

Europe is multi-lingual and communicates in English

Which language between France and Poland?

The “AfD”-party - new in German parliament and still learning parliamentary style and procedures - recently took a look at the language scene. They feel that the German language – and with it the country’s identity and reputation – is threatened by the continuous migration of foreign, especially Non-European cultures, languages and life styles, including a Non-European state religion and medieval legal system, both in the view of many experts not compatible with the constitutional German “Grundgesetz” and the German-Western way of living and working.

VARIOUS WAVES of migration since World War II have changed and are changing the historic, geographic and demographic picture of Europe. Especially the big German migration project of 2015 with large numbers of “refugees” within a short period – “it just happened and for human reasons we accept, handle and support it” - is changing the demographic pattern of Europe and Germany.

In cities like Frankfurt-Main – only half of the inhabitants are “German”, the other come from more than one hundred countries – the language question is not theoretical or ideological. Like in other large towns and “foreign” residential districts Turkish and Arabic languages dominate, are firmly established, or, better: continued and kept since the arrival in Germany. It is known that for staying you are not forced to learn and speak German. Well, perhaps from now on it will be more clearly suggested and expected.

Arriving from foreign continents and countries in Germany, with its open borders and the state’s readiness to accept “refugees”, to care for them and help them to integrate, you have the right to communicate here freely, unlike in many other countries. Your initial problem, however: In which language can you communicate successfully with your new environment, means: who will understand you, who can – and will - talk with you?

Business people, especially those in companies producing and selling internationally, and most of all others in central Europe speak and understand at least “Basic International English” (*like this memo simulates a future European situation crossing language borders by using this type of English*). But only a small percentage of migrants from the Orient, from Africa and Asia speaks English and nearly nobody German.

THE GERMAN REFUGEE PROJECT – originally based on “State Humanity” - , after other European countries refused to participate, is more and more transformed and re-declared as a German Migration Project, although – in the opinion of experts – it lacks the necessary legal basis, analysis of needs of economy and labour markets, definition of quantities, qualities and timing, organisational and operational structuring and much more.

Parallel to the German refugee & migration project there is the European Project. In this context also the language question is discussed: “What should be the future language – or the languages - of the visionary European Project beyond the present European Union (EU), in the greater European Multicultural State, currently under political and legal construction”? Despite the upcoming “Brexit” the majority of continental Europeans in a recent survey voted for “English” as European language, mostly because it is already widely established. There is also hope for new generations of better, “learning” translation computers which will reduce the daily language barriers.

Some reflect that for a functioning New State of United Europe and an efficient Central Administration one common language – like Esperanto – could be a useful instrument for leaders, especially for declarations, contracts and law documents, similar to what Roman Latin was for governing the Old Roman Empire, and at the same time it would be a symbolic step and confession for a New Europe.

Artificial languages could be developed with the help of IT and A.I., from existing and new vocabulary, adjusted and extended to a variety of future demands. Utopian? Perhaps, since “language in the traditional human context” always has needed a close connection to people’s thinking, feeling and living. On the other hand an increasing part of communication is already computerized and an integrated part of machines and robots, of many other and new systems.

More likely however, at least at present, will be the increased usage of French as one of the Official European Administration Languages – a world language and spoken in 29 countries with growing populations. France already has demanded a higher ranking and usage of French in present and future Europe.

THERE IS A TENDENCY among Non-European migrants to form, keep and extend Non-German parallel societies under the protecting umbrella of the German Welfare State (Sozialstaat), with its freedom of practising any religion and culture (there are discussions whether the respective law is misinterpreted on purpose by migrants and their supporters). In this environment the German language is not necessary. Migrants and following families feel here immediately at home, are protected from expectations to integrate – or even assimilate (“a crime” in view of the present Turkish leader) - into the surrounding “foreign” (German and Western) culture, which is disliked and disapproved by their religious and political leaders.

The AfD suggested – like former Parliament President Norbert Lammert - to make clear that the language of Germany is German. Due to the changing demographic and the diverse language situation the respective present law wording – written under former and other conditions - turned out to be no longer clear, natural and self-explanatory. A renewed wording is considered necessary, to be anchored in the constitutional German “Grundgesetz”. This is normal in other countries, i.e. in France, where the state – supported by the Académie Française – in a sensitive and “following” manner is caring for the nation’s language: it is considered and esteemed an important part of the French soul and culture. Traditionally the French state is fighting and trying to “clean” the language from all sorts of English words and terms coming in via technical and IT-channels, including social media, and influencing the language in everyday, scientific, cultural, entertainment and other scenes.

The AfD-proposal was rejected by “all other parties”, some say because it came “from the wrong side”. Fighting this new party in parliament apparently unites all other, it includes refusing their proposals and the suspected thinking behind. Putting the German language at a higher level of importance – as to blog comments - also could be misunderstood as “dictating the German language to others” what would mean discrimination of Non-Germans. As to further comments it also could bring back negative associations like “Rising again of German nationalism via upgrading the German language, thereby trying again to dominate other European nations”. Other comments refer to the decision of Germany’s political leaders to be “multicultural”, and this means “multi-lingual”. It also was mentioned that a former initiative to define and propagate a “German Leading Culture” (Deutsche Leitkultur), including raising the German language to a higher level of importance, was turned down, amongst other reasons because of lacking intellectual quality and weak arguing.

