

Ebner Resolution progresses amid chaotic Culture Committee meeting

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Despite hostile attempted amendments and a chaotically run Culture Committee meeting, MEP Michl Ebner's Resolution progressed towards the Plenary stage with both the programme for linguistic diversity, and an Agency to implement it, intact. But this was not without the loss of the clause which would have made language discrimination on the grounds of language or national minority part of the remit of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism.

However, the amendments put forward were not without a few surprises most notably from Marieke Sanders-Ten Holte, President of the Intergroup for Regional Minority languages, who put forward amendments against the Agency project only to withdraw them at the last minute.

The meeting itself was marred by the chaotic voting procedure, run by Committee President Rocard, who attempted to get voting on amendments done en-masse and often arbitrarily ignored votes outright. Rocard, a former French Prime Minister, left many MEPs unclear as to what they were voting for. Considering the important issues at stake with the development for regional and minority languages, some in attendance saw it as a bad day for the Culture Committee.

Besides the proceedings being a shambles, the fact that there were so many oral amendments suggests that some MEPs had not done enough preparation. It left many with the impression that some MEPs had an inadequate understanding of the complex issues facing lesser-used language development; at times preferring to use the debate for party political point-scoring or to rattle their sabres on behalf of their respective Member states.

Speaking to Eurolang, Michl Ebner reflected on the day's proceedings: 'It was a compromise. I hope that this compromise will be accepted so that we can have as large a majority as possible. This was my objective. It is not enough to have just a simple majority'(referring to the absolute majority aimed for of 314 out of the 626 members).

'I'm glad that in the end only two colleagues abstained. I was surprised by several colleagues and their behaviour'.

If successful at the Plenary stage the European Commission will take about a year to look at the proposals by which time a new European Parliament will have been elected. Mr Ebner is upbeat about the prospects for an Agency telling Eurolang: 'We will have new Member states, they are normally more open because they mostly have minorities of their own living in other countries, take the Hungarians for example. We will have a new situation. Time will work in our favour'.

Eurolang also spoke to Finnish (Swedish minority) MEP Astrid Thors who said that: 'I think that it was, from the Intergroup point of view, disappointing. We saw strong opposition against the new inclusion of cultural diversity and anti-discrimination clauses in the Constitution. I also think that the treatment of different languages in the E.U. was not according to the Council of Europe view, maybe there are more political circumstances. The question is: was it inconsistent or lack of time or lack of consultation – that I don't know.'

'I'm more concerned that this vote creates divisions within Intergroup considering the quite good co-operation we've had so far'.

Commenting on the Agency proposal, she added that: 'I would find it very useful that ... explanations could be forwarded from EBLUL explaining the pros and cons of having an agency because there can be misunderstandings shown by the resistance to this proposal'. (EL)