to function in a polyglot environment as they have to meet the requirements of a job profile while political representatives who have to work within the European institutions just have to learn foreign languages to a minimal level. The 50 per cent of EU citizens who have not learnt foreign languages at all, by contrast, cannot be expected to acquire further language skills in order to become equal members of a community of transnational communication and participation (Kraus 2004, 190).

I would like to draw the line at a different level. Kraus differentiates between the staff, the people with political functions, and the citizens. I agree with his statement as far as the EU staff is concerned: Members of the staff have to fulfil certain requirements related to their job profile and therefore it is admissible to expect language competence according to their function. I agree with what he says about the citizens, too. We cannot expect them to acquire the necessary language skills overnight. Here, I would like to take a closer look at the people who have to fulfil political functions. To my understanding this description includes all people who work for the EU and have been elected by their fellow citizens. I.e. they are sent to Brussels in order to represent their people. Furthermore, we can include the nationally elected representatives who, next to their national duties, are expected to participate and interact in EU boards as for example the Council of the European Union. This example predicates the crucial point of the European Parliament. We should be well aware that members of the Parliament are citizens elected by their fellow citizens. There are no additional skills required to stand for elections; a candidate only has to be a citizen of the member state and therefore cannot be assumed to have mastered foreign languages. In my opinion, there should be two levels instead of the three proposed by Kraus. On the one hand, there is the staff; on the other hand, there are the citizens. Both the people who interact as voters as well as the ones who are elected to represent their people are, first and foremost, citizens. To require more language skills from representatives than from the elective body who are not members of the Parliament would have serious consequences. Therefore, I propose a distinction between staff and citizens.

Also, we have to consider the impact a restriction of official and working languages may have on the citizens' right to stand for

41 See part II. 2.

42 *The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the Union*, 2004 O.J. (C 310): 41-54.

election. Representatives who do not dispose of sufficient language skills in the *lingua franca* will not have the same opportunity to intervene in the debates. Without the support of interpretation and translation services they would be forced to keep silent and this, as Kraus underlines, would mean political irrelevancy (Kraus 2004, 169).

Van Parijs states that increasing the number of official languages at EU level would favour the use of English. The pressure on members of the Parliament to use English in plenary sessions would rise. He is sure that this movement towards one language would not have any impact on the range of potential candidates for the European Parliament.

The recruitment pool of qualified MEP's will hardly shrink, the mutual understanding between participants will be significantly enhanced, and the degree of accountability to the electorate will hardly be reduced. Only once the symbolic value of asserting the equality of languages by using one's mother tongue is left to justify a costly and cumbersome practice, the latter will have a hard time surviving. (Van Parijs 2008, 18)

To my understanding, this would lead to a definite restriction to English as *lingua franca* without any interpretation and translation services offered. The pressure on representatives would show the effect described by Kraus: Representatives without sufficient language skills would have to remain silent and would not be able to do their duty, i.e. to represent their electorate's interests. So, the electorate is very likely to vote for a candidate who is thought able to represent their interests due to his language skills. Therefore, only citizens with a good knowledge of English will stand for elections for the European Parliament, thus profiting from a privilege of well-educated people. In the end, voters might not find eligible candidates who they feel represented them and might boycott elections to the European Parliament. For the European Parliament this could result in becoming a body of the elites of the member states, while the average citizen will neither feel nor be represented anymore. This could have the dangerous effect of leading ordinary people to withdraw from the EU project as they feel excluded – excluded by language use.<sup>43</sup>

