

The European Union (EU-27) and its languages

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**Université Paris Diderot – Paris 7
UFR Études Interculturelles de Langues Appliquées
CLILLAC-ARP**

<http://e271.eila.univ-paris-diderot.fr>

The CLILLAC-ARP research centre is organising an international conference entitled 'The European Union (EU-27) and its languages'. The conference will take place at the Université Paris Diderot-Paris 7 from 3 to 5 December 2009 under the direction of José Carlos Herreras.

The European Union is composed today of twenty-seven member states with Germany, Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands constituting the foundational core of its predecessor, the European Economic Community, established by the Treaty of Rome in 1957. Its current composition is the result of six successive enlargements. These allowed Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom to join the Community on 1 January 1973, followed by Greece on 1 January 1981, and five years later, on 1 January 1986, Spain and Portugal. In January 1995 under its new name, the European Union welcomed three new countries: Austria, Finland and Sweden. Then, in January 2004, ten new countries (Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia) joined the Union, and finally three years later, Bulgaria and Romania followed suit.

But, while the European Union grew and its importance on the world stage increased from the economic and political to the demographic and territorial perspectives, the introduction of new official languages raised a major linguistic issue: that of the communication between the Union's institutions, States and citizens.

Indeed, each enlargement and the integration of new countries have brought with them an increase in the number of the European Union's official languages, from four initially (German, French, Italian and Dutch) to twenty-three today, more than half of which have gained official status since 2004.

For now, the European Union, in deciding to keep twenty-three official languages, has made its gamble on the option of the complementarity of languages, a gamble on diversity. Indeed, this choice seems to have been a natural one. If one considers, on the one hand, that European construction itself is the result of a process which, by successive enlargements, allowed a certain number of countries to join the Community, which were not members at the outset, it is difficult to imagine a possible pretext for refusing certain countries a benefit which was accorded to others - that of allowing an official state language to become an official Union language. On the other hand, one may suggest that the choice of a single language would have created a certain hierarchy between countries within the Community, leading to instances of dissent and a lack of cohesion which could have endangered European construction. But, the option of diversity also carries its own demands with it, and all the more so when one remembers that linguistic diversity is the common rule in most countries of the Union.

The theme of the conference will be explored around three central poles:

1.- The first pole relates to the diverse linguistic situations within the countries of the European Union. Indeed, complex linguistic situations exist in many countries, and it would be fruitful to analyse these together with the solutions which are envisaged by the various member states to ensure the management of their languages. In this respect, particular attention will be accorded to the new countries which have joined the Union since 2004, without, however, excluding the others, whose linguistic landscapes may have undergone evolution since their accession.

2.- A second pole focuses on the European Union itself, since as an institution it draws up its own linguistic policy. One recognises that not all languages spoken in the Union have become official European Union languages and that not all official languages receive the same treatment across the European institutions. Has the accession of a large number of new countries, especially since 2004, led to a substantial change in the functioning of the European institutions on the linguistic level? What are the consequences with regard to the area of interpretation, and more particularly to that of translation?

3.- The according of official status to new languages within the Union, some of which are only spoken by a limited number of speakers, has given rise to jealousies in certain countries on the part of regional languages. In this sense, the third pole of reflection will be devoted to regional or minority languages, and their role and aspirations within the European Union.