

"More than one language": for a European policy of translation

Short of disowning itself, Europe will not come together without respecting the plurality of its languages. It has two options: either it generalises the use of a makeshift "transaction dialect" as a vehicle for exchanges, at the risk of collective impoverishment, or it celebrates and underwrites linguistic diversity as a stimulus to mutual understanding and true dialogue.

The European Union, at least within its provisory borders, authorises the circulation of goods, capital and individuals. The time has come for it to facilitate the circulation of knowledge, culture and works of the imagination, as in the most fertile moments of its history. It is time that Europeans learnt to speak to one another in their own languages. This would contribute to reconciling them with the European project. And translation has an essential political role to play in the process.

A language is not simply an instrument of communication, or a service. Nor is it just a legacy, or an identity to be preserved. A language is a net cast over the world; and it exists only in its interaction with other languages. Translation constitutes an affirmation of singularity, both one's own and that of other people. We have to understand two languages in order to know that we speak at least one.

Because it represents a way of going beyond identities, and an experience of differences, translation must be at the heart of the European public space that we all have a responsibility to construct, with its civic and institutional dimensions, but also its cultural, social, political and economic components.

This is why we call for the design of a genuine European translation policy based on two principles: the mobilisation of those who are active in the different sectors of cultural life (teaching, research, interpreting, publishing, the arts and the media); and the structuring both of the Union's internal dynamics and its policies with regard to the wider world, accompanied by a concrete guarantee that languages from elsewhere will be welcomed into Europe, and that the languages of Europe will be heard across the world. It is through translation that the European project will renew its vital energy.

Notes
