

Language policy in the European union in the context of the spread of english as a global language

The article traces the pattern of formation of the language of transnational communication under conditions of globalization. It shows the global role of English and considers the essence of language policy in the EU, with its core efforts being aimed at maintaining the principles of multilingualism. The article reveals the essence of multilingualism and its role for the deepening of European integration. The objective necessity to introduce the language of international communication into the linguistic space of the EU is highlighted. The existing contradictions in some language programmes of the EU policy are elucidated.

Keywords: globalization, multilingualism, language policy, European Union, English

Мовна політика Євросоюзу в контексті поширення англійської мови як засобу транснаціонального спілкування

Підкреслюється закономірність формування світової мови транснаціональної комунікації в умовах глобалізації. Показано глобальну роль англійської мови. Висвітлюється зміст мовної політики Європейського Союзу, головним напрямом якої є затвердження принципів багатомовності. Розкривається сутність мультилінгвізму та його значення для поглиблення євроінтеграції. Зазначено об'єктивну потребу впровадження мови міжнародного спілкування у лінгвістичний простір ЄС. Підкреслюється суперечливість деяких програм мовної політики ЄС.

Ключові слова: глобалізація, мультилінгвізм, мовна політика, Євросоюз, англійська мова

Globalisation of international relations exerts its unifying, centripetal influence on international relations not only with regard to the sphere of economic and humanitarian relations but also to global politics. There is no doubt that global trade has become a principle factor of the economic aspect of the phenomena of globalization. However, integration processes in the world economy require coordinated policy, goals and objectives of all the nations and peoples of the world.

In the era of globalization, it is objectively required that all the actors of international political relations comply with unified rules and principles, adhere to the generally recognized

criteria and norms of political behavior. The rules and criteria are formed and declared on the basis of consensus agreements between the states within the framework of various international organisations, both international and regional. It is worth mentioning that these organisations make supranational binding decisions, hence the governments of the states that support these decisions are to comply with these decisions in conducting their foreign and home policy.

At present, the most influential and reputable international association of states is the United Nations Organisation (UNO). It is this organization that regulates the relations between all the nations in the world. It determines the fundamental principles and criteria by which the relations between the states are guided, and which are of binding character for the governments of states – parties to the organization. The principles of international trade and financial relations are determined by such organisations as the World Trade Organisation, The International Monetary Fund, The World Bank, etc. The international organisations, whose activity is recognized and supported by all the countries of the world, are responsible for the formation of the structure of the global political system.

At the same time influential regional and inter-regional organisations also play an important role in the formation of the global system of international relations. The European Union, which now is composed of 27 European countries; NATO (28 member states); a regional forum “Association of First and foremost the organisations such as Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN-ARF) comprising ten Southeast Asian states (26 member states) are examples of the biggest regional and interregional organisations. There are also regional organisations set up in North and South America, Africa, Arab world, the customs Union that unites 5 countries on the territory of the former USSR.

Regional and subregional economic unions are aimed at harmonizing economic interests of member states; they establish free trade zones, define the scope of their competence and powers of the members, regulate custom tariffs and investment policy and facilitate the establishment of equitable trade relations between the states. There is no doubt that the activity of such organisations has a significant impact on the political shape of the world.

It is clear that the globalization of international relations promotes the expansion of cooperation between both global and regional unions of states. Various contacts between governments, organisations and individuals have reached an unprecedented scale. For efficient coordination of opinions as well as actions of the states-members of such international organisations, for making the most optimal decisions – a single universal language was needed. So beginning with the first half of the 20th century, for a number of historical reasons English began to fulfill this role.

That's why English became a major working language of most international congresses and the official language of most influential and widespread international organizations. As a result, in 1990ies there were about 12,5 thousand international organisations. According to the estimates made by D. Crystal, « out of random 500 organisations taken in alphabetical

order 424 (85%) of the organisations used English as the official language, and 169 (i.e. one third) use only English in their work. Such influential regional associations as European Free Trade Association (EFTA) the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) use English as their sole working language.

It should be mentioned that some international organisations not only actively use English in their activity but also strive to contribute to its global spread. Since for some international organisations global expansion of English in the world linguistic space is not only the evidence, but also the tool for establishing their dominance. Historical, geopolitical, economic, cultural factors are among a number of reasons for English acquiring the status of international language.

