



RESEARCH PAPER

Multilingualism in Europe: Costs and Benefits

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ABSTRACT

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Europe is searching for unity in diversity. European Union is making efforts to convert Europe into a border-free, integrative, inclusive and knowledge-based society. Linguistic variations can pose perceived checks against this drive for cohesion. But European Union is not looking at linguistic variations as barriers rather it is seeking to preserve the rich linguistic diversity of the continent. Barriers or boundaries are being overcome through translation. For greater unity through integration, Europe seems to work for a new multilingual and plurilingual identity. European Union is promoting development of plurilingual competences among Europeans. To boost trans-Europe communication, EU is trying to interact with Europeans in their own diverse native languages. This preference for respecting Europe's indigenous linguistic diversity may yield certain foreseen benefits but at the same time it involves complications and financial costs. This study juxtaposes the resultant costs and benefits of multilingualism in European Union.

Introduction

Empires, governments, social and professional organizations and political federations and unions spanning large geographical regions have to be inclusive to embrace multilingualism and multiculturalism. The rich linguistic diversity across the globe is not without meaning and significance. Curbing the linguistic diversity is like thwarting the plans of nature. What is nature or ordained by nature should be respected because it's linked to overall human existence and survival. Languages of the world contain diverse identities and capsules of human wisdom and experiences. Working for the preservation of all languages should be the priority of the mankind.

Nature-friendly empires, governments, organizations, associations and personalities have always patronized and protected the diversity of languages. Languages contain more than just communicative value. To use a metaphor, it may be said that languages are like trees. They should be watered and regularly trimmed so that they add to the beauty of human landscape and provide shade and other benefits to the people. The treatment given to languages, in turn, defines and determines social, political and administrative circumstances and conditions. In the past, countries were divided on linguistic divides. Therefore, it is important that regions and countries formulate their language policies meticulously taking care of the linguistic and ethnic contours of the regions.

In recent times, a region which is trying to channelize the rich diversity of its languages is Europe where European Union is setting workable examples of respecting all its languages. Europe has long history of battles, foreign invasions and world wars. In Europe, the Dark Ages were branded as 'dark' because of dark human practices and attitudes. Lack of knowledge and lack of tolerance were some of the dark attitudes which prevailed in those days.

During the high medieval period, the Islamic world was at its cultural peak, supplying information and ideas to Europe through Al-Andalus and Sicily. As Arabic books on astronomy, mathematics, science, and medicine arrived from Baghdad, Damascus and Granada, they were translated from Arabic into Latin. This translation helped in the later developments on the continent. Hitti, (2002) observes:

Their translations transmuted in no small degree by the Arab mind during the course of several centuries, were transmitted, together with many new contributions, to Europe through Syria, Spain and Sicily and laid the basis of that canon of knowledge which dominated medieval European thought (p. 363).

Thus, translation filled the wide chasm between the enlightened Arabian lands and Dark Europe.

Giving the specific details of the phenomenon, Durant (1939), the American historian in his 11-volumes, observes:

- The main stream whereby the riches of Islamic thought were poured into Christian West was by translation from Arabic to Latin. About 1060 Constantine the African translated into Latin al-Razi's *Liber Experimentorum*, the Arabic medical works of Isaac Judaeus and Hunain's Arabic version of Hippocrates' *Aphorisms* and Galen's *commentary*. At Toledo...Archbishop Raymond organized a corps of translators under Dominico Gundisalvi and them to translate Arabic works of science and philosophy. Most of the translators were Jews who knew Arabic, Hebrew and Spanish, sometimes also Latin' (p. 910).

Even the Crusades yielded learning experiences for Europe because the Europeans were fighting against a developed part of the world. All these glimpses of the past show that Europe's long-standing contact with translation. This part of the Northern Hemisphere of the world has been dealing with multilingualism and translation for centuries.

In a region which went through the ordeals of two world wars around eighty years ago, this respect for languages is not without purpose and objectives. The three objectives mentioned by Gazzola are actually the socio-economic benefits the EU is pursuing: promoting the mobility of the labor force in the Single Market, employability and growth in Europe, strengthening of social Cohesion, integration of migrants, and intercultural dialogue. To achieve these benefits, the EU is promoting life-long language learning along with translation and interpretation.

