**EU politicians debating European language education policy:**

**Who supports the 1+2 policy?**

*The subject of languages has been the great non-dit of European integration*

de Swaan 1993:224

*in varietate concordia (‘unity in diversity’)*

EU motto

**Abstract**

The European Union’s (EU) high regard for multilingualism and linguistic diversity is expressed through its language education policy (LEP), a policy adopted by the European Parliament, which represents all EU member states. However, as education falls within the remit of the member states, EU LEP has an advisory function only. Support for the LEP at national level is thus crucial. By analysing a significant parliamentary discussion by Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), this article asks what evidence there is that MEPs support the EU’s goals of learning the mother tongue plus two foreign languages (1+2), and of learning a diversity of languages at school. Secondly, the article investigates current evidence of the success of EU LEP in terms of developing dual language capacities, and of maintaining diversity in language learning. Figures on the learning of two languages, on the learning of English and on linguistic diversity are compared, covering the last decade. The results reveal that although the training of dual linguists has stagnated, no MEP expressed concerns that the EU goals of 1+2 are not being met. MEPs are, however, concerned with protecting ‘their’ national languages, and the smaller ‘their’ own language(s), the more so. Furthermore, only representatives of large EU languages express concern over English dominance in the EU’s education systems. Thus, parliamentary representatives of smaller languages unite in solidarity for greater status recognition of their language, while MEPs’ support for the EU LEP goal of 1+2 is at best patchy. The article concludes that, given the limited remit of EU LEP, discrepancies between European recommendations and national practices are somewhat inevitable, and that to improve on the 1+2 goal and counter English dominance across education systems in the EU, member states need to be better supported to appreciate and disseminate the rationales for *dual* language learning (1+2) and *diversity* in language learning.

## Keywords

EU, language education policy, 1+2, Critical Discourse Analysis

## Introduction

Few language policies are scrutinised more than those of the EU (Arzoz, 2008; Gal, 2010). The multilingual policies and practices of the EU institutions are set out in detail and are subject to much analysis. The ‘conundrum of EU language policy’ (de Swaan, 2004) is to strike a balance between, on the one hand, multilingualism and the plurality of languages which are highly valued, and, on the other, expediency and efficiency in communication. The EU puts great emphasis on the equal status of their 24 official languages. However, language competencies- both first and second- across EU member states are very unequally distributed, and EU LEP attaches great value to *multilingual* competencies and *diversity* of languages, rather than merely learning the largest or most popular languages, such as English.

Furthermore, although agreed consensually, EU education policy remains advisory, and implementation falls within the remit of its member states. It is thus unsurprising to observe mismatches between EU policy goals and implementation (Volante and Ritzen, 2016) in a range of educational areas (e.g. regarding inclusion, gender equality, social justice, see Alexiadou and Rambla, 2022), including LEP (Bergroth et al., 2022). In other words, support for EU LEP at national levels is crucial to achieve the aim of dual language education (1+2).

The following *Background* section explains the genesis and rationales of EU LEP, as well as current challenges in its implementation, especially regarding the dominance of English.

## Background

### The EU’s institutional multilingualism

Since the 18th century, the choice and adoption of one standard language has been a key factor in the construction and ideological underpinning of national identities in Europe. The EU, as a multilingual polity that values linguistic diversity, clashed with such historically embedded language ideologies from the outset. Linguistic diversity is one of the EU’s fundamental values (Charter of Fundamental Rights). For instance, in the aim of strengthening neighbourly relations, regional languages have been taught in many EU countries since 2007, e. g. Danish in Germany close to the Danish border, Irish in Northern Ireland, Frisian in the Netherlands etc (Eurydice, 2008). All 24 official EU languages could function as working languages in the EU, and much of the outward-facing information produced by the EU is indeed available in most of the 24 languages.

However, nationalistic language ideologies are evident in European LEP to this day. The European Common Market phase was dominated by the use of French as the lingua franca. During the first EU expansion in 1973, this switched to English (Wilkinson and Gabriëls, 2021a), an issue which still causes friction (Hnízdo, 2005). The European Commission tends to work trilingually in French, German and English, although German lags far behind English and French ‘in the EU corridors of power’ (de Swaan, 2004:177). German is the most spoken first language in the EU (18%), but only 14% of Europeans speak it as a second language (House, 2011). Germany’s education system, described as favouring English as a foreign language (de Swaan, 2004), is likely to have contributed to the dominance of English in the EU institutions today. Thus, different EU nations follow more or less expansionist agendas of ‘their’ language and react differently to the threat of loss of status resulting from the rising popularity of English. Smaller nations, and smaller languages, tend to see English as less of a threat compared to larger nations and larger languages: the latter have more status and symbolic power to lose (Ammon, 2006). Some EU nations representing smaller languages prefer, sometimes openly so, an L1+ English only model of LEP (Van Els, 2005). Given the high costs of maintaining multilingual practices in the EU institutions, some might argue that English as the lingua franca in the EU institutions might suffice (Extra and Gorter, 2006), but an analysis of language skills among EU citizens suggests that a multilingual regime allows for the highest participation of EU members in their politics (Gazzola, 2016). A rise of anti-English language sentiment can nonetheless be observed in many European countries.

