

Студентски дебюти
Student Debuts

Identity and European Identity in Normative Documents and Presentations

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Abstract: The essay presents the results of a review of theoretical publications, normative and legal documents related to European identity, multilingualism, student mobility. The topics are presented in official juridical documents and public appearances and presentations. The aim is to identify manifestations of and phenomena related to European identity, identity, multilingualism, etc.

Keywords: European identity, multilingualism, student mobility, single story, fake news.

Introduction

Today, the European Union is composed of 27 member states and it has 24 official languages. “One of the EU’s founding principles is multilingualism,” [1] we read on its official website. In fact, the cultural and linguistic diversity is one of the most important characteristics of the Treaty. The language we speak is a significant factor creating our identity—national, regional or even more individual. It might shape the way of thinking and perceiving information.

And what about learning languages? The European Union encourages acquiring competences in foreign languages, recognizing proficiency in more than one language as indispensable for building the community. Relying on relevant theoretical sources and official EU documents and Internet sites, I will present the opportunities as well as chances given by language proficiency to become a more conscious citizen of EU.

Why does the EU encourage us to learn foreign languages?

“According to this [promoting the multilingualism—A.B.] policy, an ideal European [citizen] should know at least two foreign languages—one language of international importance (e.g. English, French, German) and one language of a neighbour country”. [2]

As it has been already said, in the EU there are 24 official languages and all the legal acts have to be translated into all the national languages. Since there are professional translators and interpreters, what is the use of learning a language by ourselves?

Mostly, English, French and German are mentioned as the “working languages” of the EU. It means that not all the materials proposed by the EU are available in all the languages, because of lack of possibilities to translate.

In the *Communication From The Commission: Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment*, we find remarks on various arguments to learn a language. We can collect and group them under one common slogan: foreign language proficiency opens the door to personal growth. As the text specifies, “A successful multilingualism policy can strengthen life chances of citizens”. [3]

Starting with the process itself, most of the training materials are based on the culture of the country where the language is spoken. It implies that learners open their minds to different perspectives. Nowadays, it is particularly important to be open-minded and understanding while communicating with other people.

Once the communicative level of language is acquired, it gives numerous and diverse opportunities, such as a more suitable or better-paid job, or even a chance to work abroad. Also, it is possible to study in various languages or in different countries. Student mobility is promoted and facilitated in particular by the Erasmus+ programme. In some languages, there are more materials in different fields of science than in others. In effect, knowing a foreign language expands both thinking and scientific horizons.

Thanks to language proficiency, we are able to meet more people, we are not restrained to talk only with our compatriots. And as we exchange experiences with others, we gain the possibility to see more points of view. It helps to overcome stereotypes and to become more tolerant and understanding. Chimamanda Adichie in her TedTalk [4] uses the term “single story”. She shows how harmful it may be if we have only one vision of a certain group (nation, social class etc.). This talk reveals the importance of getting to know different perspectives.

Furthermore, not only does language learning open the mind but it also develops the critical sense which is very important nowadays. Modern days are marked by the accumulation of information, among them—false information, and the so-called fake news. Knowing more than one language enables us to detect fake news by comparing the information from different sources. A person who speaks more than one EU language can compare the material in national media from two or more countries and hence see different perspectives of presenting the same information. In this way, knowing more than one language enables us to be more conscious citizens of the European Union.

These are some reasons why the European Union insists on acquiring language competences. Its importance is visible on the official level. I want to briefly present the foreign language teaching process following the example of Polish public schools.

In Poland as early as the preschool level, one of the tasks is to “create learning situations that arouse children’s interest in a modern foreign language and in learning about other cultures”. [5] Then at school, in majority at the age of seven, children start learning their first modern foreign language (the most popular is English [6, 7] but it can be another language offered by their school). In the seventh grade of primary school (so at the age of thirteen), they start learning second language—according to the opportunities given by the school. The most often chosen language is German. [6], [7].

In the secondary school, there are three hours of first foreign language per week for four years, and two hours of second language, also for four years. [8] There is an option to take classes on an advanced level or go to a bilingual class. In some specific cases, the number of hours per week can be lower. However, the standard teaching on the basic level in Poland looks just as described. It is mandatory, which shows the realisation of “the Barcelona objective—communication in mother tongue plus two languages”. [9]

Conclusion

The European Union highly recommends learning languages, not only in schools, but during one’s lifetime. It gives to its citizens more opportunities in both professional and private life, the possibilities mentioned above are just some examples, because we can find many more positive aspects of language proficiency. Sensitization and awareness are also extremely important general social advantages. Not to omit the higher chances to detect fake news and post-truth. Last but not least, the topic of multilingualism in the EU can be developed in a scientific research framework.

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