In conditions of globalization of the world economy, the dominance of English speaking countries (first and foremost the USA) remains clearly visible in all spheres of international relations, that is confirmed by practically all researchers of this problem¹. Therefore it is not surprising that these countries actively engage various international organisations in promoting their interests, in particular, in establishing English as the means of international communication. Considering the aforesaid, the role of English in the work of the European Union, the Commonwealth of Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and many others is exceptionally important. According to D. Crystal, more than 85 % of international organisations use English as the working language.² Among such organisations are primarily the United Nations Organisation, the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

The same underlying principles regarding the use of languages are at the heart of the UNO, together with more than 50 of its different institutional structures, constituting the organization. The functioning of English as the means of international communication in the activity of the UN structures is of great importance, since it is within the framework of these organisations that the most significant communication between representatives of different nations and peoples takes place.

A number of multi-faceted relations are being developed within the institutionally established interstate unions, in particular in the European Union. Free movement of goods, services, labour and capital is guaranteed within the borders of integrated Europe, which promotes the expansion of interpersonal communication between representatives of different nations. This process raises the relevant issue of determining the means and languages of international communication. The aggravation of the situation results from a constant expansion of the European Union. Back in 1958, when the Treaty of Rome under the name of European Economic Community was signed (EEC), its article 217 stated that the rules governing the languages of the institutions of the Community shall be determined by the Council, acting unanimously and

¹ Michael Harriman and Barbara Burnaby. *Language Policies in English-Dominant Countries*. – Clarendon: Multilingual Matters, 1996. – P.15-22.

² David Crystal. *Op. cit.*, p. 76.

that German, French, Italian and Dutch shall be the official and working languages of the community. However, given even four official languages, 12 language combinations were in use in the EEC activity (for instance, the documents in German needed translation into 3 other languages—three combinations,). However, in 1995, when the EEC expanded by way of the accession of new members and grew to encompass 11 states, the number of language combinations increased by 110. The subsequent enlargement has brought membership to twenty-eight members since the foundation of the European Union, therefore the number of language combinations drastically increased. The current language situation in the EU calls for a critical appraisal since the language problem is escalating and needs resolution.

It should also be mentioned that some regional languages (Catalan, Scottish) also claim the status of official European Union languages. If they are given this status, it will make the language situation in the EU, which is complicated as it is, even more complicated. According to the head of German mission in the European Union V. Schoenfeld, « there is no more acute issue in the EU than the language issue »³, in addition to this, some members of European parliament consider the language issue to be a serious and dangerously explosive problem for Europe.»⁴.

Since the European legislation declares the equality of languages of all the EU member states, the documents of the EU are supposed to be translated into their languages. Citizens and governments have the right to address EU bodies in any of the 24 EU official languages, and to receive a reply in that language. The European Commission has a permanent staff of 1 750 linguists and 600 support staff, and also uses freelance translators all over the world. The translation flow is an enormous challenge to the EU. There are several responsible bodies in charge of translation, such as the two Directorates General for Translation of the European Commission and of the European Parliament and the Translation Centre for the Bodies of the European Union based in Luxembourg, which serve the EU agencies. The Centre currently has 210 staff members, 100 of them being translators. The other EU institutions also have their own translation units. Hence, the EU spends large sums of money on translation services. The European Commission's DG Translation costs 330 million euro per year. In 2004-2007 with the increase of EU's official languages from 11 to 23 the translation costs increased by 20%. However, there are a number of challenges in the translation service. Since the national languages of the EU have peculiar features, belong to different language groups, misunderstandings and mistranslations are a common type of problem in translation and especially in interpretation. So lack of semantic equivalence and precision in translating the EU documents from one language into another is oftentimes a source of confusion and misunderstanding. Research Professor R. Phillipson, a renowned advocate of multilingual education as a factor of peace and

³ Schonfeld Wilhelm. – "Suddeutsche Zeitung", 2005, 1 April.

⁴ Phillipson Robert. The new linguistic imperial order: English as an EU lingua franca jr lingua frankensteinia? In "Unions: past-present-future", Journal of Irish and Scottish Studies. Vol.1: Issue 2, 2008, p.189.

of linguistic rights against cultural and linguistic homogenization processes, writes, that the «basic notions, such as language, dialect, nation, mean different things in different languages and states...Semantic inconsistencies ... are certain to hamper reaching full international understanding .These problems are complicated by the fact the EU funds different language policies that contradict each other.On the other hand such practice and policy consolidates the positions of English.»⁵.