The EU’s LEP promotes multilingualism as the ultimate educational goal, but the EU has no legal power over those implementing it. Although the EU Parliament is the highest legislative body in the EU, education remains in the remit of its 27 Member States or the political entities (polities) within them (e. g. in Germany: the 16 German Länder). The EU influences LEP in its member states in a variety of ways, via policy and curricula recommendations and funding programmes. Well-funded EU educational programmes (Erasmus+) serve to develop citizens’ mobility and multilingual education. Critics might point out that where an institution can develop policies in the knowledge that it need not implement them, gaps between (ambitious?) policies and practice are likely, if not pre-programmed. In any case, in a constellation where one political entity provides policy recommendations, but other entities (supposedly) implement them, the boundaries between accountability and implementation become more fluid than if those same entities were responsible. To maintain the desired goals of multilingual practices, however, proactive steps are often needed to protect diversity. Experience from the EU institutions themselves illustrates this: EU politicians and employees can use all 24 official EU languages. In practice, however, their working languages are restricted to three: English, French, German, and increasingly English only (House, 2011: 594). In the context of these challenges, in particular the limited remit of EU LEP, how could it succeed?

This study scrutinises the relative success of the declared European LEP in two ways: against actual language learning uptake figures (policy in practice), and against political debates of European MEPs discussing EU LEP (debated policy). By doing so, it deepens our understanding of how much EU LEP is supported de facto by key stakeholders: learners themselves, and politicians in power to shape the policy.

### EU LEP

Valuing linguistic diversity is embedded in the genesis of the EU. The European Commission’s 1995 *White Paper Teaching and Learning –Towards the Learning Society* declared that every European should become proficient in two foreign European languages, and that this objective should be reached by the end of formal schooling. The policy was implemented in the EU’s 2002 Barcelona Declaration (European Council of Barcelona, 2002). The nature of this ‘1+2’ (mother tongue plus two) has undergone several reformulations since (Studer et al., 2010 and constitutes the core of today’s EU LEP. The late 1960s and early 1970s saw a substantial expansion in higher secondary education, including language learning. The widening access cemented the dominance of English as the first and most-learned FL across the EU. Today, 100% of schoolchildren in the EU are learning English during some of their schooling (Eurydice, 2023) ). The genesis of the 1+2 is to be understood in the context of three key values and rationales for languages: linguistic diversity, European citizenship, and the knowledge-based economy. The EU LEP of 1+2 is strongly supported by the EU Council and the European Parliament, and the last two decades (since 2002) have seen increased EU efforts to improve on the 1+2 goal in particular (Martyniuk, 2012).

Besides valuing linguistic diversity, two further rationales of the 1+2 policy are key: language education for the development of European citizenship, a rationale often poorly understood and executed in foreign language education across the EU (Hennebry, 2011). The rationale to develop Europe’s knowledge-based economy (KBE), however, has received somewhat more public understanding and attention. The EU Council (2000:5) states that the EU intends *‘‘to* *become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world”.* Across European texts on LEP, this rationale is often emphasised over that of linguistic diversity (Wodak and Krzyzanowski, 2020). Instrumental rationales (such as learning languages for material benefits), however, tend to favour the learning of larger languages, first and foremost English. In this tension *‘oscillat[ing] between economic (KBE) values and ideologies and traditional European cultural values such as diversity and education’ (*Krzyżanowski and Wodak, 2011:124), evidence on language learning at EU national levels suggests that KBE tends to gain the upper hand (Suvakovic, 2018, Tender and Vilahemm, 2009): more and more students in European education systems are opting to learn English (Wilkinson and Gabriëls, 2021b) (‘voting with their feet’). In short, whether the linguistic diversity of the EU is problematized or welcomed: no European language issue topic is currently more controversial than the dominance of English.

### English dominance

Despite broad support for the EU’s aim of multilingual education, there has de facto been little increase in multilingual competencies in the EU (Romaine, 2013), while competencies in English have increased dramatically. In many EU nations, LEPs either permit or tolerate the preponderance of English as L2.

