

Strategy to develop the use of French in Europe

Of the 450 million citizens of the European Union, 70 million are native French speakers and 12 million are learning French. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has developed a strategy to promote the use of French in Europe, which goes hand in hand with the strategy for plurilingualism. The addition of ten new member states has upset the balance of languages in Europe, making it all the more urgent to promote the use of French in the EU. It has therefore become a top priority. As a result, it is important that:

- we work closely with the EU institutions responsible for the development of plurilingualism in the national education systems of the member states (1);
- the development of plurilingualism be extended to civil service in the EU, and that we therefore work to enhance the use of French in the public domain (2),
- particularly by providing training to civil servants in charge of multilateral and European issues. Such training could take place in initial or continuing education programmes, in partnership with the other Francophone member states and the International Organisation for Francophony (3 and 4).

If we want to see the French language continue to be a language of international communication, we have to see that its future is secured in Europe, both in EU institutions and in the education systems of the EU member states.

1. A clear goal: standardising the teaching of two modern foreign languages to all European citizens as a means of promoting French within the EU's national education systems.

The EU's top priority at the Barcelona European Council (March 2002) was the mandatory teaching of two modern foreign languages in the EU's national education systems. This priority was reconfirmed in a European Commission document addressed to the European Parliament, European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions in November 2005. The document was entitled "Framework strategy for multilingualism". However, the document has not yet been applied in seven EU countries (Spain, Italy, the UK, Hungary, Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia).

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is determined to develop the use of French in the EU's national education systems by promoting the standardisation of teaching two modern foreign languages in schools. The introduction of a second mandatory foreign language will benefit French in particular.

This effort also extends to the teachers, who are invited to take teacher training courses in France and may benefit from scholarships, the provision of native readers for their classes and the development of partnerships with IUFMs (Teacher training institutes) in France. A three-year plan to provide training to 2,000 French teachers in the countries of central and eastern Europe has also been developed.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs attaches particular importance to bilingual Francophone institutions, in which 50,000 European pupils are enrolled. Together with the network of the Agence pour l'Enseignement du Français à l'Etranger (AEFE - Agency for Teaching French Abroad), these institutions promote excellence in teaching the French language. As such,

they are magnets of recruitment for French departments in universities and in institutions of higher French education. It is in this context that we are trying to develop synergies between the AEF network and bilingual sections in schools, with the support of measures for linguistic and educational cooperation.

The promotion of French certifications (DELF/DALF), which have been harmonised with the Common European Framework of Reference for the languages of the Council of Europe, is another source of leverage benefiting the quality of French teaching and encouraging cooperation with local authorities on issues concerning evaluation and curricula.

As regards departments of French studies in the higher education system, France is assisting with the modernisation of university curricula, a process accelerated by the Bologna Process. By way of example, a regional project is underway in Poland and the Czech Republic for the creation of an inter-university network of French studies departments, the establishment of a central data base of Master's theses and the creation of a PhD programme.

2. Developing the use of French in EU institutions

During the negotiation of the new conditions of civil service in the EU, France endeavoured to ensure that the use of French in EU institutions would be maintained. The recruitment process for EU civil servants now requires candidates to speak a second foreign language in addition to their native language. Furthermore, a third language, in addition to the first two, will now be one of the pre-requisites for the promotion of civil servants in the EU. The measures to apply these requirements are currently being negotiated and should enter into force at the start of May 2007.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is also working to preserve the use of French in newly created European agencies, whose language regimes are still quite varied.

A memo on "French in European institutions" was sent out to remind French State officials that they must systematically give preference to speaking French in European institutions.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is also working to ensure the presence of French citizens, European civil servants or national experts on assignment, in all of the EU's institutions, an effort that contributes to maintaining the use of French in Europe. As such, the development of the French placement policy is very important from a linguistic standpoint.

3. Targeting specific audiences, in collaboration with the International Organisation for Francophony

France's policy to promote French in the EU began as a bilateral effort, which became multilateral in 2002 when the Multiannual action plan for French in the European Union was signed by France, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, the French-speaking community of Wallonia-Brussels, and the International Organisation for Francophony.

The plan is aimed at creating French training courses for civil servants in EU member countries and in countries that are candidates for entry, as well as for diplomats, civil servants

in European institutions, translators, interpreters in European institutions and in candidate countries, and journalists accredited by the EU.

Memorandums have been signed at the ministerial level with a number of countries concerned by the plan (Romania, Hungary, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Slovakia, Croatia) and others are being negotiated with the Czech Republic, Austria and Greece. Estonia and Lithuania are not members of the International Organisation for Francophony, however they have also expressed interest in the plan. All of these countries have made a commitment to train their diplomats and civil servants in French for European relations over a three-year period. The countries have also agreed to take this training in to account for their promotion and assignment. The vast majority of the countries co-finance these training programmes.

The Francophone Summit in Bucharest, to be held in September 2006, will be a significant event and an opportunity to celebrate the efforts of these member states and candidate states to provide French training to their civil servants.

The number of people who have taken advantage of the French training programmes offered thanks to the Multiannual Plan has increased significantly over the past few years: over 8,900 people benefited from individual training courses in 2005 (vs. 1,600 in 2001).

From the beginning, the actors involved in implementing the policy to promote French in the EU have worked very well together.

4. In 2006, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is focusing its efforts on the quality of the training programmes and on making network tools consistently available for these programmes.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has organised training and practice courses for French teachers at the Centre Européen de Langue Française (European Centre for the French Language) in Brussels (February and June 2006) and Sofia (October 2006).

Based on the surveys regularly performed by the French Embassies to define the expectations of civil servants in terms of training, the Ministry is in the process of making a number of tools available to the French training network starting in the summer of 2006. These tools include:

- on-line teaching tools, developed with respect to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and to French certifications,
- a long-distance training platform
- an application to help design, manage and evaluate course offerings

Conclusion:

Although the French language is certainly of key importance in and of itself, it also contributes greatly to France's foreign policy in the European Union. It is a priority that is applied to several other French programmes, such as the programme for key personalities of the future at the Centre d'Analyse et de Prévision (Centre for Analysis and Forecasting).

The French language is an indispensable factor in our university, technical and audiovisual cooperation programmes, and is a fundamental source of the country's attraction. Efforts to promote the French language, in a greater context of cultural and linguistic diversity, remain a priority for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.