Undoubtedly, the English language has the status of one of the world's most important languages which serves as a means of international communication. In D.Crystal's words, « international English is the political and cultural and reality.»⁶An authoritative weekly magazine with a global focus on business and politics «Economist» offered an insight that English has fundamentally established itself as the global standard language.»⁷.

However, in the European Union English acquired the official status of a working language only in 1972, when Great Britain became a member of the EU. Despite this fact, English quickly gained the leading position among other EU languages. It is evidenced by the changing trends of language choice regarding the official EU documents of various European institutions. In 1970 60% of all the documents were written in French and 40% in German, whereas in 2006, 72% of all the documents are written in English, 14% in German and only 3% in German. It is worth mentioning that no other than these languages were used in drafting the EU documents back in 1970.Currently,11% of the documents are drafted in the language of member states.⁸. These proportions are a proof to the complexity of the current language situation in the European Union.

It is obvious that English is quickly and rather aggressively ousting other national languages of the EU member states. It is easy to conclude that homogenization of the linguistic space of the EU may pose a real threat to the very existence of some “small” European languages (for example Dutch, Estonian, Latvian), which can gradually disappear from the linguistic map of Europe. In conditions of globalization of international relations English is acquiring the status of lingua franca not only in Europe, but also globally.In ancient times the term *lingua franca* was used to describe a language systematically used to enable effective communication between people with different native languages.The Italian language was the primary composition of the lingua franca with the language featuring many Italian words and phrases. Other languages whose words made up the lingua franca include Old French, Occitan, Arabic, Greek, Turkish, and Portuguese. The earliest English record proving the existence of the term lingua franca was in 1632 where it was known as “Bastard Spanish”. In times of globalization the English language is capable of effectively fulfilling the functions of an international means of communication.

⁵ Phillipson Robert. Op. cit., p.190.

⁶ David Cristal. Op. cit., p.9.

⁷ Language and Electronic. – Economist, 1996, 21 December.

⁸ Phillipson Robert. Op. cit., p.192.

However, establishing English as a means of global communication can be described as a complex and complicated process. It is worth mentioning that in some countries, mostly Asian and African one can observe a negative, if not hostile attitude to English and to the process of its global spread. For example the president of Kenya Jomo Kenyatta back in 1974 said that the national language is the «foundation on which any independent state is built. That is why we can't continue using the language of our colonists.» In 1908 an Indian national leader Gandhi emphasized: «To give the masses the knowledge of English means to deprive them of freedom, to enslave them»⁹.

It means a certain opposition to the spread the English language results from the desire of some countries to get rid of colonial legacy, to ensure the development of their national cultures and languages. But the British colonial expansion, accompanied by the migration of substantial numbers of English speakers from Great Britain, stipulated the global spread of English. No wonder, that many peoples and nations associate it with suppression and domination, with some former British colonies (the USA, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, partially SA) considering it their native language, whereas other African and Asian countries often rejecting it.

Random occurrences of a negative attitude towards English as a global means of communication can, however, also be observed within the European Union. Some linguists, in particular, R. Phillipson, identify the spread of English with the policy of «linguistic imperialism», used by the anglosaxon world to establish and strengthen its global dominance.¹⁰

According to a Danish researcher P. V. Christiansen, a democratic linguistic foundation is of paramount importance in EU integration processes in order to ensure a democratic union.¹¹ However, on reflection it may seem obvious, that the dominance of English in the European Union linguistic environment in essence, contradicts the officially proclaimed and legally-established principle of linguistic equality of all the countries-members of the EU. However, different languages can't be considered equal in terms of their socio-economic and political status. If we consider the language potential of a particular language as a type of commodity, we will clearly see that the popularity, or even the demand for different languages is different, with some languages (those of least populous nations) having very low degree of demand and popularity. If we consider the the positions of European languages by the number of native speakers, Latvian, Hungarian, Estonian totaling 1.8, 1.3, 1.1 million speakers correspondingly, we will see that they have no potential competitive advantages.

The opponents of establishing global means of communication strongly resist implementing the policy of conducting most classes in English in European educational institutions. For example, the document of the European commission, called «Promoting language learning and linguistic diversity' An action plan 2004-06. » emphasizes that «in non-anglophone countries, recent trends to provide teaching in English may have unforeseen consequences on the

⁹ David Cristal. Op. cit., p.157.

¹⁰ Див.: Robert Phillipson. Linguistic Imperialism. – Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1998.