*[...] in a blind process every national education system gravitated towards English as the first foreign language, while each Government continued to defend publicly the necessity of a multiplicity of languages for communication.* (de Swaan, 2004: 173)*.*

Meanwhile, the EU’s consensus voting system ensures that no EU nation would ever give up the official status of ‘their’ languages. In De Swaan’s (*2004*: 179)words: *Clearly, there is a desire to square two circles: the vicious circle of mutually reinforcing expectations that lead to a stampede towards English, and the voting cycle that paralyses all policy at the Union level.* This makes EU LEP more vulnerable to Englishization than might be assumed: if all languages are framed as equally valid, why not make all students learn the most popular lingua franca. It might be cost-effective, and - some argue- entail little loss to cultural diversity. Given the high symbolic capital associated with English, learners increasingly focus on L1+English competencies, rather than competencies in a variety of languages (Earls, 2016).This ‘elephant in the room’ perception (Wright, 2009) may be shared by learners and policymakers alike, even if not willingly admit to it. A pragmatic emphasis on English might be one reason for the relative lack of support for the EU LEP at national levels (Tender and Vihalemm, 2009).

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#### **EU Education Systems and English**

To complicate matters further, the EU’s educational institutions also play their part in driving English dominance in education. Wilkinson and Gabriëls (2021a).cite an example whereby even LEPs designed to counter English dominance does not succeed. Belgian LEP is intended to foster both a small language and a large language other than English, but inadvertently results in English as L2 dominance.

*‘Unlike most other language learners in Europe, Flemish pupils learn French as their first foreign language. French is taught from the age of 11, whereas English tuition starts at 13. However, while French is basically taught in an instructed setting (i.e., a classroom), Flemish pupils are exposed to English outside the classroom through pop music, television, computer games, the internet, and social media. As a result, they have massive exposure to English, but not to French […]. Consequently, most Flemish pupils are much more fluent in English than in French.’ (*Wilkinson and Gabriëls 2021a: 40)

In sum, despite all efforts, Englishization is currently endangering EU LEP. Is the EU policy perhaps poorly drafted, or never intended for full implementation (‘*lip service is paid to multilingualism, while there is ever greater use of English as a lingua franca*; Wright, 2009: 93)? If the implementation of a policy - however laudable - rests with individual nations, or even smaller entities, the chances are high that diverging interests will take different policymakers in different directions. For some, KBE may be more important; for others, safeguarding cultural diversity is the priority, and for others still fostering European citizenship is what counts.

Whenever gaps between official language policy and practice emerge, practice tends to favour the more powerful languages (Ammon, 2006). This would make the chances of EU LEP providing a bulwark against English dominance rather slim. Any growth in foreign language competencies over the last decades are mostly due to a rise in immigration (Jefferey and van Beuningen, 2020), and not EU LEP. MEPs, then, representing both national interests and those of the EU, are a key stakeholder in driving forward European LEP at national level, but to what extent do they support EU LEP? One way to ascertain if this is to scrutinise how they discuss it.

## This study

This study asks how the declared multilingual LEP of the EU fares against a) EU parliamentary debates on the issue, and b) current uptake in language learning. In doing so, it examines the tension between English dominance, multilingual education, national interests, and safeguarding a diversity in FL uptake. The overall aim of this study is to investigate the relative success of declared EU LEP against actual uptake (practised policy) and political debates on the issue (debated policy).

*Operationalised research questions:*

1. How do EU politicians debate EU LEP in respect of rationales, problems and aims for language learning? Do politicians’ concerns differ by nation, and if so, how?
2. What do the most recent EU language education uptake figures reveal regarding the development of competencies in two FLs, uptake of English as a FL, and uptake of a diversity of FLs?

### Methodology

This article follows in the tradition of both critical analysis of language policy (Menken and Garcia, 2010; Tollefson, 1991) and analysis of policy-in-practice. It sits at the intersection of critical discourse study and language policy research, and straddles critical LEP analysis and empirical data analysis. The approach necessitates the discussion of two fundamental theoretical assumptions, regarding the nature of LEP, and the nature of discourse, and in particular public political discourse. Both are discussed in turn now.

*What is LEP?*

A critical sociolinguistic approach of LEP views policy as ‘one mechanism by which dominant groups establish hegemony in language use’ (Tollefson, 1991:16), thus enabling dominant groups to shape language use in alignment with their ideology (Bakaros and Unger, 2016). Language policy as institutionalised ideology aims to shape stakeholders’ behaviour, and reproduce hegemonic ideology. However, LEP is a dynamic process, whereby different stakeholders may enact, interpret and contest LEPs (Johnson and Johnson, 2015). Furthermore, one significant way of influencing and contesting LEP is *through language* (Bakaros, 2016). In this discursive understanding of LEP, the relative power and agency different stakeholders may hold in their LEP is in part expressed through language, and in part through policy-in-practice. In the complex interplay of different layers of power in LEP, from the material and structural to the discursive and debated aspects of LEP, different agents may avail themselves to whatever means available to them to influence LEP.