The conclusion must be that within the European Parliament and

43 Here one might object that for work as a representative in the EU a high level of education is necessary in order to understand the complex issues at stake. This means that we need well-educated people anyway in order to fulfill their duty as representatives in a meaningful way. And so, we can assume that this level of education includes English studies as well. This is certainly plausible as we have seen in note 33, well-educated people intervene more often as soon as EU issues are concerned. But we must keep in mind that the democratic principles of the EU should allow any citizen to stand for elections and therefore it is critical for the Union's future to just count on the well-educated. Furthermore, we cannot be sure to what extent well-educated people really master the English language. As we have seen in note 37, the Union's efforts to evaluate the language skills of representatives had to be stopped due to negative reactions of the representatives themselves. Obviously, the level of English skills among Europeans in general and the present well-educated majority of EU representatives demand evaluation. Some thoughts concerning the importance of the proficiency in a potential *lingua franca* will be discussed in part III. 6.

in communication between the European Parliament and other bodies of the EU interpretation and translation have to be offered in all the official languages. Otherwise, not all representatives will work under equal conditions. Generally, this should be the principle for all boards of democratically elected representatives.

Last but not least, the constantly mentioned costs of the present language regime should be addressed. Kraus is the only one who defends the cost of two Euro per citizen per year as not being too much with regard to the service provided. Jan Figel', the European commissioner responsible for education, culture and multilingualism in 2006, said that the costs for translation and interpretation amounted to 2.48 Euro per citizen per year for the nineteen languages at the time (Fischer 2007, 43). Considering the comfort of having access to complex information in one's own national language this amount is not excessive. Still, it does not mean that the problems with respect to translation that are mentioned by many authors have to be tolerated. But we should be aware of the fact that such a system needs a huge number of qualified staff<sup>44</sup> and these are certainly not easily recruited. Furthermore, the development of the infrastructure needed to support the work of the Union needs time as new staff has to be trained. I consider the intention that has led to the present situation very important: The idea of assuring access for every representative to the entire information stems from the basic democratic conviction that it is necessary to provide equal conditions for their participation.

In my opinion, due to the aforementioned deficiencies it is too early to disqualify the present system. Facing the fact that the number of official languages has doubled since 2004, we have to acknowledge that this is an enormous challenge for translation and interpretation. Deficiencies, such as the lack of quality and professionalism, are expected to decrease in the course of time.

#### 4. The nation state: an appropriate role model

In this part, I would like to address the difficulties and misunderstandings raised due to the use of the nation state as a role model with respect to the debate on the Union's multilingualism. The idea that the members of a nation should share a common language has emerged from national unification movements. In pre-democratic times, the language of the reigning class and their subjects was not the same, and there was no necessity for a common idiom as communication had to work top-down only. With the turn to democracy, this had to change. Now that subjects had become citizens, communication had to work top-down and bottom-up at the same time in order to assure a mutual understanding between citizens and representatives (Wright 2004a, 22-23, 31). Thus, at that time, a single national language was chosen for practical reasons, as we have seen earlier in this article. A further reason why the national elites decided to implement one common language was the fact that it was seen as means for unification, as this citation shows for the example of France:

The national language is the nation.<sup>45</sup>

The consequence was that the French language became the language taught within the recently installed school system and the other varieties spoken on the French territory were demonised:

Breton is the language of federalism and superstition; German is the language of those who hate France and have abandoned it; Italian is the language of those who oppose the revolution; Basque

44 See part II. 2 in this article.

45 "*L'idiome national est la nation.*" (Giordan 2002b, 180)

is the language of fanaticism. We must destroy these harmful instruments, which lead the people into error. (Barère, 1792 in Wright 2004a, 32)

The fear of a possible return of the *ancien régime* and the will to unite people in solidarity and brotherhood led to the stigmatisation and exclusion of the non-national languages, i.e. of any other language except French (Wright 2004a, 32). Schnapper addresses the question whether political authorities should interfere with regard to multilingualism. As language is, first and foremost, a marker of identity<sup>46</sup> it is to be classified as ethnic. So, why could we not just handle multilingualism like religion and exclude this delicate subject from the political level? Language is, and this is in Schnapper's view the crucial point, not only part of the ethnic. It is a most important part of the civic as well. It is the means for political participation, the tool for democratic communication. Thus, it is not at all condemnable that the state decides on language restriction at national level since the state must enable mutual understanding. How can democracy develop if the citizens do not communicate in one common language? Therefore, the practice of the national language became a citizens' duty within the democratic nation (Schnapper 2004, 218-221).