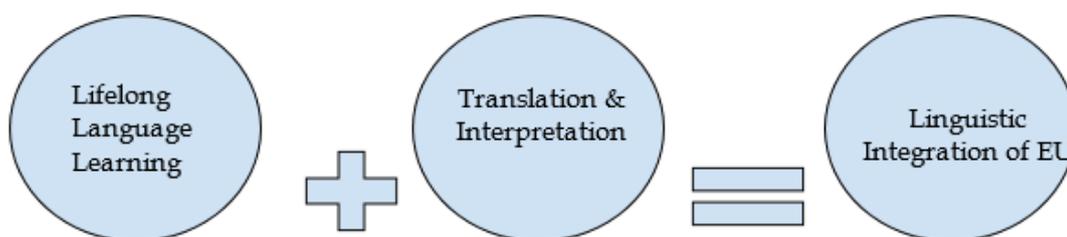


Figure 1: Linguistic Objectives and Perceived Enhanced Integration of Europe

Figure 1 shows how life-long language learning programs and translation and interpretation may help the EU achieve linguistic integration of Europe. There are studies that support the EU's preference for multilingualism. In fact, language skills are part of human capital in the sense that they can influence productivity and income. The greater number of languages a person knows, the more income opportunities he or she can exploit in a multicultural environment. There are labor markets in European and Asian cosmopolitans where skills in foreign languages are associated with income differentials. Gazzola (2016) explains that 'the results of empirical research carried out in different countries show that foreign language skills bring about economic advantages for individuals in terms of positive earning differentials' (p. 7). In fact, Europe looks at multilingualism as an investment and links plurilingual competencies of people with Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Gazzola (2016) explains that 'this emphasizes the importance of teaching and learning more than one foreign language, following the recommendations of the European Council that have been summarized in the formula mother tongue + two foreign languages (MT+2). Positive social rates of return on foreign language teaching show that language learning is a valuable investment for society as a whole' (p. 7). Though it is hard to predict whether the union will succeed in achieving its dream of a linguistically intertwined Europe or not, certain calculations, comparisons, insights, and lessons from the past may help us better understand the envisioned phenomenon and the costs.

## Literature Review

The intended linguistic integration of Europe has been the topic of wider interdisciplinary debates. The issue of EU language policy is very important in the study of linguistic integration of Europe. Does there exist any formalized language policy? What does that language policy state about the linguistic integration of Europe? Some experts like Nic Shuibhne (2004), Gazzola (2006), Krzyzanowski and Wodak (2011), Moore (2011), and Romaine (2013) lament that language policy has been politically untouchable. They point out that currently there is no coherent legally binding language policy either at the level of EU Institutions or in member-states. Whether EU language policy exists or not, it may be a matter of how the concept of language policy is actually defined. Gazzola (2016) defines that a language policy can be described as ‘a set of measures-usually undertaken by the State, regional and local authorities to influence, explicitly or implicitly, the corpus, status, and the acquisition of one or more languages’ (p. 15). The same author makes it clear that on the basis of this given definition of language policy, it can be said that at least some language planning exists in the European Union in terms of lifelong language learning concepts and programs and translation and interpretation. Furthermore, the EU’s official website provides some information about its language policy. It states that there are 24 official languages of the EU. Figure 2 below shows the 24 official languages of EU and the time when they became official languages.