¹¹ Language policy in the European Union European/English/Elite/Equal/Esperanto Union?.p.26

vitality of the national language. University language policies should therefore include explicit actions to promote the national or regional language. »¹². The European approach to promoting linguistic diversity also means «actively encouraging the teaching and learning of the widest possible range of languages in our schools, universities, adult education centres and enterprises. Taken as a whole, the range on offer should include the smaller European languages as well as all the larger ones, regional, minority and migrant languages as well as those with ‘national’ status, and the languages of our major trading partners throughout the world. The imminent enlargement of the European Union will bring with it a wealth of languages from several language families; it requires a special effort to ensure that the languages of the new Member States become more widely learned in other countries. Member States have considerable scope to take a lead in promoting the teaching and learning of a wider range of languages than at present», which shows the relevance of the language issue as well as the concerns the linguistic diversity causes. D.Kristall calls the national languages «the most universal symbol of national identity and individuality.»¹³ That is why the countries –members of the EU try to protect their native language from the dominance of the English language. In France, one of the few countries with governmental laws protecting its language, for instance, a law was passed on the protection and development of the French language. In fact, France, which prides itself on the preservation of its language, has installed governmental and cultural barriers to keep other languages out, in order to uphold the purity of its mother language. The opinion of the former president of France Jacques Chirac, who supported the preservation of the French language and its integrity: “Nothing would be worse for humanity than to move toward a situation where we speak only one language”¹⁴ is widely shared and supported by the government, which installed regulations specifically for the media to ensure they were using the French language over foreign vocabulary.

The representatives of demographically “small” languages, such as Danish, Swedish, languages of Baltic states and Eastern and Central Europe have enough grounds to fear that their languages will be considered as secondary in the linguistic market of Europe, moreover, they will be gradually ousted from the competitive field by other, more popular European languages. In this regard R. Phillipson remarks that «the complexity of language policy of the EU is connected with various roles that the languages play in the member states and in the European integration»¹⁵. That’s why some EU countries take pains to assert the priority of their languages in the linguistic environment of the continent.

Western scientific terminology uses the term «linguistic nationalism» with reference to such situations. It is noteworthy, that nationalism, the priority of national identity are not supported or encouraged in the EU: since the EU membership itself means limiting state sovereignty of the

¹² Phillipson Robert. Op. cit., p.198.

¹³ David Cristal. Op. cit., p.190.

¹⁴ Johnson, Paul. “Must the Whole World Speak English?” Forbes.Com. 29 Nov. 2004

¹⁵ Phillipson Robert. Op. cit., p.186.

nation states to a certain degree, then the people of these nation are supposed to refuse from some of their values and interests. In Europe not national, but European identity is prioritised which implies the creation of multicultural and multilingual society in Europe.¹⁶ However, according to Gerard Delanty European identity can be seen, not as an identity that is outside or anti-national, but as an internal transformation of national identities. In these terms, it is not a case of European versus national identities, but of the Europeanization of national identities that is significant. Thus it is the case that many national identities have found within the project of European integration the means of advancing their interests, but too often re-orienting their self-understanding. Building up and strengthening solidarity within the framework of the *European Union* but not emphasizing National Cultural Differences or causing social alienation within integrated Europe is the foundation of humanitarian strategy of the EU. It can be concluded that current migration policy of the EU may gradually and subtly lead to erosion of national diversity of the demographic pattern of European society and to its homogenization.

However, languages are and will yet remain for a long time the fundamental national value in the European countries. That is why many Europeans view the spread of English as a threat for their linguistic culture. Moreover, the aspiration of the people to maintain their culture and preserve linguistic identity contradicts the needs for homonisation of the European linguistic space, the functioning of linguistic means of international communication. In this connection D. Crystal states: «The need for understanding each other and at the same time the need for sociocultural *identification as a nation*, perceiving themselves as a nation divides peoples and nations. ... First of all it encourages learning an international language, which in most cases is English, second, it calls to maintain and propagate local languages and local cultures.»¹⁷. These two trends in the language policy of the European Union contradict each other, furthermore, this contradiction may have unpredictable consequences.

The objective factors and historical circumstances, which lead to the deepening of the the integration processes in the European Union (primarily of political nature) demand that a common language should be introduced into the practice of international relations in Europe and it is only English that can perform this role, which is already *established* as the de facto lingua franca, as a dominant language on the continent.

