

UNIVERSITY OF MARIBOR  
FACULTY OF ORGANIZATIONAL SCIENCES

Publishing House  'Moderna organizacija'

# Management, Knowledge and EU



PROCEEDINGS OF THE  
23<sup>rd</sup> INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE ON  
ORGANIZATIONAL SCIENCE DEVELOPMENT

SLOVENIA, PORTOROŽ,  
MARCH, 24<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> 2004

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**Title:**  
 Proceedings of the 23<sup>rd</sup> International Scientific Conference  
 on Organizational Science Development  
 Management, Knowledge and EU

**Editorial Committee:**  
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**Publishing house:** *Moderna organizacija*  
**Printed by:** Fleks d.o.o. Medvode  
**Information support of the conference:** Bortt Werber, Ph. D.  
 Kranj, March 2004

CIP - Kataložni zapis o publikaciji  
 Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica, Ljubljana  
 65.012(063)  
 65.01:007(063)  
 339.923:061.1EU  
 INTERNATIONAL Scientific Conference on Organizational Science Development (23 : 2004 :  
 Portorož)  
 Management, Knowledge and EU : proceedings of the 23rd International Scientific Conference on  
 Organizational Science Development, Slovenia, Portorož, March, 24th-26 th 2004 / [editorial  
 committee Jože Florjancić ... et al.] - Kranj : Modern Organization, 2004  
 ISBN 961-232-166-3  
 1. Gl. siv. nasl. 2. Florjancić, Jože  
 129191168

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V

## FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN EU

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### *Abstract*

*Throughout history civilized nations communicate in order to satisfy their mutual economic, cultural, scientific and informatory needs. The knowledge of foreign languages is very important for the countries that are members of EU and also for countries, which aim to be members of it. There are many languages in the world and all the time some of them compete for dominant position in the international communication.*

*The aim of our research is to investigate the importance of knowledge and usage of foreign languages, especially English, in EU.*

### 1. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EUROPEAN INTERGATION AND LANGUAGES

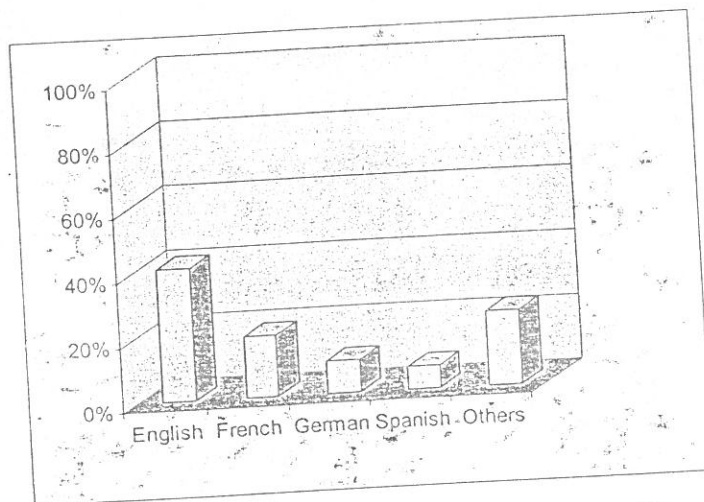
The EU is a democratic organisation so it has to communicate with its citizens in their languages, not to mention the Member States' governments and civil services, businesses and other organisations all over the EU. The public have a right to know what is being done in their name and must also be able to play an active part without having to learn other people's languages. And the European Union passes laws which are directly binding on everyone in the EU, so everybody in the EU must be able to understand them, which means they must be available in all the official languages.

The EU does not yet have a language policy in the traditional sense that of policy formed with the intention of influencing the linguistic behaviour of a population. This type of policy is generally associated with building or consolidating nation-states, and usually aims for linguistic homogeneity within a state or region. Most of the EU's legislative attempts to influence linguistic choice amongst the population have been directed at maintaining existing diversity, but have been in the form of non-binding directives and recommendations, the implementation of which remains firmly in the hands of member states, who are concerned with maintaining the best position for their own languages. But concerning the use of languages within its own institutions, the EU has made one binding declaration.

The Euro barometer survey was conducted last December among 16000 citizens of the European Union, and provides information on the language knowledge of Europeans, their opportunities to use the foreign languages they know, their opinions on the

usefulness of speaking other languages, their interest in speaking these languages and the way in which languages are learned in the various Member States.