The citizens' language use within the nation state is seen as a commitment to this democratic polity – or as a refusal. I would like to show in a short overview why the EU cannot act like a nation state and implement one sole language in the same way the latter did.

Firstly, the EU is neither a state nor a superstate. It depends on delegated sovereignty and does not have the right to interfere with language use in the nation states that constitute it. Every decision about language restriction or the acceptance of further languages as official languages at EU level would be such an interference. This has been mentioned before with regard to the question of minority languages.<sup>47</sup>

Secondly, prior to nation state building, the people of the respective countries were subjects to their leaders. They only became citizens owing to political changes – in France for example thanks to the French Revolution. The EU, by contrast, is based on the tradition of citizenship. Today's EU population does not consist of subjects but of citizens who are more or less experienced with this status and also require this for the new supranational polity. Furthermore, EU citizens already possess a more or less established national identity (Kraus 2004, 70) because the borders within Europe are quite stable compared to the circumstances before nation state building (Wright 2004a, 20-25).

Thirdly, nation state building in general unified a territory composed of small entities where a range of language varieties were spoken. These varieties rarely had a written tradition or grammar. The EU, by contrast, has on its territory a range of established national languages, each with a tradition and a geographical domain. I think that the way of implementation of a single official language in a nation state cannot be a role model, as there has even been a demonisation of other varieties on the territory. People were suspected to be counterrevolutionaries because of their differing language use. Forcing individuals to use but one language for the sake of a polity that is entirely new to them might have been considered a valid sanction at the time citizenship emerged. Today, however, such measures are neither discussable nor enforceable on the European continent with its long democratic tradition.

Fourthly, as the EU is founded by nation states and is based on

46 Further authors accentuate the close relationship of language and identity, for example Wagner 2006.

47 See part III. 1 in this article.

democratic principles, the decision to reduce the number of languages should be subject to a vote. In the present situation it is hardly possible to foresee the result of such a ballot. It can be asked whether the citizens would reject this as they did in France or the Netherlands in the case of the European constitution, because they do not see what an impact the EU has on their conditions of life. They did not seem to vote on the subject at stake then; their goal was to penalise their governments or to express their frustration about political matters in general. This leads to the question how meaningful a vote on such an important subject as the reduction to one *lingua franca* at EU level could be at the moment.

However, it is important that decisions about such subjects remains with the citizens. Yet we should be aware of the possibility that such a vote could be distorted by more immediate concerns for which there is no other outlet, as the constitution of the respective country does not offer the possibility of voting on subjects at national level. The fact that this could harm decision-making at EU level is of secondary interest for people since EU matters in general are not among their most urgent concerns. These few points show that the nation state has emerged under totally different conditions and none of the measures employed in order to achieve national unity and national comprehension – considered suitable for the nation state then – could be a justifiable measure for the EU today.

## 5. Alternatives to the idea of english as *lingua franca*

So far I have presented the arguments which are put forward in favour of one *lingua franca* that should be English, but there are other potential candidates. In the frame of this article, a brief insight into the argumentation pro and contra Esperanto must suffice, but it should nevertheless be mentioned here since – as a matter of fact – one fifth of the members of the European Parliament think Esperanto is an option that could improve communication in the EU (Gubbins 2002, 55).