One way to gauge levels of democratic engagement and transparency in LEP, then, is to investigate to what extent different stakeholders may directly influence LEP, and what forms (discursive? material? structural?) these influences take (Tollefson, 1991: 211). In the context of EU LEP, tensions between discourses around LEP, on the one hand, and policy-in-practice on the other, can be expected to be significant, given the exceptional jurisdictional gap between explicit policy and implementation.

*Analysing Political Discourse: Critical Discourse Analysis*

Critical analysis of LEP starts with the premise that LEP is enacted, interpreted and contested through language (Barakos, 2016). This dynamic and multifaceted understanding of LEP has consequences for conceptualising and analysing discourses around LEP. One is to view such discourses not as outside LEP, but part of it, and the more such discourses take disputatious and fractional tones, the more likely it is that stakeholders differ in their parochial interests and national and/or regional stakes on the LEP in question. Publicly voiced disputes and discord on LEP, then, are part of democratic and transparent processes in LEP, and politicians engaged in the process might simultaneously fight for -in their perception- optimal LEP in the interest of their nation, their political orientation, and their constituents. In such discourses, it is assumed that the relation between speaker, listener, ‘talked about’ topics, and wider stakeholders carries high significance.

For this reason, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is used as a theoretical framework of analysis. CDA rests on the basic assumption of a dual interaction between language and communities, whereby language both creates communities, and is constrained by the nature of a given community in which it is used (Fenton-Smith, 2007). In this study, CDA is used to investigate how the dynamics within an educational ‘problem’ manifest themselves through language: it serves to uncover not just textual understanding but the relation between the representations of themes and the socio-political contexts in which the discourses emerge and are read or listened to. Within CDA, one analytical tool is macro-semantic, or topical, analysis (Van Dijk 1993:272). Topical analysis can reveal issues of group identity and ideological beliefs (Van Dijk, 1998), especially if combining textual and contextual information. The approach, including quantification of macrothemes, is a well-established approach in the analysis of public discourse (e.g. Fico, Lacy & Riffe, 2008).

### Data

To answer question 1, one significant and lengthy European parliamentary debate was located (*Wednesday, 13 June 2018-Strasbourg: Improving language learning and the mutual recognition of language competences in the EU)* in the following way: searches on the European Parliament documentation site were undertaken for the current legislative period (2009+), 2014-2019, and 2009-2014, with the search terms Language Learning and Language Education Policy. One extensive parliamentary debate dedicated to smaller languages and language learning in the EU was found and selected for analysis: A video of the debate, dubbed with simultaneous voice-over into English is available, as are transcripts of the speakers’ contributions in the 15+ languages that the Members of Parliament chose to speak in[[1]](#footnote-1). The English-dubbed video was used to analyse the debate and to code contributions for aims and objectives, rationales and problems mentioned (see Table 1). The following offers a summary of the debate, followed by a discussion. Citations from the direct transcripts in languages other than English have been translated by the author.

For question 2, the most recent Eurostat data available on uptake figures were extracted and compared across four timescales, reporting, for each timescale, the figures on dual language learning, Englishization, and diversification of FLs.

### Limitations

Only one extended and significant European discussion on EU LEP was found during the time span observed, thus limiting the generalizability of the study. The debate was called to discuss smaller languages, rather than English dominance, in the EU, thus does not explicitly address the currently dominant language educational dilemma in the EU. The mere absence of EU parliamentary debates on English dominance in language education, however, can be taken as evidence of discrepancy between declared and debated language policy. If future parliamentary debates on the topic of English dominance emerge, a repeat study would be desirable. Future studies might also consider investigating LEPs at national levels, to examine discrepancies and overlaps between European and national priorities.

## Results

### European Parliament debate

Table 1 gives an indication of the frequency of the aims, rationales and problems mentioned by MEPs during the debate on 13 June 2018. At a glance, we observe that MEPs seem to agree on one strategic pathway to improve language learning: to increase use of the EU’s programmes, support and education systems to enhance language learning. Furthermore, concerning the rationales for language learning, MEPs support societal enrichment above all others. The biggest problem MEPs see is the (lack of) support for their own country’s small languages, rather than the dominance of English.

