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Nowadays the Council of Europe and the European Union in their numerous documents stress the importance of developing multilingual economy, policy and at the same time of preserving a language diversity. Thus, the policy of these two organisations is shaped in two directions: development of societal multilingualism and individual plurilingualism.

The Lisbon Strategy and Barcelona Declaration (2002) resulted in launching a promotion campaign for multilingualism in all EU member states. Educational policy is based on the conviction that peaceful coexistence can only be achieved if we look at identity based on civil rights and at the same time develop an understanding of diversity. The Barcelona Declaration called for learning 2 languages in addition to a mother tongue (2+1). Yet, most young European citizens support the idea of learning only one foreign language and thus become bilingual.

Times when bilingualism was considered a low status symbol or even a harmful phenomenon are gone. It is practically the 21st century that brought us full understanding of the benefits of second and foreign language learning. Research shows that the learning of more than one language has distinct linguistic advantages as it correlates with linguistic awareness (Jessner, 2006; Wolff, 2006), sociolinguistic sensitivity (Goetz, 2003) [5,8,3], verbal intelligence and originality (Lazaruk, 2007) [7], better reading strategies (Hong & Leavell, 2006) [4], and contributes to the development of multilingual competence (GabryF-Barker, 2005; Jessner, 2006) [2]. Recent data presented in “Europeans and Their Languages Report” (2012), usually referred to as Eurobarometer 2012, show that a great majority of adult European citizens understand the significance of languages: 88 % consider language learning useful and 98 % consider it useful for the future of their children[1].

Language education is a way to achieve, promote and protect multilingualism in a peaceful way. The term promoting multilingualism is used and understood today in a number of ways:

1. Protecting endangered languages of national minorities or languages with very few native speakers.
2. Promoting minority, ethnic and regional languages.
3. Protecting language varieties. One more meaning of the term promoting multilingualism has to do with protecting or reviving language varieties, which depends on their status and spread.

4. Securing language rights of regional and minority speakers.

5. A hidden agenda to maintain the language status of formerly powerful languages. When the popularity of languages that had been widely used in Europe and beyond started decreasing, two directions of language policy emerged: one in relation to the language regime of powerful European institutions, the Council of Europe and the European Union, and another in relation to the number of languages offered in the school systems of their member states. In its policy the Council of Europe decided to use two official languages, English and French, which was an obvious way to boost the status of French.

6. A hidden agenda to stop English as a lingua franca. The strategy for maintaining the status of formerly powerful languages at its core identical with the hidden agenda of stopping English from being a lingua franca in Europe or at least slowing down the process of its spread. This hidden strategy has not proved very successful considering the fact which has already been mentioned that 73% of European learners take up English as their first foreign language in the primary school and 90% take it up in the upper-secondary school [6, p. 11].

7. An open agenda to empower less widely spoken languages of ethnic minorities, to gain a higher status for their languages.

Promoting multilingualism must also focus on the Learner. It means:

1. Broadening the language offer. Schools should offer more languages to learn including minority languages. Widening the scope of languages on offer will help maintain social and national equality.

2. Securing the rights of native speakers for whom the language of schooling is not their mother tongue. Valuing languages and cultures can help to raise self-confidence of immigrant learners. The whole class and not only the individual student can develop linguistic and intercultural competence by using L1 as a learning resource, which has been powerfully demonstrated in a number of projects of the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) such as for instance the Valeur Project – Valuing All Languages in Europe (McPake et al., 2007).

So, in order to promote multilingualism we should consider two main issues: widening the range of languages taught at educational institutions and preserving the rights of minority languages.

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