Esperanto<sup>48</sup> should not be underestimated. Developed in 1887 by a Polish physician<sup>49</sup>, it has known a long history and there have been several attempts to strengthen its position. The UNESCO's appeal to international organisations to make Esperanto their common language for communication was the peak of its success in 1985 (Haarmann 1993, 328). Several conventions took place in the 20<sup>th</sup> century during which Esperanto was the language used by the participants – conventions on technology and natural science, *nota bene* (Hagège 1996, 27). The Esperanto movement is very active all over Europe. Even though this artificial language proved from its beginning that it could work as language of communication, its neutrality and independence from all social identity might have been the reason for its being disregarded by the majority of social as well as political entities. In fact, none of the international organisations has adopted Esperanto as a working language (Haarmann 1993, 328-329). And the adaptability to further fields like literature is highly doubtful. The lack of cultural identity that a language normally produces during its development could be the reason for the lack of nuances that literature lives on. Its neutrality, once seen as the major advantage, has been seen not to be effective enough to avoid its being replaced by English (Hagège 1996, 27). As far as the comparison has been made between artificial and natural languages, it can be said that no artificial language can seriously challenge any of the natural languages of global influence. Thus, Esperanto will not be of any importance for the decision on a *lingua franca* in European cooperation (Haarmann 1993, 329).

48 There exist further artificial languages, but Esperanto is the most successful one (Haarmann 1993, 328).

49 For more detailed information on the history of Esperanto, see Sikosek 2006.

Gubbins inquires into the question why 20 per cent of members of the Parliament do not intervene actively in favour of Esperanto, which they consider the appropriate language for Europe. He finds that most of them do not know enough about the details to defend this proposition in public. The agreement on Esperanto is owed to the strength of the national Esperanto associations and their lobbying among parliamentarians. Representatives do not know much about it because the Esperantists do not think it necessary to inform them properly (Gubbins 2002, 54-55).

And there is a further critique with respect to Esperanto as *lingua franca*. Van Parijs does not agree that it is neutral, as the basis of the language is the Western group of Indo-European languages. He does not see the promised simplicity of it either. Esperanto with its present vocabulary could not meet the needs of efficient EU-communication. The words and expressions needed to enlarge its vocabulary would come from English and thus its simplicity and neutrality would be gone. Furthermore, learning would be difficult since there is no opportunity for practicing it in everyday life as there are no TV shows, books etc. Therefore Van Parijs agrees that the European *lingua franca* has to be found among natural languages (Van Parijs 2007, 222-225).

Esperanto is considered by 20 per cent of the members of the Parliament a suitable alternative to English. But as authors like Gubbins or Haarmann show, Esperanto has not achieved its goal of becoming a transnational language or a language used by international organisations yet. It is a language employed by elites and does not have the necessary attraction to people in general. The major drawback is probably the fact that the learning of Esperanto is very difficult, due to the lack of books and other instruction material. It is not accessible for everyone and it is highly questionable why we should learn a language for communication within the EU that has no meaning at all outside Europe. Esperanto is, in my view, out of reach for the vast majority of Europeans as they have not heard anything about this language at all and as there are no media or books available in it.

Latin, the other candidate that is sometimes named, is another universal language that is considered predestined for the role of *lingua franca* of Europe since it actually used to be the universal language of Europe (Gubbins 2002, 54). This proposition is rejected by Trabant. Latin certainly represents European identity and is surely a European language that has had a crucial impact on European history and literature. But introducing this language as *lingua franca* would have serious drawbacks. In the Middle Ages, it endangered other languages as there was no need to learn anything else but Latin. Furthermore, it had a crucial impact on the developing popular idioms. And Latin as *lingua franca* in the Europe of today would degrade all the national languages to the level of languages without importance – not only at the political level. This shows that Latin as universal language of the Middle Ages had the same effect as English as *lingua franca* would have today. We should always be aware that the decadence of Latin coincided with the rise of the bourgeoisie. The new and economically important middle class wanted to have access to knowledge in their language. Latin was the language of a minority only and excluded the majority of the members of society from knowledge. So the question is whether we really want to go back to the Middle Ages as the division of society in literates and ignorants would undoubtedly return since Latin has been and will not be learnt by all European citizens (Trabant 2008, 195-198) - even though some members of the Parliament see it as a language “we all learned”<sup>50</sup>.

