

## **How to *translate* a burden into a competitive edge?**

### **European Commissioner in charge of Multilingualism addresses the College students at the Natolin campus**

On 6 March 2008, the Vice-Rector welcomed Mr Leonard Orban, Commissioner for Multilingualism, at the Natolin (Warsaw) campus during the study visit of the students of the EU International Relations and Diplomacy Studies programme. Commissioner Orban stressed that the College students were a fitting audience for his speech entitled “Multilingualism – Essential for the Unity in Diversity of the EU”, as they represented “a vivid proof of how multilingualism can build bridges between people from different countries and different cultures”.

Outside the College, however, the European everyday reality is rather bleak. As the Commissioner pointed out, only 2% of EU citizens live and work outside of their country of origin, an astonishing 44% are monolingual, while only a mere 28% meet the Commission’s goal of being able to communicate properly in two languages on top of their mother tongue. Faced with these serious challenges, the Commissioner displayed unyielding determination that multilingualism constitutes “an essential feature we must hold on to at all costs”, and in his view, parity between Europe’s languages remains “an absolute”. And this is so for good reasons: not only is the improvement of language skills an indispensable cornerstone of an intercultural society but also it is to be seen as providing the EU with a “competitive edge” in business. In a simple analogy, he stressed that whereas English might be sufficient for someone who knows what s/he wants to buy, a smart seller (or exporter for that matter) would need to speak the language of his clients.

In the discussion session, Mr. Orban decidedly rejected the frequent criticism of allegedly bloated translation machinery in Brussels: by bolstering democracy, transparency and legitimacy of the EU, multilingualism helps to keep “the door open between the EU institutions and citizens.”

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