Moreover, many experts consider that this language itself can facilitate and foster the unification of Europe: functioning of English as the European lingua franca can avert the potential language conflicts between the countries and peoples of the European Union. Contrary to the requirements of modern times, the European institutions aspire to adhere to the principle of linguistic equality and multilingual diversity. To this end, at the initiative of the European Parliament the «*A European Agency for Linguistic Diversity and Language Learning*»

¹⁶ Див.: Смокотин В.М. Новый этап в развитии принципов многоязычия в Европе: построение многоязычного и поликультурного общества // Вестник Томского государственного университета, 2010, №337. – С.81-86.

¹⁷ David Cristal. Op. cit., p.192.

was established. The agency developed and adopted an *Action Plan to promote linguistic diversity* and language learning *in the framework of the Lifelong Learning programme* which ran from 2007-2013. However, according to this programme, the funding of support of regional languages and languages of national minorities was curtailed (from 1.2 million euros to 149 thousand euros per year). To some extent it is the evidence of inconsistency of the linguistic policy of the European institutions in *promotion of multilingualism* and *linguistic and cultural diversity* in the linguistic environment of the EU. Contrary to the requirements of modern times, the EU institutions are committed to adhere to the declared principle of linguistic equality and multilingualistic diversity. The adoption of the resolution on a European strategy for multilingualism in November 2008 is another evidence of implementing the policy of multilingual and cultural diversity. The document notes that: «linguistic and cultural diversity is part and parcel of the European identity; it is at once a shared heritage, a wealth, a challenge and an asset for Europe.»¹⁸ Besides, the European Agency for linguistic diversity and language learning was established following the requirement of the European parliament. The Agency developed and approved the plan for promoting the linguistic diversity within the framework of the EU *programme on «Integrated Life Long Learning»*, for the *period 2007-2013*. However, in accordance with this programme, centralized funding for the support of regional languages and languages of ethnic minorities was curtailed (from 1,2 mln.euros to 149 thousand euros per year). To some extent it points to some inconsistency and contradictions in the EU institutions regarding promotion of *multilingualism* in the linguistic space of the EU.

The European Strategy for Multilingualism (ESM), a rather ambitious framework project developed by The European Council (2005), states among other things: “multilingualism is still the most effective language regime among the alternatives usually examined in the literature.”

The ESM sets itself the goal-promotion of multilingualism for the purpose of “strengthening social cohesion, intercultural dialogue and European construction.”¹⁹ The Strategy recommends that the governments of the EU member states adhere to the following standards in the field of language policy and education:

- implementing the commitment to teach at least two foreign languages from a very early age, and mastering at least two foreign languages, with the emphasis on effective communicative ability
- mother tongue plus two other languages: making an early start
- developing the National Curriculum to promote multilingualism;
- adopting a holistic approach to the teaching of language, which makes appropriate connections between the teaching of ‘mother tongue’, ‘foreign’ languages, the lan-

¹⁸ ENDANGERED LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2013/495851/IPOL-CULT_NT\(2013\)495851_EN.p.23](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2013/495851/IPOL-CULT_NT(2013)495851_EN.p.23)

¹⁹ http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/573460/IPOL_STU%282016%29573460_EN.pdf p13. Research for Cult Committee-European Strategy for Multilingualism: Benefits and Cost

guage of instruction, and the languages of migrant communities; as well as improving the quality of teaching foreign languages²⁰

- Better language teaching; identifying the core pedagogical and linguistic skills necessary for today's language teachers, and proposing a framework for their assessment.
- early language learning;
- combining language teaching with interdisciplinary teaching (integrated approach); Higher education institutions play a key role in promoting societal and individual multilingualism. Proposals that each university implement a coherent language policy clarifying its role in promoting language learning and linguistic diversity, both amongst its learning community and in the wider locality, are to be welcomed;
- language learning in secondary education/vocational training;
- establishing a European language competence indicator, that is the assessment of language;
- skills universal for all EU countries;
- active use of foreign languages in multilingual economy

However, upon scrutiny of the above listed requirements we can conclude, that the implementation of these provisions will increase the role of English in the linguistic environment of the EU. So the citizens of the United Europe, when choosing a language to learn in the European educational institutions will give (already give preference) to English. As a matter of fact the The European Strategy for Multilingualism suggests and declares that learning English become mandatory in all the educational institutions - from kindergarten and primary schools to universities. Hence, the European Union unofficially admits the role of English as the means of international communication within the EU linguistic area.

The strategic goal of promoting the spread of English as the linguistic means of international communication is the formation of a global English speaking society without territorial, state and sociocultural borders. In fact, this aim contradicts multilingualism and multiculturalism as the foundation of European language policy.

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