This shows that voting for Esperanto or Latin is elitist. Latin is nowadays studied by a minority at school and the knowledge acquired there will generally not suffice to use it actively at EU

level. Gubbins comments with regard to the proposition of Latin by Ursula Schleicher that we can see, “*how out of touch elected representatives can be*” (Gubbins 2002, 54). English would have the advantage of an immense spread all over Europe. But nevertheless, it would exclude many people from power as mastering English to an extent that allows meaningful work at political level can still not be expected from everybody. And the EU’s democratic principles oblige us to find a solution that allows political participation for all of its citizens and not just for the well-educated elites.

Even though I think it important to consistently stick to the democratic principle, I understand the wish to simplify communication. Internal communication differs from external communication since the number of interacting people is manageable compared to the immense number of citizens. A promising compromise for internal communication might be the market model (“*Marktmodell*” (Lölke 2007, 68)). At the moment, it is practiced in 90 of 160 of the working groups that prepare the meetings of the Council of the European Union. The nation states’ delegations have to book interpreters according to the needs of their group. Each member state receives a budget of one million Euro per six months from the community in order to pay for this service. If this budget is exceeded, the costs have to be borne by the state in question. Credits will be carried forward in favour of the countries’ travel budgets. The so called passive way of using interpretation services – speaking in one’s own language, but waiving the service when listening – cuts the cost down to 50 per cent. Two years after the introduction of this model, the result is that hardly any country exhausts its budget and that the number of interpreters needed per meeting has decreased (Lölke 2007, 68-69).

In my view, this is a model that could be adapted to all kinds of situations where representatives are involved in EU institutions. Delegations are included in the decision on the employment of interpreters and are aware of the costs. The market model still grants a stable basis for the work of the institutions while it motivates people to contribute to a more efficient and less costly communication process. The differentiation of active and passive interpretation allows a more specific employment of the interpreters, while the problems of costs and space can be eased in agreement with all the people affected.

The positive result of the experiment in my opinion is not surprising. As we have seen earlier in this article, people who are treated as responsible individuals and who experience respect and recognition and are free to negotiate their language use according to the situation without restrictions from the top are more willing to cooperate. The cooperative attitude that is needed to communicate in the market model underlines that language use in a plurilingual situation is not a barrier, it can be rather an incentive for interaction and the construction of common ties.<sup>51</sup>

The only justified critique is based on the fact that every country has one million Euro for translations. If a country wants to get all the information and needs all translations and interpretations, it has to pay out of its own pocket. Germany for example pays 700’000 Euro per six months extra for interpretation and translation services because they want to have everything translated and interpreted into German (Lölke 2007, 69). One could object that not all countries have the means to afford such a sum. Here Van Parijs’ objection that multilingualism can be discriminating or excluding because only the rich and the powerful can afford quality interpretation and are really able to interact<sup>52</sup> must be taken into account. Responding to this objection, I agree that the budget would certainly have to be kept in mind. Further experience with this system for working groups

51 As we have seen in parts II. 6.

52 See part II. 2 in this article.

50 Statement by MEP Ursula Schleicher (Gubbins 2002, 54).

and institutions would, in my view, allow us to improve and adapt a variant for the respective fields of interaction.

#### Lost in Translation or a Babel of School Pupil English?

Gubbins comments the present wait-and-see attitude of the EU, as he names it, as follows:

It would appear, therefore, that while an expanded Europe seeks new identity and purpose, its definition and expression are doomed to remain lost in translation. (Gubbins 2002, 57)

This citation shows the fear of latent multilingual chaos. The question to be asked in this context is whether we would understand each other better in a *lingua franca*. Democracy demands not only simple communication but an exchange at a very high level. Self-governance by the citizens, as I have sketched democracy in a very simplified way, implies that all citizens should be able to communicate on all topics of relevance. Giordan thinks that after some generations of compulsory schooling everybody in the EU will be able to communicate in English and Van Parijs is sure that by means of intensive English training of EU citizens the laborious and inefficient translation services could be abandoned.<sup>53</sup> I think it most important to investigate the real English skills of Europeans with regard to the specific demands of democratic cooperation.<sup>54</sup> We must see that people are not generally fluent in a foreign language and cannot be expected to be so, as Wright for example states:

