

INTERVISTA AL VICEPRESIDENTE
DELLA COMMISSIONE EUROPEA NEIL KINNOCK

a cura di Laura Mori
(con una premessa di Vincenzo Orioles)
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Nel Trattato di Roma (25 marzo 1957), atto costitutivo dell'allora "Comunità" diventata dal 1992 con il Trattato di Maastricht "Unione Europea", era stabilito che tutte le lingue nazionali dei Paesi aderenti fossero considerate "lingue ufficiali" dell'Unione stessa e avessero quindi parità di diritti e di effetti: in aderenza agli obblighi sanciti dal Trattato di fondazione a ciascun cittadino dei Paesi membri è assicurato il diritto di rivolgersi nella propria lingua a qualsiasi istituzione comunitaria e di riceverne risposta nella propria lingua.

Inizialmente erano in gioco le quattro lingue dei Paesi fondatori (francese, italiano, nederlandese, tedesco): nel tempo si sono aggiunte le lingue degli altri Paesi via via aderenti (Danimarca, Finlandia, Grecia, Regno Unito, Irlanda, Portogallo, Spagna, Svezia); a partire dal 1 maggio 2004, con l'ingresso di dieci nuovi Paesi, questa condizione viene ora riconosciuta alle lingue di Cipro, Estonia, Lettonia, Lituania, Malta, Polonia, Repubblica Ceca, Slovacchia, Slovenia, Ungheria. Tra le famiglie linguistiche fin qui rappresentate nell'Unione Europea era nettamente maggioritario l'indoeuropeo ed in particolare nell'ambito indoeuropeo erano rappresentati finora i gruppi romano, germanico e celtico ed ellenico; unica lingua non indoeuropea tra quelle nazionali era il finnico. Con l'adesione dei dieci nuovi paesi (maggio 2004), l'UE da una parte vedrà consolidarsi il primato indoeuropeo grazie alla presenza di tre nuove lingue slave (si aggiungeranno tre varietà occidentali – ceco, slovacco e polacco – e una meridionale, lo sloveno), al potenziamento del greco (alla Grecia si affiancherà la comunità ellenofona di Cipro) e all'ammissione di paesi di espressione baltica (rappresentati dalla Lituania e Lettonia); tuttavia garantirà anche nuovi spazi alle lingue ugrofinniche (con l'ungherese e con l'estone) ed aprirà per la prima volta le porte dell'Unione ad una lingua di ceppo semitico, il maltese. Resta tuttora in dubbio se verrà riconosciuta una qualche forma di status al turco, nonostante costituisca uno delle due lingue praticate a Cipro, poiché la tensione tra le due comunità fa temere che, almeno in un primo tempo, l'adesione dell'isola si risolva nell'ammissione della sola comunità di lingua greca.

La diversità linguistica dell'Unione Europea ne sarà indubbiamente esaltata, ma è innegabile che la gestione di questo impegnativo plurilinguismo costituisce una sfida alla quale le istituzioni comunitarie devono garantire una equilibrata risposta. A questi temi è particolarmente sensibile il Centro Internazionale sul Plurilinguismo al quale il vicepresidente della Commissione europea Neil Kinnock ha rilasciato una articolata intervista il cui testo è stato curato da Laura Mori e che ben volentieri sottoponiamo all'attenzione della comunità scientifica.

La percezione è che ci si muova in un difficile equilibrio: c'è da una parte il rischio che la polverizzazione dei soggetti linguistici porti ad un monolinguisma di fatto, che consoliderebbe l'egemonia dell'inglese: una prospettiva di questo genere, quella cioè di un'unica "lingua veicolare" sovranazionale di fatto, rimetterebbe in discussione il principio pluralista su cui si regge l'identità europea; il "passaggio" di contenuti concettuali complessi elaborati in seno a culture così diverse entro le forme di una sola lingua non potrebbe che produrre inaccettabili semplificazioni. Dall'altra non appare realistico, soprattutto dal punto di vista dei costi insopportabili che discendono dalle ben 380 combinazioni interlinguistiche, immaginare una parificazione operativa totale delle venti lingue ufficiali.