Insert table 1 *Quantification of macro-themes in European Parliament debate 18 June 2018* somewhere here

To interpret the debate in a contextualised manner, a more detailed approach, outlining which MEPs put forward which arguments, is needed. This is presented in the next section.

#### **The petition**

The debate was tabled as a result of a petition: when Bulgaria held the Presidency of the Council of the EU, the *Association of Bulgarian Schools Abroad* submitted a petition to discuss the future of language learning in the European Parliament, in particular with respect to smaller languages and EU cohesion. This was granted. The petition calls for greater unity in the EU in recognising language competencies, including competencies in smaller languages, and increased mother tongue education for children with a migration background. The lack of statistics on EU language learning other than in the ‘big 5’ languages is criticised. The petition also asks for a clearer explanation and communication of the socio-cultural and economic benefits of the 1+2 policy. Swedish Chair Cecilia Wilkstroem opens the debate with the accusation:

*The petitioners claim that the existing differences in the teaching, evaluation and recognition of language skills in different Member States undermine the freedom of movement, which is very serious. They also claim that it discriminates against children in school whose mother tongue is one of the smaller languages of the 24 official languages of the European Union*.

and answers

*Parliament is taking serious note of these petitions that we have received, in which EU citizens do raise their severe concerns about the lack of teaching and recognition of language skills in their mother tongue.*

She evokes the core European value of multilingualism, and its function in terms of societal benefits, but also functional benefits such as employability. She calls for greater recognition of skills in smaller and minority languages.

#### **Concern over smaller languages**

A series of contributions from Bulgarian MEPs show concern over the status and recognition of small languages. Stetoslav Hristov Malinov (Bulgaria) emphasizes the need to value and protect smaller minority languages. Peter Kourumbashev (Bulgaria), Asim Ademov (Bulgaria) and Momchil Nekov (Bulgaria) call for the right for all EU students to sit exams in their mother tongue regardless of where in the EU they are schooled. They report that accreditations in mother tongues such as Bulgarian are often not recognised abroad, calling this discrimination. Notis Marias (Greece) emphasises that for migration within the EU from the margins and from the South to the North, increased use of programmes such as Erasmus is vital. Following this, a wide range of speakers of small languages speak up, such as Irish, Slovak, Galician, in addition to those defending Bulgarian (again). These speakers also call for greater clarity in naming the problem with EU LEP- the poor recognition of small languages. It is also remarkable that Michaela Šojdrová (Czech Republic) deliberately addresses the plenary in Bulgarian rather than in her fluent English in order to remind listeners of the close cultural affinities she feels for her native language.

#### **English dominance**

Against expectations, only two contributions criticise English dominance, most vocally Dominique Builde (France). Her concern is mainly over Englishization in higher education. She also accuses many countries of applying double standards by paying lip service to multilingualism while de facto accepting English dominance.

*Monsieur le Président, dernièrement des voix s’élevaient aux Pays-Bas, pourtant chantre de la mondialisation heureuse, contre la suprématie de l’anglais dans l’enseignement supérieur. Un réveil tardif à l’heure où pour l’étudiant international lambda, les journées sont rythmées par des cours en anglais et des conversations sur Skype dans la langue maternelle.Les objectifs de Barcelone de maîtrise de deux langues étrangères comme gage de diversité auront fait long feu tant, de Bologne à Maastricht, le globish règne sans partage.Comment s’en étonner alors que les institutions européennes entretiennent elles-mêmes un double discours permanent entre éloge du multilinguisme et une hégémonie de l’anglais disproportionnée au regard de son poids démographique au lendemain du Brexit. Derrière la question de principe se profile celle de la considération accordée à des nations comme la France, État fondateur et contributeur net, alors que le renouveau des patriotismes essaime les ferments d’un printemps des peuples européens. De la réponse à cette question dépend la légitimité de l’Europe mais également sa survie.*

*[Mr President. Recently voices arose in the Netherlands, after all a country which happily accepts globalisation, against the supremacy of English in Higher Education. This is a late wake-up call for the average international student who divides his day between lessons in English and Skype calls in his mother tongue. The Barcelona objectives of mastering two languages will have fizzled out, from Bologna to Maastricht. Globish rules the world.  Why then should we be surprised when the European institutions themselves constantly hold a two-voice discourse praising multilingualism on the one hand, and a hegemony of English on the other, which is disproportionate in respect of its demographic weights, given Brexit? Behind this question of principle is: how do we treat contributing nations such as France, founding member and net contributor, while the new uprising of patriotism is turning away from the founding principles of the European people. Not only the legitimacy of Europe but also its survival depend on this question.] [translation by author]*

EU LEP is attacked on several fronts. On the one hand, the EU is accused of double standards, and caring more about developing English competencies than the 1+2 policy. Anti-English movements, however, are linked to patriotism, and thus also criticised, on grounds of threatening the founding principles of the EU. The key demand is for greater respect for the status of the French language, justified through references to the historical/political role of France, rather than the principles more usually put forward within the EU, such as mobility, social coherence, citizenship and cultural enrichment.

