

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Working Documents

1981 - 1982

5 October 1981

DOCUMENT 1-560/81

Report

drawn up on behalf of the Committee on Youth, Culture, Education, Information
and Sport

on the use of European languages in air transport

Rapporteur: Mr M. PEDINI

At its sitting of 19 September 1980, the European Parliament referred to the Committee on Youth, Culture, Education, Information and Sport as the committee responsible and to the Committee on Transport for its opinion, the motion for a resolution tabled by Mr HABSBURO and others on the use of European languages in air transport (Doc. 1-412/80).

At its meeting of 22 October 1980, the Committee on Youth, Culture, Education, Information and Sport appointed Mr TURCAT rapporteur.¹

The committee considered the motion for a resolution on 22 June 1981.

At its meeting of 23 and 24 September 1981, in view of the fact that Mr Turcat had left the European Parliament, the committee instructed its Chairman to assume responsibility for the report. The report was adopted unanimously at the latter meeting.

Present: Mr Pedini, Chairman; Mr Pattison and Mr Hahn, Vice-Chairmen; Mr Brok (deputizing for Mr Schall); Mr Del Duca; Mr Estgen (deputizing for Mr Marck); Mr Papapetrou; Mr Schwencke; Mrs Viehoff and Mr Wedekind

The explanatory statement will be presented orally.

The opinion of the Transport Committee is attached.

¹ At the meeting of 23/24 September 1981, Mr Turcat was no longer a member of the Parliament.

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The Committee on Youth, Culture, Education, Information and Sport hereby submits to the European Parliament the following motion for a resolution

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

on the use of European languages in air transport

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the motion for a resolution tabled by Mr HABSBURG and others on the use of European languages in air transport (Doc. 1-412/80);
 - having regard to Annex 10 of the ICAO Convention.
 - recognising that safety is the essential factor in all transport and particularly in air transport,
 - having regard to the report by the Committee on Youth, Culture, Education, Information and Sport and the opinion of the Committee on Transport (Doc. 1-560/81)
1. Believes that European culture is not threatened by the use of English in air traffic control;
 2. Instructs its President to forward this resolution and the report by its committee to the Council and the Commission of the European Communities and, for information, to the ICAO.

Opinion of the Committee on Transport

Draftsman: Mr C. Ripa di Meana

On 5 December 1980 the Committee on Transport appointed Mr RIPA di MEANA draftsman of its opinion.

The Committee considered the draft opinion at its meeting of 20 February 1981 and adopted it unanimously the same day.

Present: Mr Seefeld, chairman; Dame Shelagh Roberts, Mr Carossino, vic e' men; Mr Gatto, draftsman, Mr Buttafuoco, Mr Moreland, Mr Moorhouse, Mr Voyatzis.

INTRODUCTION

1. In the motion for a resolution by Mr HABSBURG and others anxiety is expressed at the increasingly widespread use of 'Anglo-American language' at the expense of the other European languages in more and more sectors of economic and social life, in particular in air transport.
2. The proposers call upon the Member States to address themselves to this problem, and ask the Commission to draw up proposals for Community harmonization of the relevant legislation.

LANGUAGE USE IN AIR TRANSPORT

3. The language used in air traffic control is at present governed by approved standards and recommended practices established by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

The ICAO recommends that radio communications between pilots and air traffic controllers should be conducted in the language of the air traffic control centre, which is not necessarily the language of the country in which the centre is located. The ICAO also recommends that, pending improved radio communication arrangements, English should be the working language, and that all control stations responsible for international air traffic should be in a position to operate in English.¹

The ICAO recommendations also leave open the possibility of regional agreements being concluded to allow the use of a second language in addition to English in air traffic control.

4. In short this means that the local language is used in addition to English in certain countries.
5. With a view to preventing fatal misunderstandings between pilot and air traffic controller, the ICAO has also produced a long list of standard phrases.

The existence of such a list points clearly to an urgent need for uniformity in radio communications in civil aviation.

¹ See Annex 10 to the Convention on International Civil Aviation: International Standards and Recommended Practices for Aeronautical Telecommunications, Vol II, third edition, July 1972, para. 5.2.1.1.

6. It is patently obvious the misunderstandings in the transmission of instructions or information can have catastrophic results, witness the collision over Zagreb on 21 October 1976 and that at Tenerife airport in March 1977. The use of a foreign language was partly to blame for both these disasters.

7. This led Mr NOE', in his own-initiative report on behalf of the former Committee on Regional Policy, Regional Planning and Transport on the promotion of an appropriate air traffic control system, to point to the considerable pressure for a single language to be used in communications with aircraft. Mr NOE' also considered there to be a need for further study of the dual problem of language and terminology in air traffic control.¹

8. In a letter to the chairman of your committee, the IATA stressed the danger of misunderstandings resulting from the use of more than one language. In the IATA's view it is desirable for all air-to-ground communications in air space used by international traffic to be conducted in English.²

9. Language problems are also important in the context of cabin service. Most airlines realize the importance of this and, as far as possible, ensure that cabin staff are able to cover the language needs of passengers. However, cases still arise whereby cabin staff are not sensitive to language difficulties. The Committee therefore urges airlines and IATA to pay particular attention to improve the language facility of cabin staff.

CONCLUSIONS

10. The Committee on Transport appreciates the initiative by Mr HABSBERG and others to preserve the cultural inheritance of the European nations. It believes, however, that, for safety reasons, English should be the working language for exchanges of instructions and information between pilots and air traffic controllers in international air transport, and requests the Committee on Youth, Culture, Education, Information and Sport to incorporate this recommendation in its motion for a resolution.

¹ Doc. 49/78, para. 69 of the explanatory statement.

² Letter from the IATA to Mr SEEFELD of 31 October 1980.

ANNEX

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION (DOC 1-412/80) tabled by
Mr HABSBURG, Mr FANTON, Mrs AGNELLI, Mrs SPAAK, Mr ESTGEN,
Mr BUCHOU, Mrs CHOURAQUI, Mr CLEMENT, Mrs CRESSON, Mr DEBRE,
Mr DELORS, Mr GANDEBIEN, Mr ISRAEL, Mrs MOREAU, Mr MOTCHANE,
Mr d'ORMESSON, Mr PRUVOT, Mrs ROUDY, Mr SARRE, Mr Konrad SCHÖN,
Mr SEITLINGER and Mr SUTRA
pursuant to Rule 25 of the Rules of Procedure on the use
of European languages in air transport.

The European Parliament,

- whereas there is a growing reluctance in more and more sectors of economic and social life to use a number of European languages,
 - whereas the air transport sector is particularly affected by the increasingly widespread use of Anglo-American language in a world without frontiers in which languages are sacrificing their individuality to internationalism,
 - disturbed by the consequences of this development for the continued existence of the culture and the heritage of the European nations,
 - whereas most of the Member States are affected or will be affected by this situation,
1. considers it necessary for Europe to initiate a common policy and common action to cope with this new problem;
 2. calls upon the Member States and the Ministers meeting in political cooperation to address themselves to this problem and to consider what measures are needed to fill the legal vacuum that today affects the linguistic rights of the peoples of Europe;
 3. requests the Commission to draw up a proposal for harmonizing the relevant laws;
 4. instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission and to the Ministers meeting in political cooperation.