Si profila allora, come fa intravedere lo stesso Kinnock, una soluzione pragmatica basata su un ristretto numero di procedural languages ("lingue di lavoro"), ossia l'inglese, il francese ed il tedesco,

cui si ricorrerà per la discussione ed i processi decisionali: in concreto verrà sempre più codificato l'accorgimento della cosiddetta "two-way translation" (traduzione "a doppia corsia"), già impiegata dopo l'ultima ondata di adesioni, per cui al traduttore viene chiesto di tradurre dalla sua lingua in una delle tre lingue procedurali, per poi far controllare questa traduzione – se necessario – da un collega che abbia come lingua materna la lingua procedurale scelta.

Resta il fatto che dallo statuto di "lingua di lavoro" resterebbero tagliati fuori idiomi di antica e diffusa tradizione culturale, come lo spagnolo, il portoghese, il polacco, l'ungherese, e tra essi anche l'italiano nonostante la nostra lingua possa far valere tutti i requisiti in linea di principio validi per godere di tale prerogativa, ossia a) presenza del Paese interessato tra i fondatori dell'Unione; b) consistenza demografica; c) apprezzabile diffusione della lingua al di fuori del Paese di appartenenza; d) entità del contributo al bilancio comunitario; e) antica ed estesa ricezione dei valori di civiltà di quel Paese nel tessuto culturale europeo. L'oggettivo disagio che si avverte di fronte a scelte di questo tipo è a stento temperato da tutta una serie di garanzie formali.

A Kinnock è stata espressa un'altra preoccupazione, se cioè l'ingresso di tante nuove comunità, ognuna delle quali portatrice di un ricco plurilinguismo interno, possa penalizzare le politiche linguistiche comunitarie in materia di tutela e valorizzazione delle "lingue regionali e minoritarie"; Kinnock ribatte (v. in particolare la domanda 10) rifiutando con decisione l'ipotesi che le lingue europee meno diffuse saranno emarginate: sarà previsto e tutelato uno spazio adeguato per tutte le lingue che formano il mosaico Europeo.

1. The language regime states that Community law is to be drafted in the eleven official languages but in practice the Community institutions use a number of procedural languages internally. Because of time pressure and economic reasons they adopt an asymmetrical regime using three languages (English, French and German) for discussion and decision making.

Fifty years after the original European Community was set up, do you believe multilingualism to be an effective language policy?

Yes, the ability of citizens to communicate with European Union institutions in their national languages (11 now, 20 in May next year) is a democratic right. It is also an obligation under the Union's founding Treaty.

It is therefore vital to ensure that citizens are able to read all communications and see all laws that apply to them written in a language they can easily understand. Respecting identities, culture and language is at the heart of the European project. Our language policy must be a bridge, not a barrier and multilingualism is central to sustaining the twin values of unity and diversity in Europe.

Obviously, however, there's a functional difference between communication with citizens and communication among officials in the Commission. At the moment officials work within the Commission using a core of three languages for discussion and decision-making: English, French and German. These are the procedural languages, derived from a pragmatic approach in the interests of maximum convenience and speed.

2. Multilingualism plays a central role in a democratic Union of different cultures because it brings unity and is a means of social and economic development. As part of your remit you have political responsibility for the Commission's language services.

What are the guidelines of your political strategy: how do you manage to look after the interpreting and translation services? How do you work out different language policies?

My role is to define the main strategy at political level and to have it endorsed by the Commission when necessary. The Director-General for Translation (DGT) and the Director General for Interpretation (DGI) are responsible for the day-to-day management of each language Service.

Three hundred and eighty million people with 11 languages means a massive organisational and logistical effort and more challenges must be met when ten new Member States join the EU next year.