Representatives of smaller nations and languages, in contrast, can be found to defend English dominance.Michaela Šojdrová (Czech Republic) suggests that in order for young people in the EU to communicate, English should be used as the lingua franca, but not to the detriment of other languages.

#### **Emphasising progress in LEP**

Despite their overall concerns concerning smaller EU languages, politicians representing smaller languages also find praise for the EU LEP. Monika Panatoyova (Bulgaria, at the time deputy minister of the Presidency of the Council of the EU) argues that the EU Council has made great progress in increasing the number of dual linguists, enhancing the mutual recognition of HE entry qualifications, and greater cohesion on national LEPs. Likewise, Tibor Navracsics (Hungary) claims that language learning has never been higher on the political agenda. More than other speakers, he sets his hopes for improvement on a greater convergence of national LEPs, use of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), European Language Portfolio and Europass language passport. To implement the 1+2 policy, he recommends that mother tongue, one large European language, and one further language of *personal* relevance should be studied. In terms of rationales, like other MEPs he mentions social benefits to the EU first, followed by personal benefits.

In sum, most of the contributions to the debate are made by representatives of smaller languages, sharing their concerns over ‘their’ language’s lack of status. Rather than seeing English as the main threat, some of these MEPs advocate increased use of English as the lingua franca, in stark contrast to the French MEP, for whom failure of EU LEP is evidenced by increased Englishization and the low use of French. In this debate at least, most contributions of MEPs evidence concern for national linguistics interests, rather than for the EU LEP.

### Uptake

The Eurydice 2023 were scrutinised for the following: Englishization, the uptake of two FLs, and diversity of FLs studied. For a developmental trend overview, four time dates were selected: 2020, 2018, 2015 and 2013 (including oldest and latest available). In these statistics, data for Ireland and for the UK pre-Brexit were not available. In the following, the EU statistics are reported as percentages of uptake per nation and education level: Upper Secondary level, Lower Secondary, Primary.

*Enrolment in two or more FLs: trends over the last decade*

*Upper Secondary*: In **2013**, the EU mean percentage of EU students learning 2 or more FLs at upper secondary level was **52.3%**. 100% or near 100% uptake was achieved by Liechtenstein, Romania and Finland only. In **2015**, the EU mean was **51.4%**, with Romania, Finland, Luxembourg and Liechtenstein achieving 80% +. Many eastern and medium-sized nations hovered around a 50% uptake, while several larger EU countries such as Italy, Germany and Austria achieved a 30-40% uptake. Uptake in the largest nation by population, Germany, was 31.8%. In **2018**, the EU mean was **48.3%**, with national differences similar to 2013. In **2020**, the EU mean was **49%**, again with great national variation, with 90% + uptake in Finland, Romania and Liechtenstein. In some EU nations, notably in Eastern Europe and the Baltic states, the uptake achieved was 60-80%: Poland, Latvia, Estonia, but also France and Belgium. Many EU nations hover around a 50% uptake, but the most populous nation, Germany, achieves 30%, with Greece at 1.5% being the lowest.

*Lower Secondary:* In **2013**, the EU mean was **43.7%**, and 10 nations (Luxembourg, Italy, Finland, Greece, Liechtenstein, Romania, Estonia, Malta, Romania and Portugal) achieved 90%+, but Germany as the most populous nation came in at only 37.1%. In **2015**, the EU mean was **46.3%**. Again, 10 nations achieve 90%+ but Germany, the largest in terms of population, only achieves 34.5%. In **2018**, the EU mean was **62.2%**. Even among the most populous nations there was great variation: Germany 36.5% and Spain 46.1%, but France 74.8% and Italy 95.5%. In **2020**, the EU mean was **59.2%**. The same 10 nations achieve over 90%, and the overall decrease can be attributed to a further decline in countries which were already achieving below-average in terms of dual language learning.

*Primary:* **In 2013**, **1.3%** of primary school students learned 2 FLs, with Luxembourg leading the way. Except for Spain (5.8%), all larger EU countries had an uptake of below 2%. **In 2015**, the mean rose to **5.8%**, with Croatia, Greece, Estonia, Latvia achieving 15%+. In **2018**, the EU mean rose to **7.7%**, which can perhaps be largely explained by the fact that the high Danish uptake had been missing from previous statistics. Poland’s uptake of Primary 2FL dropped dramatically from nearly 10% to almost zero. In **2020**, the EU mean remained stable at **7.2%**.