The results of Euro barometer survey include the following findings that 41% of the people interviewed said that they speak English, which was more than French (19%), German (10%) or Spanish (7%). The proportion of Europeans who can only speak their mother tongue is 47%, which is an average that hides major differences between Luxembourg where just 2% can only speak their mother tongue and the United Kingdom, where 66% of the British people can only speak their mother tongue. In Sweden, the Netherlands and Denmark, less than 15% of citizens cannot express themselves in another language, while this is the case for 56% of Portuguese people, 53% of Spaniards and 51% of French people.



Picture 1: The results of Euro barometer survey

The goal set by the Barcelona Council of teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age is ambitious. Up until now, only a small percentage of foreign-language students and pupils in the European Union have attained fluency in foreign languages. For most students, and in some countries for more than 90% of children, this foreign language is English, with other languages being optional extras. In the United Kingdom, all foreign languages have come to be considered as optional for children from the age of 14. This is a logical consequence of the dominance of English in all other European education systems as well as in all spheres of society.

In continually striving towards the goal of multilingual Europeans, as a basis for a common European identity and society, the European Commission should therefore recognize that difficulties in learning national languages represent a barrier for many students, who would nonetheless benefit from knowing a second or third language. The European Commission should also recognize that the dominance of English within European society might have harmful economic and social effects upon a whole range of cultural and educational industries. Monolingual English-speakers who experience ever-

speaking these languages and the States.

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greater difficulty in learning any foreign language also feel these negative effects. This is due to the fact that non-English-speaking Europeans have already had a lifetime of exposure, mainly via media, to English. On the other hand, non-native speakers of English almost never reach 'mother tongue standard' English following puberty. Unfortunately, 'English mother tongue' or 'perfect English' is required for an increasing number of positions in European companies and organizations.

In preserving linguistic diversity, the European Commission should take note of the Council of Europe report, "The diversity of languages in the educational systems of the Member states". Carried out in 37 countries, the report ascertains "that [at present] in almost 4 countries out of 5 one language is learned by a number of students greater than the total number of students that are learning all the other languages". That language is English. At the level of higher education, there is also increasing pressure to study at English-speaking universities.

## 2. THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH WORLDWIDE

Over 337 million people speak English as their first language. About 350 million people speak English as a second language. In the Top Ten of world languages, English occupies the 3rd place. English is also the favoured language of science, commerce, and airline companies. Over 80% of the world's electronically saved information is in English.

The use of English is expanding in continental Europe as a direct result of globalisation. This affects commerce (greater use of English as a corporate language and in advertising), the military (a reshaping of NATO), science, education, the media, and youth culture. The use of English is also increasing in the institutions of the European Union.

The greatest argument for the adoption of English as a European lingua franca is that, within the institutions of the EU, this is already the *status quo*. The investigations surveyed above all reveal a preponderance of English as the preferred medium in the majority of communicative situations faced by the EU. While French may still have the upper hand for purposes of internal communication, English dominates in communication with member states and with third parties.

Not only in the institutions of the Union, but on other levels throughout the continent and indeed throughout the world, is '*global English*' becoming the preferred medium of communication between speakers of different languages. English is both widely spoken in its own form, as well as heavily influencing other languages through the borrowing of Anglicism. It has become synonymous with youth and pop culture, with progress and the modern lifestyle.

The implications for other European languages are unclear. Several states have legislated to stem the tide of English. Many states are acting to strengthen national languages, including some minority languages, while investing heavily in the learning of English.

There are currently eleven official languages of the European Union in number. Those languages are Danish, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and Swedish.

Language policy has traditionally been the preserve of individual states, but many EU and Council of Europe policy statements aim at setting norms for language policies, and at diversifying the languages learned.

The principle of multilingualism ensures democratic transparency and equality of the rights of citizens and Member States in access to legislation and in communications with the EU institutions. It also guarantees legal certainty: legislation that is directly applicable in the Member States must be adopted in the different languages in order to enable all those concerned by it to have equal access to it.

Enlargement, the imminent accession to membership of the EU of 10 new states, will consolidate the ongoing economic and political unification of Europe. It will also complicate the operation of EU institutions, through the addition of many new languages.