Enlargement from May 2004 will bring nine more languages and a theoretical increase from 110 possible language combinations now to 380 then.

The need to manage the cost of multilingualism in the context of enlargement has motivated the Commission to develop a strategy for reducing the total volume of translation and interpretation work in order to focus on primary needs. In Spring 2002 we therefore adopted an overall strategy to further enhance the efficiency and productivity of the linguistic services by limiting overall demand when necessary and sustaining quality.

If there were no language services in Brussels and Luxembourg, there would need to be more in the Member States. That would probably increase rather than decrease overall costs. With a central system at EU level, there are obvious economies of scale and better means of quality control.

Our Linguistic Services are recognised to be about the best in the world but the aim of the strategy now being implemented is to further improve the service and the standard of output offered by our language departments, by focusing supply more directly, all in the context of the fresh demands and pressures arising from enlargement.

The strategy may have generated some controversy because it is the first formal departure from the previous principle of “translation on demand and without limit”. However, the DG Translation and DG Interpretation management agree that, by concentrating demand on key activities and real needs, we can actually improve the level of service by reducing translation times and extending available interpretation resources to cover more meetings while raising the standard of linguistic delivery.

3. Respect for and promotion of European national identities in a culturally diverse continent are fundamental to democracy. The other side of the coin is the need for an efficient structure able, day after day, to handle a huge amount of excellent translation and interpreting work.

Multilingualism requires a massive and expensive organisational and logistical operation. How is it possible to minimise its cost?

Obviously, democracy and multilingualism have costs – freedom is rarely free! But the reality is that the total cost of translation and interpretation for all of the EU institutions is, at € 700 million, less than 1% of the EU budget and, even after enlargement and an 82% increase in the number of EU official languages, it will still be less than € 1 billion. In other words, we produce legislation and information for all citizens in their own languages, enable the representatives from all Member States to express themselves in their own languages, and provide the means for citizens to communicate with the EU Institutions in their own language at an average cost of just € 2 per citizen per year – and that low cost will continue.

The DGT now translates 1.3 million pages per year with output up 2.8% and productivity up 2.2% on 2001. DG Interpretation interprets for approximately 11,000 meetings held each year with a staff of around 700 interpreters each day. In order to deliver this level of service in a cost-efficient manner, these Services have been at the forefront of the reforming drive for excellence and efficiency across the Commission.

Both services are currently implementing a series of actions from the 2002 the strategy paper to reduce global costs while maintaining the overall quality of services. They include:

- increased outsourcing of translation of non-core documents (with a target of 30% for the DGT in 2005 compared with 20% today). This provides an additional flexible resource to complement the Commission’s translating staff, and it will be made easier by the clearer distinction being made between core and non-core business. Some 50% of DG Interpretation’s work is already being done by freelance interpreters.
- long-term hiring of freelance interpreters as well as better identification, recruitment, training and testing of interpreters;
- the development of internal billing between services and the DGT, and service-level agreements between DG Interpretation and the Institutions which it serves;
- greater co-operation between the EU Institutions on recruitment and economies of scale;

- more cooperation with translators in the preparatory stages of document production. If translators are involved at the drafting stage of actions and legislation, for example, they can make sure that minimal translation is required in the intermediate stages and when the finished product arrives. That restrains costs while increasing quality;
- reduction in the number of mandatory reports and overall reduction in the size of documents. That too, focuses the attention of drafters and increases efficiency;
- “scoping” is undertaken to ensure that interpreters are only deployed when needed and that people attending meetings know how to get the most out of them by providing documents or written speeches ahead of time, not reading from long scripts, briefing in advance about complex issues and acronyms, etc.
- the learning of “translation-friendly” drafting techniques by officials, through courses on clear writing. We are working on “embedding” such improvements in the drafting of software programs.
- further computerisation of translation techniques, such as the Translator’s Workbench (a memory programme which matches translations against similar previous translations) and machine translation. DG Interpretation is also developing its online chat service so that realtime interpretation can occur with delegates online, through text.