[...] English is learnt only as a *lingua franca* for utility and access to knowledge and markets; there appears at present little likelihood that English will replace any learners' mother tongue as a first language and learners' competence in the foreign language may remain quite limited both in sophistication and in the domains in which a learner can operate. [...] It [European education] is creating a community which can communicate, even if only in school pupil English. (Wright 2000, 214)

This citation leads to what I would like to point out here. The community of communication that Wright wishes to emerge, or a forum shared by all Europeans that Van Parijs has in mind<sup>55</sup>, demand very advanced language skills in order to discuss the issues the EU deals with. 'School pupil English' will certainly not suffice.

Bliesener stresses that cultural identity is given through socialisation. It is defined by relationships between actors and the actors' manner of communicating their 'ego' to others. So it is very difficult for a non-English-speaking person to get across exactly what he or she would like to say in this foreign language. The statement by an English teacher "*I speak English, but I do not really talk it*" helps to explain the difficulty. A person who has learnt English as a foreign language is able to use the English code to a certain extent, but it is still very difficult for them to express their own thoughts and feelings. Thus the comprehension of the true meaning of non-native speakers is very demanding (Bliesener 2002, 214).

Furthermore, Bliesener states that people form the English language according to their needs and operate with insertions

from their own mother tongue or apply the grammar of their mother tongue to the foreign language. Spanglish in Florida shows that people unconsciously seem to defend their mother tongue against the dominance of English in order to preserve their identity (Bliesener 2002, 213-214). This seems to come close to what House understands by ELF<sup>56</sup> and shows a major drawback of the idea of communicating in a language that is modified according to people's skills and needs. The subjects discussed at the EU level, such as legislative texts, demand very advanced language skills in order to understand the subtle distinctions a native speaker makes. ELF will not meet the needs of such sort of communication. Considering all the non-natives that should be informed in English only, we can expect that a lot of misunderstandings to arise. On the one hand, a single language will exclude misunderstandings caused by translation. On the other hand, a considerable number of misunderstandings will arise due to insufficient language skills. Thus, people have to have access to information of such complexity in their proper language and with additional explanations that take their background into account. They cannot be expected to learn another language to the extent of such specific vocabulary.

At present, people still learn some of the neighbour states' languages to a certain extent. Even a basic knowledge of these languages gives them an impression of the cultural multitude and the views and attitudes of their neighbours; therefore, even a low level of language skills is valuable for mutual comprehension. This might hold true for political matters as well. My intention is to underline that English studies alone do not create understanding between nations since people from different cultural and democratic backgrounds use a foreign language without having the necessary knowledge of their interlocutors' respective background. In addition to the linguistic difficulties among non-native speakers, the concentration on foreign language studies in English increases cultural and political misunderstanding. The negotiation of language use by the partners concerned makes it probable nobody will feel neglected, either in terms of language or culturally. In my view it is this recognition of the interlocutor as a person with all her or his cultural identity that enables such a kind of communication. I think it is dangerous to suggest to people that they would not need more than one tool for communication instead of different foreign languages. There is nothing to be said against English studies as part of language learning. But it cannot replace the positive effect of the learning of a wider range of languages.

The ideal of multilingual Europe is seen by several contributors as a hindrance to political participation. I counter that the ideal of English as common language is an obstacle to political participation as well. To expect English skills of all the people that should be politically involved is certainly not realistic. This is shown by the fact that the exchange programs, as *Lingua* or *Erasmus*, initiated by the EU are only accessible for a minority. Only 1.5 percent of the eligible young Europeans participate in such programs. And this share is not expected to rise (Gubbins 2002, 49).

