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Celebrating two decades of existence this year, EXPOLINGUA Berlin has confirmed itself as a central event in the linguistic landscape of Europe. Interpreting the spirit of EXPOLINGUA, I dare say that no other name would be more appropriate for this initiative: each of our languages paints a unique picture in the living exhibition of our Europe, not closed off in a museum, but used and enriched by a vibrant and prosperous society.


We want our citizens to be able to travel easily around Europe and to be able to take up opportunities to work and study in all corners of the EU, as well as to seize opportunities with companies trading with other parts of the world. However, the awareness of the importance of speaking foreign languages is still low in the European population, and more needs to be done to allow young Europeans to grow up with languages around them. As well as providing solutions to the language needs of European citizens, EXPOLINGUA gives stakeholders an excellent opportunity for dialogue and exchange of best practices on nurturing the kind of multilingual environment that Europe needs.

Multilingualism not only preserves the cultural richness of Europe, but is also a way of ensuring that migrants are included in the new society they join. The European Commission has declared 2008 to be the European year of intercultural dialogue. Knowledge of languages and sharing in multilingualism are effective ways of spreading mutual understanding and tolerance in a continent that is more and more multicultural and multiethnic. Offering the opportunity to migrant groups to learn the language of their host country and to attach value to their own language is essential for their integration into European society.

Multilingualism doesn't only have social implications, it has a strong economic dimension too. Recent studies show that there is significant potential for small businesses in Europe to increase their total exports if they invest more in languages and develop language strategies. The Business Forum on the links between multilingualism and competitiveness held in Brussels in September emphasized that companies which do not have the necessary language skills and strategies are losing money and losing business.

To better understand the language needs of European citizens, I launched an on-line consultation on multilingualism whose results will be published in spring 2008. The information gathered, together with the lessons we have learned from other initiatives, will help us define a coherent strategy for promoting language learning in the EU.

I want to congratulate the EXPOLINGUA organizers for their successful initiative and wish all visitors and exhibitors exciting days in Berlin.



Leonard Orban