4. EU enlargement is the next important step: from May 2004 it will bring in 75 million more citizens and nine more languages. From then on, more than ever, the European Union will be a unique international organisation with economic, socio-political and cultural aims. From your point of view it will mean an unprecedented challenge: under Regulation No 1 of 1958, the official language regime will embrace 20 languages.

How do you plan to reorganise the work within the interpreting service and the Directorate-General for Translation in order to maintain efficiency and productivity?

As a logical follow-up to the strategy paper that I mentioned above, we are undertaking major reorganisation of the structure of DGT. The process was initiated in January this year and is currently being finalised. It strengthens the means of reaching the main objectives identified in the strategy paper:

- to refocus the Translation Service on its core business for the Commission and other European Institutions and to promote inter-institutional coordination, by reducing or eliminating non-essential activities,
- to increase overall productivity further improve the cost-quality and cost-effectiveness ratio, output, effectiveness and on-time delivery,
- to introduce the translation capacity required for the new languages resulting from the forthcoming accession,
- to strengthen the organisational and functional aspects of demand management linked to the Commission’s priorities, and
- to rationalise the management of external translation.

To implement these objectives, the new organisation is based on three Directorates (instead of the current two). Resources Management and two Translation Directorates with 51 units for the existing languages (instead of the current 68). Translation capacity will increase upon enlargement, with growth keeping pace with the development of language activities for the new Member States. The translation function is based on Language Departments, and the number of units varies according to criteria linked to demand and output.

In October this year, on my proposal, the Commission created DG INTERPRETATION to strengthen and reorganise what was formerly known as the Interpretation and Conference Service (SCIC), so that it is fully ready to receive about 200 new colleagues distributed over a further 9 interpretation units starting from next year. After enlargement, total staff numbers within the Directorate General will approach 900, organised into 3 Directorates.

DG INTERPRETATION has, of course, been preparing for enlargement for several years and some changes were made to the service's organisational chart as long ago as December 2000 in order to assist with that.

The further changes mean facilitating the efforts of the Directorate General in:

- Meeting increases in the volume and complexity of the tasks to be carried out as a consequence of enlargement, making it necessary to reinforce the number of management functions;
- Dealing with the increase in the number of staff to be managed.
- Securing the further implementation of Commission reforms relating to budgetary, financial and personnel management, in particular the separation of management of resources and operations.

The new structure highlights two aspects of the DG's activities: The first, relating to the organisation of administrative activities (up until now they have been mainly grouped together under the general heading "administration"), and the second relating to the integration of the interpreters for the new languages into the DG's organisational structure.

The focus here is on management of the interpreting staff, with particular emphasis on quality control and the ability to integrate the interpreters for the new languages. This will be done by creating new interpretation units for the new languages and by grouping them together with the existing interpretation units in departments of four units each. In this way, we can keep a single Interpretation Directorate, thereby guaranteeing stability and facilitating co-ordination at and after the crucial moment of enlargement.

5. Some of the national languages of the accession countries are related to the existing EU official languages.

Do you think the 'risk' of the theoretical possibility of working with 380 language combinations can be avoided by promoting the use of pivot languages, one language for each family group (such as English for Germanic languages and French for Romance ones)? If so, do you think that such a political choice could lead to a gradual marginalisation of less widespread European languages?

The use of "relay" languages in translation is very exceptional and is likely to remain so after the forthcoming enlargement since translators will be able to continue the standard practice of translating directly into the relevant languages. What is bound to increase is so-called "two-way translation", already employed after the last wave of accessions, whereby the translator is asked to translate from his own language into one of the procedural languages (English, French or German), this translation being subsequently checked – if needed – by a colleague who is a native speaker of the chosen procedural language. This method has so far been used for internal preparatory documents only.