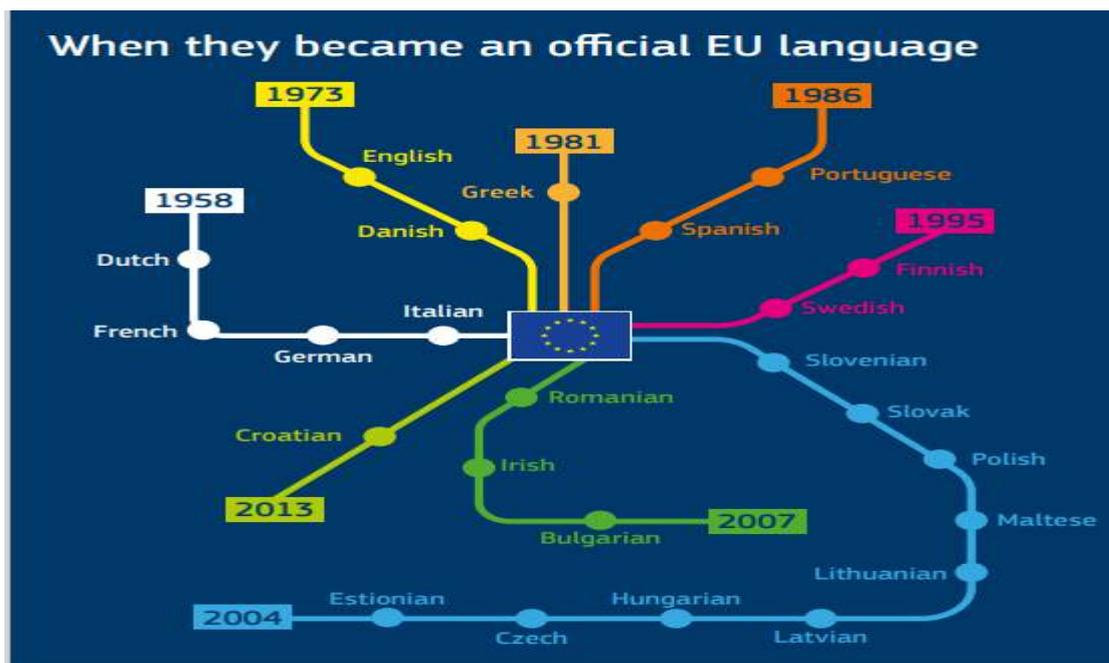


Figure 2, EU Official Language, retrieved, from European Commission, Directorate-General for Translation, (2021).

As shown in figure 2, it is clear that Dutch, French, German and Italian were made official languages EU in 1958, later on with the passage of time other languages

were added. EU's official website further explains that general information, legislation and key political documents are published in all EU official languages. Documents that are not legally binding are usually published in English, French, and German. Urgent or short-lived information appears in a single language initially, given the specific target audience. Other languages may be added later, depending on user needs.

Thus, EU language policy exists in rudiments and it emphasizes that EU and its member states should introduce the language teaching programs for EU official languages in their respective domains and regions. Furthermore, the policy states that translation and interpretations of EU documents should be done in all EU official languages. In the absence of a European lingua franca, the EU relies on translation. Pastor (2009) and Drugan, Strandvik & Vuorinen (2018) have talked about the principles, practices, quality, and management of translation at EU. Another frequently studied theme of literature is multilingualism. Strath (2000 & 2002), Nic Shuibhne (2004), Wodak (2007 & 2012), Krzyzanowski (2010), Krzyzanowski and Wodak (2011), Moore (2011), and Romaine (2013) have discussed EU multilingualism from the diverse perspective of politics, discourse, linguistics, economics, sociology, and anthropology. Doerr (2012) has discussed translation and multilingualism in the EU from the perspective of political science. Duchene and Heller (2012) have discussed the phenomenon from the perspective of discourse and language capital. Orban (2007) has discussed the issue of Lingua Franca in multilingual Europe. The following sections deal with these aspects in detail.

### **Preference for Multilingualism**

The world has numerous patterns of linguistic and cultural variations and diversities. Gazzola (2016) argues that 'the value attached to languages goes beyond their simple communicative value' (p. 32). Linguistic diversities are markers of regional and political identities, traditions, and cultural practices. But, linguistic boundaries, if planned human interventions do not occur, are fluid and flexible. This is why pidgins and creoles (varieties of languages) emerge when different speakers of different ethnic communities interact. On account of this kind of fluidity and flexibility, one language borrows and assimilates systems, sounds, and words from other languages. English is a good example of this linguistic phenomenon. Over the course of history, English has borrowed from Latin, French, German, Spanish, Persian, Arabic, Hindi, and many other European and Asian languages. Furthermore, fluidity and flexibility of linguistic boundaries also offer opportunities for multilingualism. International and regional bodies of nations, like the UN, EU, and multilingual Empires have to or had to translate their official text into several languages. For example, in the multilingual Ottoman Empire, Turkish, Arabic, and Persian were the three important languages. But people learned other languages as well to communicate in multi-ethnic regions of the time-honored Empire. As a result of having multiple linguistic groups, the Ottoman authorities had government documents translated into other languages such as Greek Armenian Serbian

Bulgarian, and even French. French was not an ethnic language in the empire but translations in the empire were done in French as well because it was an important European language of educated Europeans. In the 21st century, where faster means of communication have transformed our perceptions and sense of our community; better sociolinguistics approaches are needed to address the emerging regional and global socio-linguistics challenges.

A global village necessitates preference and respect for multilingualism. If Modern times are compared with ancient times, scales and modes of global and regional communication seem to have changed. Greater social, political, and cultural cohesion and unity of Europe demands better management of multicultural communication in a trans-European speech community, (Tosi, 2002). Thus, the European Union needs to work out linguistic solutions for Europe before it achieves better linguistic and cultural harmony. Carson (2003) points out that the European Union needs to address the issue of multicultural communication. Such challenges involve issues of language rights, language identity, language attitudes, and offering multiple languages at the institutes of higher education. Gazzola (2016) explains that a considerable amount of work was done on multilingualism in Europe in 2007-2010. In this period, important documents about the proposed multilingualism were published, frameworks formulated and resolutions were passed. For instance, the European Parliament passed a resolution on multilingualism on 24th March 2009.