Furthermore, I would like to briefly discuss the argument for English as *lingua franca* put forward by Giordan.<sup>57</sup> He fears that without a common idiom a serious weakening of European economy could emerge, followed by an increasing influence of the Anglo-Americans on the European market. A survey among smaller companies in the EU proves that the lack of language skills causes financial loss. Nearly every company has lost orders due to poor language skills or ignorance of different manners. It was not just the missing ability to communicate in English, but a good command of various other languages, including cultural empathy that would have been demanded

<sup>53</sup> See parts II. 3 and II. 5.

<sup>54</sup> See note 44.

<sup>55</sup> See parts II. 2 and II. 5.

<sup>56</sup> See part II. 4.

<sup>57</sup> See part II. 2 in this article.

(CiLT 2007)<sup>58</sup>. What we should learn from this is that there is more we need in everyday life than a tool for communication. People really need to understand each other. This includes knowledge of cultural peculiarities as well. Many authors, as we have seen, mention the costs of the plurilingual strategy of the EU.<sup>59</sup> But there is a great amount of money lost by the lack of cultural and linguistic awareness that cannot be compensated by imposing English, or any other language, as the sole official one everybody would have to learn.

In my view we should focus on the positive outcome of plurilingual situations and multinational cooperation should profit from the obvious cooperative attitude people show in such circumstances – this is what we can learn from the ELF experiment of House as well. The will of interlocutors to communicate successfully and the resulting mutual respect and recognition must be the basis for further European integration. Since European political cooperation is wanted to be continued, the permanent withdrawal of the citizens has to be counteracted.

#### IV. Conclusion

There are many propositions about how to improve European cooperation and how to achieve better integration of the citizens in the democratic system of the EU. As we have seen, with regard to language use there is no simple solution. The idea that linguistic justice could be granted by the installation of one sole language for all EU matters does not take some crucial aspects into account. Firstly, it does not consider the present situation of the EU and its citizens. Distrust and passivity are very dangerous for future cooperation and therefore, the implementation of one *lingua franca* for the EU might not be accepted by the citizens at the moment. Secondly, the nation state must be respected as decisive entity for the citizens of the EU. They are used to participate in democratic processes at nation state level in a certain language and cannot be expected to acquire further languages in order to participate in the European democratic process. Restricting language use for institutions where elected representatives interact or for the communication between the Union and the citizens would exclude a part of them from power and this is not acceptable with regard to the EU's democratic principles. As democracy means self-governance by the citizens, they must understand the policy-making done in their name and they have to be granted the opportunity to participate actively in the decision-making process – regardless of their language skills. Thirdly, mutual comprehension in a single *lingua franca* is considered much easier and more efficient. This is misleading. We should not forget that the topics the EU deals with are very complex and demand a high level of language skills – skills the majority of citizens does not dispose of at the moment and might never dispose of in the future. So, the interpretation and translation services would still be needed – for external communication and for internal communication as far as elected representatives are concerned.

The EU should stick to its commitment to multilingualism and further integration could certainly profit from the cooperative attitude people show in plurilingual situations. Thanks to the acquisition of more than one foreign language citizens will learn more about the languages as well as about cultural peculiarities of their neighbours. This exchange supports the comprehension of the interests of other EU-member states. Mutual comprehension in this sense could build up common ties and favour a better participation and cooperation in the future. Without recognition and respect, the citizens might definitely withdraw from the political process at EU level. And this could

be the deathblow for the entire European project.

As a final conclusion, we can state that the situation of language use is more complex and closely connected to identity, culture and democratic rights. The EU will have to shoulder the costs of interpretation and translation services and it will have to accept the fact that citizens need some time to adapt to their role in the European system. This is the price the EU has to pay for integration and a meaningful future cooperation with its citizens, including access to democracy and linguistic justice for all of them. But these efforts will have positive effects on European integration and democratic participation; thus, in the long term, the EU will profit from its investments.

58 The study ELAN (Effects on the European Economy of Shortages of Foreign Language Skills in Enterprises) was commissioned by the Directorate General for Education and Culture of the European Commission in December 2005.

59 See parts II. 2 and III. 3.

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