To summarise, we observe a slight decrease at upper secondary level and an overall increase at lower secondary level, although the 2020 results suggest a regression. Trilingual education at primary level remains marginal.

#### **Increase of English as FL: trends over the last decade**

*Upper secondary*: In **2013**, **79.1%** of upper secondary students in the EU were enrolled for learning English, with a relatively low national variation: nearly all countries have a 60%+ uptake. In 2015, this rose to **81.8%** and in 2018, **86.8%**. In 2020, **88.1 %** of upper secondary EU students  were enrolled for learning English.

*Lower secondary*: In 2013, **96.6%** of lower secondary students in the EU learned English. In 2015, it was **98.6%**, in 2018 **97.5%**, and in 2020 it rose to **98.3%**. Again, national variation is low compared to statistics on the uptake of two FLs.

*Primary:* In 2013, **70.8%** of Primary students in the EU learned English.This rose to **71.9% in** 2015, **82.1%** in 2018, and **84.1%**. in 2020**.** The national variation is a little higher than in the secondary sector; for instance, despite most countries having over 60% English at primary education level, Belgium had only 5.1% in 2020.

In sum, the last decade has seen a steady increase in the teaching of English across all sectors observed. In secondary education, the increase has slowed somewhat in recent years, suggesting near-saturation at this level, but at primary level, the increase continues apace.

#### **Diversification of FLs**

Insert Table 2: *EU uptake means of different FLs at different school sectors (percentage)* somewhere here

This trend table suggests that most languages have remained relatively stable at Lower Secondary level, except for an increase in Spanish. Greater change can be observed at Higher Secondary level, when, in many education systems and/or schools across the EU, students may drop a second FL. Here, Spanish is gaining, to the detriment of French. Table 2 also demonstrates how the popularity of a FL is affected by geopolitical changes: Russian. Following the dissolution of the USSR, the teaching of Russian in schools fell dramatically in Eastern European countries, including member states of the EU (Pavlenko, 2008). This observation serves as a reminder that the reasons for the rise or decline of any specific FL in the EU are likely to be multifactorial, including the LEP at the level of individual schools, teacher availability etc.

Over the last decade, the teaching of English has increased in all sectors, and in nearly all countries. Regarding the core aim of EU LEP, i. e. to develop competencies in two FLs, the picture is much patchier: the uptake of two FLs is decreasing at upper secondary level, and to some extent in the lower secondary sector too. National variations in terms of dual language uptake are very substantial. In the mean, however, EU nations have very progressed little in developing their dual language competencies. Although some EU nations, notably some Nordic and small ones, boost high bilingualism rates by virtue of societal bilingual practices, formal dual FL *learning* has not increased in the EU. Many Europeans are still far from proficient in one or just a few foreign languages (Gazzola, 2016: 560). In contrast, the rate of English learning, both at secondary and primary school level, has accelerated across the EU over the last decade (Seidlhofer, 2020) and is showing no signs of reaching a ceiling. Europeans, after all, consider English by far the most useful language to learn.

### Discussion

The trend analysis on practised European LEP suggests that the goals of increasing the percentage of dual linguists fall behind target, and that the increase in the learning of English as FL has yet to reach a ceiling. As for debated LEP, MEPs showed broad consensus regarding the benefits of European values of multilingualism (including for European identity), diversity and equality of languages. They also agree that the best avenue for improving language learning would be to make greater use of EU programmes and educational tools. Beyond this, however, MEPs representing smaller languages make several assertions that the principle of equality is not respected (e. g. that accreditations in their languages are not recognised abroad). MEPs representing somewhat larger nations and languages tend to reply to such accusations at a conceptual and hence non-controversial level, stressing the declared EU LEP of equality. In this respect, their claims remain unanswered. Speakers who criticise the vagueness of the replies do so to no avail. Overall, EU MEPs are mainly preoccupied with the equality and recognition of *their* language.

English dominance, addressed by few MEPs, is either strongly criticised (French MEP), or accepted as a pragmatic solution (Greek MEP). In addition to its strong resentment of English dominance, the French contribution stands out for its unusual justification in demanding that the French language be given a higher status in the EU: none of the commonly used rationales for LEP (e.g. cultural, material, or social benefits) are mentioned. Instead, national arguments based on France’s historical and political importance in the EU are evoked. For a contribution that criticises patriotism in the EU for spreading non-EU values, and makes Englishization (in part) responsible for this trend, this is indeed an oddly patriotic stance.