No translation link has ever been attempted between relay languages and those belonging to the same family group. To do so would certainly limit our options – and the standard of service – since the Slavonic languages, the Baltic languages, Estonian, Hungarian, Greek, Finnish and Maltese fall outside the two main family groups – the Germanic and the Romance groups.

The interpreters already employ relay or bridging languages in the Union with 11 languages, and have done so since the start of the EEC in 1958. We have never sought to limit the choice of relay language to those of the same language family. If we had wanted to do that, we would be facing serious problems with the Slavonic and Baltic languages, Estonian and Hungarian, not to mention Maltese.

In fact, we have sought to spread the network of relay languages in any given meeting widely across Germanic or Romance languages in order to ensure an even distribution of the workload for the interpreters working in relay.

In practice, this would mean that – say – Finnish could transit into Greek via English, German, Spanish, Italian or French – in the same meeting, depending on the choice of relay language made by the Greek interpreter working into his or her mother tongue. However, we would still want to be able to

provide interpreters for as many of the 380 possible language pairs as possible, for example for a meeting between a Commissioner and representatives of one Member State.

We reject the assumption that less-widely spoken European languages will be gradually marginalised. We believe they not only stand to gain in exposure beyond the national boundaries within which they are spoken but will also enrich themselves through cross-fertilisation of ideas and concepts as a result of participation and interaction in the Union's many activities.

DG Interpretation always looks at the real needs of people attending meetings when assigning interpreters, and often offers the opportunity for people to speak in their own language although they have to listen in a reduced number of languages – typically those most widely known.

This system of “asymmetrical interpretation” produces very considerable savings for the European taxpayer while still enabling delegates to understand each other – which is the whole purpose of the exercise and consistent with the democratic fundamentals of the EU.

6. The alternative strategy could be a training plan for existing staff working within the EU language services in order to offer courses in all the accession languages. Competence in a foreign language involves the four abilities, but as far as the translation of Community law is concerned EU translators have to handle specific varieties of written language.

In view of this, are you planning specific passive language courses aimed at training translators to read and translate legislative texts in the accession languages?

Our aim is not only to attain the maximum level in the Council of Europe's four abilities, but to provide our translators with the highest possible level of active knowledge of the languages and culture of the accession countries.

Since 2000, DG Admin – in cooperation with DG Translation – has offered a growing number of specialised courses for translators in all the accession countries' languages. DGT builds on this to provide translators with a comprehensive training programme in these languages, with a total of 6 levels over 4 years, plus 3 training periods of 20 days to be spent in universities, and – additionally – a cultural programme.

This programme is equipping our staff with the means of translating not only legislative texts but also highly technical documents, as they already do for the current EU languages.

The EU Institutions are also jointly recruiting new staff with a knowledge of the accession languages, as the extra translation workload after the new countries join cannot all be carried by the existing officials.

DG Interpretation already offers training courses in all the new languages to its existing staff – and has done so for a number of years. About 60 existing staff interpreters are currently engaged in Accession Country language courses at different levels.

It has to be said that one crucial asset of the Commission linguistic services is the cultural commitment of the staff involved. They are never content to “do the job” in a mechanical way. Their professionalism means that they always go further – what I call the extra 10% that makes the difference between good and excellent. No-one can put a price on that, it is literally invaluable.

7. Computerised translation tools, such as the Translator's Workbench and machine translation, may help translators to a certain extent by offering quick solutions to translation problems and ensuring terminological consistency.

Don't you think that it could be important to increase the role of language coordination within each language unit in order to ensure uniform quality and use of terminology consistent with that in use in each Member State?

The Commission's translation service has been investing in computer-assisted translation tools for many years which speed up the translation process and also enhance terminological consistency across the variety of texts which are translated. In the new structure for the Commission's translation service, which was put into place in July this year, each language department will be devoting resources to ensuring a higher level of quality through terminological uniformity and linguistic consistency. This is of special importance to the departments to be set up for the accession languages.