European citizens can be prepared for this multilingual society by learning more languages at school. Unfortunately, this is a slow process particularly in "countries such as Germany, France, Italy, Spain and the U.K. where many children regard language learning as an unnecessary chore." (Graddol, 1997)

Of the twelve foreign languages available to students from the age of 13 upwards, 86% of French students opted to study English notwithstanding the fact that more native speakers than any other language inside the EU speak German. On the other hand English will be of no use in the situation whereby people have to travel all over Europe in search of work - it is only useful for those non-native speakers coming to the U.K. or Ireland.

### 3. RESEARCH

According to the results of Eurobarometer Survey (February 2001):

- 93% of parents say it is important that their children learn other European languages,
- 72% of Europeans believe that knowing foreign languages is/ would be useful for them,
- 71% consider that everyone in the European Union should be able to speak one European language in addition to their mother tongue,
- 53% of Europeans say that they can speak at least one European language in addition to their mother tongue,
- 26% say that they can speak two European foreign languages.

As we wanted to know the opinion of our students we did the research. The aim of it was to investigate the importance of knowledge and usage of foreign languages, especially English, in EU.

The research was carried out on a sample of 51 students who were attending the fourth year of the Faculty of Economics and Tourism «Dr. Mijo Mirković» in Pula. The students' attitudes were collected on the basis of the questionnaire that contained two questions:

- 1) Do you think English is going to become the lingua franca of EU?
- 2) Is it important to know at least another foreign language? If yes which one?



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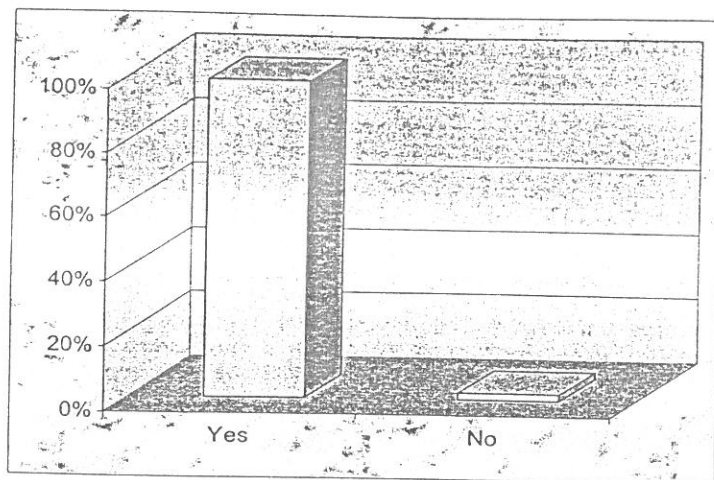
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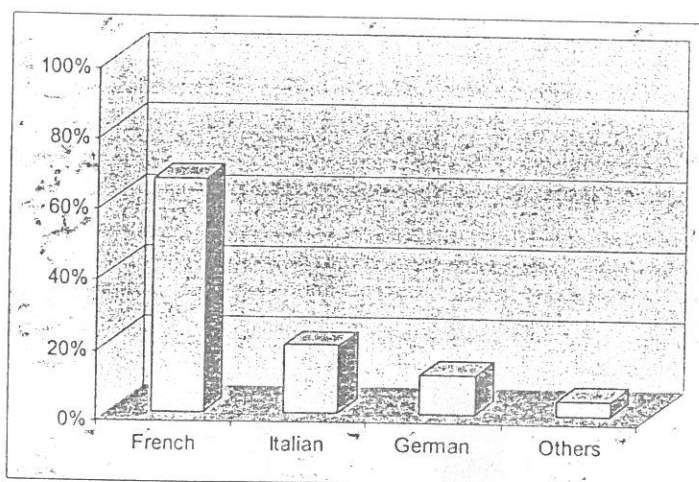
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Picture 2: English - lingua franca of EU

The results of questionnaire were expected. 98% of our students believe that English is going to become lingua franca of EU.



Picture 3: Importance of foreign language knowledge

Our students believe that the knowledge of at least one foreign language is of great importance. 66% of them think that it is important to know French, 19% Italian, 11% German and 4% other languages.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

According to the above mention we may concluded that the knowledge of foreign languages is very important. It is widely believed that English is truly the world language. Although the use of it is increasing in the institution of the European Union, they support language learning and regional and minority languages through a variety of founding programmes.

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