Thus, the representatives of small languages feel marginalised, while the representatives of larger languages are hardly receptive to these concerns, and no MEPs seem overly concerned by the lack of progress of the EU’s 1+2 policy. Furthermore, the representatives of a large EU language feel threatened by English, while other MEPs are more inclined to see it as a neutral lingua franca.

**Conclusion**

The introduction argued that, given the limited scope for EU LEP to influence education systems within the member states, discrepancies between policy and practice may be inevitable. Discrepancies were indeed found. In the last decade, the uptake of dual language learning has stagnated, and the diversity of FLs learned has either stagnated or decreased (depending on the target FL and on the educational sector). Meanwhile, MEPs’ support for EU LEP is best described as patchy in terms of the 1+2 goal and countering English dominance, but representatives of smaller languages unite in solidarity for a greater status for their own language. Overall, however, the considerable lack of support from MEPs for the 1+2 policy leaves in doubt if the discrepancies between declared and practised policy can be eased using the current LEP only. For a start, the EU and its member states might want to return a common understanding of the main rationales and purposes of the policy, so as to improve support for its implementation.

Despite the expense and bureaucracy that accompanies both multilingual education and multilingual working practices in the EU (Ammon, 1994), official EU communications attach great importance to multilingualism and multilingual education because it is seen as integral to European identity. To some extent, the notion of using language to create political identities replicates the efforts made at national level in the 18th century to exploit languages for the purpose of nation-building (White, 2009), and it remains questionable whether languages are indeed the best tool to achieve this goal. Regardless of this issue, EU member states and their education systems currently remain ill-equipped for truly multilingual practices (Gogolin, 2002; Jeffery and van Beuningen, 2020). To improve this, significant investment in LEPs at national levels would be needed, but as long as member states show little investment in the core rationales of LEP, discrepancies between policy and practice will prevail. Directives and support programmes alone, such as the common standard CEFR, have done little so far to unify LEP across the EU (Van Avermaet, 2009).

A more forward-facing question might be what value there is in countering English dominance in the EU via education systems, and if multilingualism and English dominance might achieve a reasonably balanced co-existence. Extra and Gorter (2008) propose that English as the lingua franca could be reconciled with the aim of multilingual education under three conditions: if a wide range of languages are offered, if three FLs are made compulsory, and if FL learning starts early. They concede that this would further increase English competencies within Europe, but argue that the official recognition of the de facto status of English is a necessary step towards a more realistic balance in FL learning, and towards alignment between policy and practice. Others still argue that the introduction of a first compulsory FL which is *not* English (Suvakovic, 2018) offers the best chance of countering English dominance.

Cenoz and Gorter (2015) and Zapp et al. (2018) propose more ambitious, fully trilingual education (e.g. mother tongue + English + other), starting at primary level and involving *simultaneous* FL medium instruction (Cenoz and Gorter, 2015). Zapp proposes selecting the target languages strategically so that each secondary school student in the EU learns at least one out of three or four important foreign languages, which would give many young Europeans the opportunity to communicate in a common language. Critics are quick to point out that by making strategic choices for a lingua franca, one FL only would suffice: English. Weaker versions of this proposal also exist. House (2011), for instance, suggests that learners may be content with developing passive competencies only in a variety of foreign languages to follow conversations.

Policy visions combining English and multilingualism in some way, however, rely on the framing of English as a neutral lingua franca. For some (Phillipson, 2017), English will never be neutral. Others point out that now the UK has left the EU it could be perceived as more neutral than before:

*Now that English is no longer the official language of one of the EU’s big member states, it provides a more neutral medium in the EU context, and therefore a more appropriate instrument for that role*. (van Parijs, 2021:364).

If this were indeed the case, the author might have identified a rare ‘Brexit opportunity’, albeit to the benefit of the EU. However, the ‘mother tongue + ‘neutral’ English + other’ vision of trilingualism would need to be implemented by the member states in full. The current level of engagement with EU LEP at national level suggests that politicians and policymakers at this level lack an engagement with the rationales behind EU LEP and the necessary conviction.

Failure to reach declared policy goals should not be interpreted as active resistance against EU policy by member states, as can be observed in other policy areas (Crespy and Saurugger, 2016). Rather, this study has demonstrated a clear gap between declared policy on the one hand, and practised policy and vested interests of stakeholders, on the other. Member states tend to be concerned with two other priorities: that of validating ‘their’ language, and that of equipping their young generation with the language deemed the most useful for driving national prosperity: English. For the EU LEP to progress towards a greater alignment between declared, practised and debated policy, then, more democratic interaction is needed.

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