In the context of building a new Europe, and parallel to the ongoing processes of de-nationalization, the language question is worrying many people and governments, amongst other also the German opinion leaders: Should we, convinced by facts, trends, developments, voluntarily or forced,

“sacrifice” our language on the altar of an upcoming European state? Should language go avantgarde, accompany or follow real developments? Will downgrading the German language in the mix of political, cultural and economic processes help “our” people to preserve essentials of European and German culture (and language is bearing culture), to contribute to the changes and win the future? Is language what people consider a piece of hold and security when “the times – they are a changin”(Bob Dylan)? What is the benefit of what for whom?

OF COURSE the AfD-proposal was rejected by all others, too, as being “nationalistic”, “Anti-European”, and the proposal in addition was described as being unprofessional. Some Members of Parliament decided to comment not in High German but in their home dialect, i. e. in “German Platt”, a northern dialect not understood by most people outside this area and brought parliament stenographers into trouble. Germany has many and very different dialects, many of them going back to the middle ages and beyond, to the Roman occupation and historic times, and all contributed to today’s German. The “re-vitalized” parliament did not take and discuss the language proposal seriously. But the question about the future role and weight of the German language in the German culture, in the new European context and in the demographic change will stay.

In social media – among many other comments – the question was raised what “Goethe” would have said to “this political language request, generally and in view of the European project”. Goethe? According to Wikipedia: *German writer, poet, novelist, and playwright, also worked as an actor, administrator, scientist, geologist, botanist, and philosopher, influenced many 19th century writers and thinkers.* Yes, Goethe, among many activities was also appointed and active as “*Staatsminister und Geheimrat im Herzogtum Weimar*”, and in this political function he was very successful, too.

AS TO THE RAISED blog question - here are two statements of Goethe, in his preferred language, both reflecting experience of life and insight:

1. *“Wer sich den Gesetzen nicht fügen lernt,
muß die Gegend verlassen, wo sie gelten“.*
(From Goethe, Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre, 1821)

...this statement certainly would collide with today’s degree of “protected tolerance towards imported and practised Non-German cultures including law systems, especially life rules of foreign religions, unconsidered their potential conflict with the constitutional German Grundgesetz - the consequence of a human and unconditioned opening of the country and its social systems for all refugees fleeing pursuit, poverty, hunger, war, unemployment, lacking perspectives, trouble and distress”. That with uncontrolled migration also potential conflicts and new dangers are imported, has long been ignored or tolerated. The need to inform migrants about German laws and Western way of life, the necessity for migrants to speak and understand the German language now is being more and more recognized and acknowledged by Government and Migration Management.

2. *„Und wer franzet oder britet,
italienert oder teutschet,
einer will nur wie der andre,
was die Eigenliebe heischet.“*
(West-östlicher Divan, Buch des Unmuts)

...this statement in older German language and writing shows a very sober look of Goethe at the observed selfish behaviour of nations. Is today’s striving towards a fair and peaceful living-together of nations and cultures – within and beyond Europe – a naive illusion? How to deal with national egoisms in Europe, today and tomorrow? Banning national thinking would require undemocratic

ruling and would not correspond with the democratic picture of New Europe. Suppressing national egoisms by a powerful new, central state and government of “New Europe”, by punishing “Un-European – and morally inhuman - behaviour” (i. e. refusing refugees)? Will European nations by order of Brussels reduce their national feelings and self-understanding as sovereign states with own borders, self-control, own language, culture, currency? And, apart from national European languages – what languages are needed for Europeans outside Europe, for the contacts with the rest of the world, including proud “nations” like Russia, India, Korea, China, Japan, let alone the big number of relatively new African states? What are the language requirements for producing, trading, selling there? Where does forming bigger state and administration units help and where does it reduce the freedom of moving, thinking, acting? Avoiding waging wars is and stays a big benefit, but is it enough? Is “Politics before economics” and “Europe before European Nations” the new gospel?

Finishing these quotations with a self-explaining statement of Goethe’s friend Schiller:

*3. „Die Sprache ist ein Spiegel einer Nation;
wenn wir in diesen Spiegel schauen,
so kommt uns ein großes, treffliches Bild
von uns selbst daraus entgegen.
(Friedrich Schiller (1759 –1805)*

EUROPE TODAY AND EUROPE TOMORROW – together with the claim “Europe first” - is a collection of necessary and unnecessary questions. The priorities, as set by the individual nations, the quality of the answers and decisions and – often forgotten – the power of open, true and convincing communication will determine the success of the project, presently questioned by many. Who will develop and give these answers? “National politicians”, assigned by their countries, and “Independent European politicians”, forming a transnational European “Task force”?

The first group tries to pursue the European perspective and feed the process “from the national bottom”, ideally without ignoring or hurting basic national needs. The second one has increasing problems to combine and harmonize vision with reality, to get understood and supported. Both groups face the same challenge: What is the real and strong idea to bring and hold together different European nations, what are their common values and interests, what prevents them from leaving the community, and – bold idea – what brings back the escaped and escaping ones?

The European Union at present is the determined and “official” way to the visionary future project. Its paths are relatively narrow and pre-designed. A stop, an internal and external audit could help to better recognize the arisen problems and to outline the next steps. People still like “Europe”, but without undemocratic, bureaucratic measures and pressures. In the meantime, starting now, a clear, courageous look at the chaos of facts and fakes, together with true and open communication, would be the best step that could be done. By leaders and everybody.

Or, as a friend, earlier in German und European assignments, wrote: *“European elites are challenged to balance national objectives with the vision of a European superstate, which currently guides the Commission in Brussels. This is a mammoth task requiring true and open communication. The participation of all Europeans is needed to achieve solutions which are compatible with the great, historic idea of a united Europe”.*