8. In order to join the European Union the candidate countries need to have the Community *acquis* in their own national languages. This means a large number of regulations and directives to be translated by May 2004.

Do the European Commission's language services contribute to this translation activity, providing accession countries with some kind of financial support and human resources for the translation of Community law?

The translation of the Community *acquis* represents a very heavy workload – totalling some 76,000 pages (of Official Journal) per language. The candidate countries are responsible for these translations and the Commission has been providing technical assistance to these countries since 1996 under the PHARE programme.

In this context, DGT has been cooperating with DG ELARG and the Translation Coordination Units (TCUs) in the accession countries by transferring know-how in new technologies (translation memories, terminology databases) and translation techniques. The Commission's Legal Service and the Council of Ministers are currently assisting the accession countries with the final revision of these translations. All assessments show that progress everywhere has been good.

9. From your point of view EU enlargement means planning a restructuring of the language services within the Community institutions. Alongside internal planning activity, increased European multilingualism should have an impact in each Member State to support the creation of a multilingual citizenship. Many Member States have their own language promotion programmes for linguistic diversity but it might be useful to have a Community plan to promote multilingualism in Europe.

Do you have any plan for promoting plurilingual education and what activities are scheduled to encourage language learning?

The Union is already linguistically very diverse. The promotion of language learning and linguistic diversity has been an objective of the EU since its inception and will continue to be so.

Obviously, under the terms of the Treaties, responsibility for the organisation and content of education and training systems rests with the Member States. Regrettably, the quality of provision and encouragement is uneven but only Member States can really foster the improvements which are plainly in the interests of their own people – especially the young generations.

In July this year, the Commission adopted an 'Action Plan Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity 2004-2006' with the general aim of making better use of existing financial resources. The EU has a wide range of means of doing that at its disposal, including the two major Community education and training programmes, Socrates (general education) and Leonardo da Vinci (vocational training).

By way of example, between 2000 and 2002 the EU provided funding for more than 16,000 in-service training grants for language teachers. In addition, other EU programmes can also be used to promote plurilingualism: for example, through the Media Plus programme which supports the European cinema industry the Community has helped towards the subtitling of films.

The Action Plan sets out a coherent vision of a multilingual Europe, setting out 45 tangible actions at European Union level that will support the action taken by Member States to extend the benefits of

lifelong language learning to every citizen and to improve the quality of language teaching while building a more language-friendly environment.

The Convention on the Future of Europe has, meanwhile, proposed that a paragraph devoted to the promotion of language diversity should be inserted into the European Constitution.

10. The European Charter signed in Strasbourg in 1992 recognises regional and minority languages as important expressions of national cultural heritage.

In order to join the EU, the candidate countries' language policy had to safeguard the languages spoken on their national territory. In spite of these requirements the EU pays little attention to regional languages in relation to national ones.

Within the enlarged Europe the number of European minority languages to be protected will increase enormously. In your opinion will this considerable increase have an adverse effect on EU language policy guidelines?

No. The Action Plan advocates an integrated approach to language learning which includes the so-called 'regional' and 'minority' languages. It proposes that EU programmes in education and training, which are already largely accessible to 'regional' and 'minority' languages, should provide more support for these languages in future. Studies and conferences on regional and minority languages are also planned.

The EU gives regular financial support to the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages (EBLUL) and the Mercator network. Policy in this area is based on the fact that linguistic diversity is one of the Union's defining features and that respect for this diversity is a founding principle of the Union. The number of languages is not a major factor in determining this policy.

11. Furthermore, there has been a proposal to add a paragraph on the promotion of linguistic diversity to the European Constitution.

Do you think it will also be possible to include a paragraph on the defence of plurilingualism?

The Inter Governmental Conference (IGC) of Member States which is now underway has many complex subjects to deal with, and it will be for the governments to decide whether they want to include a paragraph on language pluralism in the Constitution. Obviously, improvements in the conditions for language teaching and learning are mainly the responsibility of the Member States.