### **Search for a New European Lingua Franca**

Languages seem to swap their positions as lingua franca languages. Over the course of history, Greek, Latin, French, and English have been lingua franca languages of Europe (Alina, May 21, 2018). As a result of British expansionism and the victory of the Allied forces, the English gained the status of global lingua franca after the Second World War (Crystal, 1997). Furthermore, American political influences, military campaigns, and Hollywood movies popularized the English language and American culture in different parts of the world. This is why, today, the number of non-native speakers of English outnumber the number of native speakers of English (living in Great Britain, USA, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada). Keeping in view this and other such aspects, in 2013, some stakeholders in the European Union favored making English the official language of the EU but, since a culture seems to be embedded in a language, other stakeholders had reservations because the dominance of one language implies the dominance of the culture as well. So, according to Oltermann (April 24, 2013) imposing English would lead Europe towards disintegration and undemocratic ways. Europe cannot make Latin as their lingua Franca because of its association with the distant past and dark ages. Besides these issues, recent public opinion in Britain has witnessed a split over Britain's membership in the European Union. In this context, with the majority of English people voting in favor of Brexit, English is still often used as a lingua franca in the European Union. Thus, the current ground reality is that since English is practically treated as a Langa Franca in most of the world, how the EU can ignore this position of English in the world. So, English is likely to remain as an important language in the scrolls of the EU. But, Gazzola (2016) has a different

perspective on English playing the role of lingua franca and argues that ‘after the exit of the UK from the EU, English will be the mother tongue of only a tiny minority of the population in the new EU with 27 member states (essentially the Irish and Briton’s living on the continent)... Brexit is likely to increase the importance of a multilingual language regime’ (p. 35). Gazzola (2016) further states that only 7% of the EU citizens declared an ability to speak English as a foreign language at a very good level. Intermediate and elementary levels are more common. Despite the massive investments in the teaching of English in the education system, bilingualism is not expected in the near future. Knowledge of English is not a universal “basic skill” in Europe (p. 19). But, as mentioned before, the EU respects all EU languages including English. This inclusive policy precludes the EU from having a lingua franca of Europe. Gazzola (2016) explains that ‘the percentage of people who would be excluded if English was the only official language of the EU ranges from 45% to 80% depending on the indicator and dataset used. A trilingual policy based on English, French, and German would exclude 26% to 50% of adult residents in the EU. The percentage of excluded people is significantly higher in Southern and Eastern Europe’ (p. 8). Languages in a network of European excellence (LINEE) was a project started by Europe in 2006 and ended in 2010. Costing a budget of € 5 085 384, It established a scientific network of nine European universities to investigate the linguistic diversity in Europe. The areas of focus were language, identity and culture, language policy and planning, multilingualism and education, and language and economy. Each topic was studied at national, regional, and European levels. In the European classrooms studied by LINEE, multilingualism was not seen as an asset and most teachers embraced the ideology of ‘using only one language in the classroom and one language only at a time’ (LINEE, November 3, 2011). Project partners, therefore, emphasized the fact that teacher training in this direction could be encouraged in connection with programs promoting intercultural skills. With 24 languages, including English, as the official language of the EU, it requires a considerable financial expense and human resources to produce EU documents in all the official languages. EU is using translation a tool of wider communication.

### **Translation Work at EU**

As it has been already mentioned, international and multilingual bodies and organizations rely on translation. House (2016) explains that translation is a way of communication in cross-culture interactions and contends that translation is part of the parcel of all worldwide localization and glocalization processes. Since the EU does not have a Europe-wide agreed-upon single lingua franca language, it has to rely on translation to ensure the proceedings of the EU are communicated to all member states in their own native languages. Eco, an Italian novelist said, “the language of Europe is translation” (Eco, 1993). Literature available on the subject shows that the following organizations undertake translation and interpretation work:

1. Directorate General for Translation of the European Commission
2. Directorate General for Translation of the European Parliament

3. The Translation Centre for the Bodies of the European Union based in Luxembourg
4. Directorate General Interpretation with the European Commission
5. Directorate General for Interpretation and Conferences with the European Parliament

