

Hungarian-Slovak language law led to European multilingualism debate in Fryslân

Language Scientists formulate advice for European multilingualism policy

Ljouwert/Leeuwarden, 24 September 2009 - In cooperation with the Research Institute for Linguistics in Budapest the Mercator European Research Centre for Multilingualism and Language Learning organized last Saturday in Ljouwert / Leeuwarden a scientific language seminar. At the end of the day recommendations were formulated which were strongly supported by all the linguists. These recommendations will be presented to the EU commissioner for Multilingualism, Mr. Leonard Orban, to the high commissioner from the OSCE, Mr. Knut Vollebaek and to the Council of Europe (Secretariat of the Charter and the Language Policy Division).

The reason to organise this scientific seminar "Managing linguistic diversity in the EU - Practices and Regulations" was the recent amendment to the language law in Slovakia, which the use of the Hungarian language in public restricts. Besides this amendment, the linguists studied the language legislation of various European countries in the context of the existing instruments such as the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. As a result of extensive lectures and round table discussions with 20 participants a number of recommendations were formulated:

- Linguistic diversity is something to be nurtured; in designing language legislation, the effective involvement of all parties concerned is necessary. Language laws should be enabling, not restrictive, and avoid unnecessary interference in the personal sphere. Measures adopted should be realistic, proportionate and fair.
- In managing the multilingualism of Europe - in particular in border regions, there is an urgent need to bring all possible expertise to bear on the matter. We suggest identifying principles of best practise from Europe and beyond. By best practise we mean measures to increase the linguistic options of both individuals and language communities, in public administration services, education, and the media.
- These examples of best practise could serve as a basis for information and an inspiration to a constructive dialogue. We suggest that the collection and dissemination of recent best practise would be a most useful initiative in furthering the principles of multilingualism.

The Mercator Research Centre which is part of the Frisian Academy, and its network partner the Research Institute for Linguistics in Budapest, invited several prominent European scientists for the seminar. Furthermore a number of representatives of European organizations, such as the Council of Europe and the European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages (EBLUL) were present.