These organizations carry out translation and interpretation work for European Union. They house thousands of staff: translators, freelancers, interpreters and contractors for translation. The DG for translation of the EU, in its 2021 figures stated that 99% of the translation work was done in Luxembourg and Brussels and around approx. 2 million pages were translated a year. Furthermore, 69% of the translation work is done by in-house translators while 31% of the translation work is outsourced. (European Commission, Directorate-General for Translation, 2021). The same document gives details of how much translation is done in each language, as shown in figure 3 below:

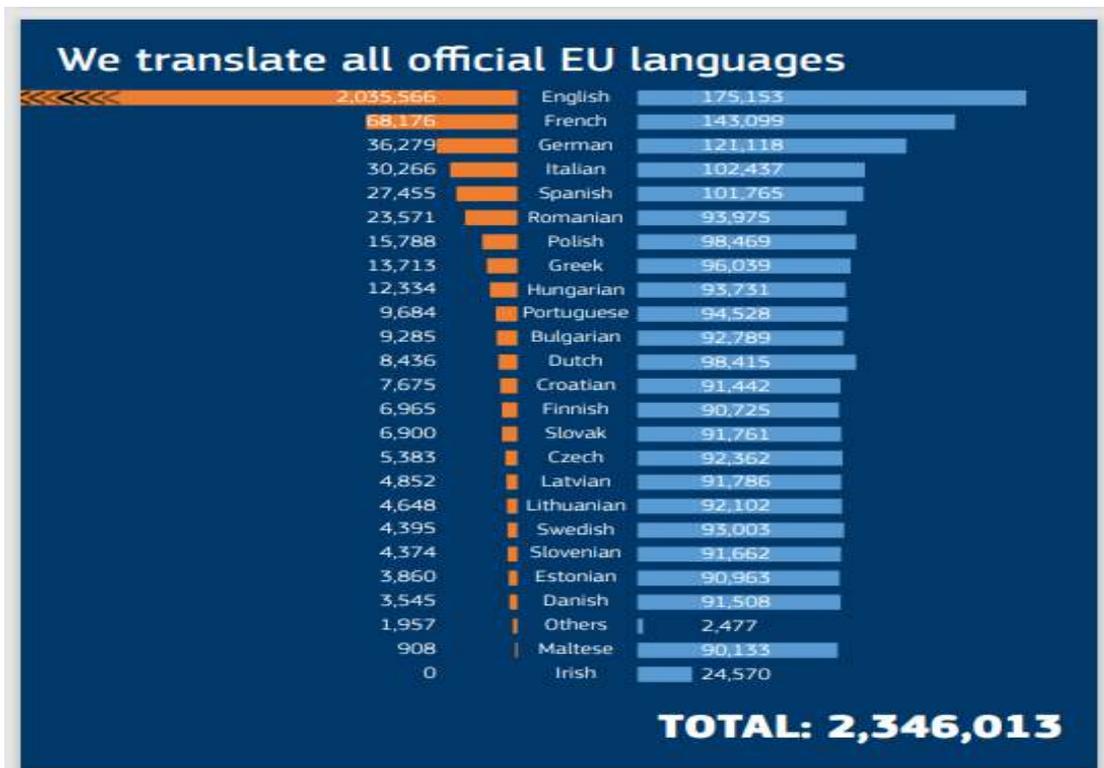


Figure 3: Translation in EU Languages, retrieved from European Commission, Directorate-General for Translation, (2021).

Figure 3 shows that translation work is more frequently done in English, French and German, Italian, Spanish and Romanian languages than in other languages.

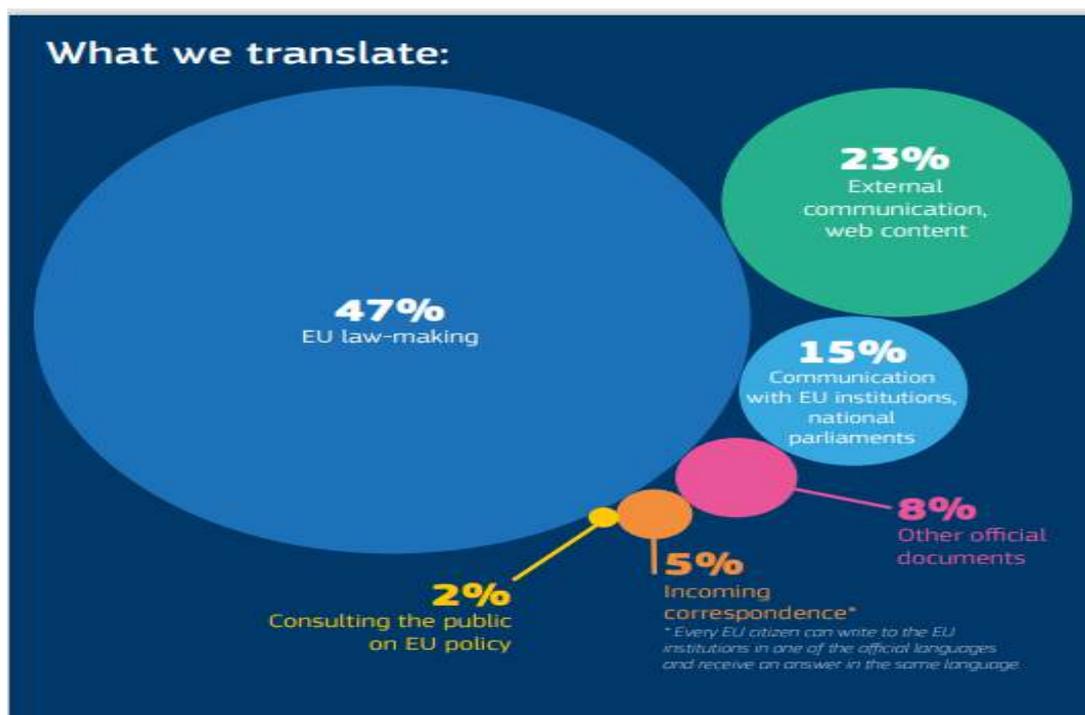


Figure 4: Content Translated at EU, retrieved from European Commission, Directorate-General for Translation, (2021).

Figure 4 shows that 47% of the translation deals with EU law making, 23% of the translation content deals with web content or external communication, 15% of the translation deals with EU institutions, the remaining 15% of the translation work deals with public consultation, correspondence and other official documents.

Besides, many other European Union organizations and agencies maintain their own translation services. In addition to the financial costs, there are other translation challenges which EU faces such as inaccuracies of translations, misunderstandings, delays and misinterpretations. Oltermann (April 24, 2013) reported that in 2012, a senior translator at the European court of auditors compiled a 33-page document on commonly misused English phrases in EU publications. Furthermore, beyond these translation organizations individual researchers in EU have to pay translation charges on their own. Frank (September 23, 2016) talks about translation costs individual researchers have to pay to get their findings translated in English and other languages.

### Translation Budget

According to the figures given in 2013 by the European Commission's DG Translation, the translation cost was 330 million euro per year which was less than 1%

of the annual general budget of the EU (Translation in the European Union – Facts and Figures 2013, para 13). With the passage of time this cost of translation increased. According to figures given by the same directorate of EU, in 2021, the translation cost was 349 million euro per year which was 0.2% of the total budget of the union. Fiscal hawks are raising their objections on translation budget. The critics of EU's translation policy are of the view that it is wasting huge amounts of taxpayers' money on translation. *The Week*, a weekly news magazine in the United Kingdom, observes that 'the European Parliament has overspent its translation budget by millions of euros, prompting accusations that the EU is continuing to waste taxpayers' money on vanity projects and bureaucracy'. The same magazine further observes that 'the EU has around 4,300 translators and 800 interpreters on its permanent staff, yet it still outsourced more than a third of its translation work to private contractors last year' (EU overspends its translation budget by £3m, August 30, 2017). It is natural for human beings to weigh things in terms of costs and benefits. In this article we tried to juxtaposed the costs and benefits of translation work at EU. Against 2% of annual, EU budget, the benefits, EU may reap are of social, cultural and political nature. The insights of fiscal hawks don't serve people and nations in all spheres and affairs. Human survival, cohesion and integration is more important than financial losses. The EU commitment to multilingualism seems to be good example set by the union for the rest of the regions of the world.

## **Conclusion**

It can be said that the inclusive policy precludes the EU from having a *lingua franca* of Europe. EU is channelizing the value attached to languages beyond simple communicative value. Language skills are part of human capital. The organization is looking at language learning is a valuable investment for society as a whole. Skills in foreign languages are associated with income differentials. Plurilingual competencies of people are being linked with Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Besides, positive social returns of multilingualism are more important than economic gains. By spending 1% of the whole EU budget on multilingualism and translation, EU is likely to have better economic, social and cultural benefits for its citizens. This envisioned social cohesion may help Europe stay away from sanguinary times experienced by Europe in the ten-year-long World Wars--the largest military conflicts in the entire human history.

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