

This call was drafted prior to the *Etats généraux du multilinguisme*, held at La Sorbonne in Paris on 26 September 2008, and read publicly by Paolo Fabbri.

The first signatories are as follows: Adonis; Vassilis Alexakis; Etienne Balibar; Tahar Ben Jelloun; Yves Bonnefoy; Barbara Cassin; Michel Deguy; Emmanuel Demarcy-Mota; Claude Durand; Umberto Eco; Maurizio Ferraris; Ghislaine Glasson Deschaumes; Michèle Gendreau-Massaloux; Yves Hersant; François Jullien; Julia Kristeva; Eduardo Lourenço; Amin Maalouf; Robert Maggiori; Federico Mayor; Ariane Mnouchkine; Jacqueline Risset; Fernando Fernandez Savater; Juergen Trabant; Heinz Wismann.

Call for a European translation policy

Europe cannot continue to grow if it fails to respect its multiple languages; for the alternative would be to deny its very identity. It can take one of two paths: promote the general use of a “business dialect” to further exchange, with the risk of a collective loss; or welcome linguistic diversity and safeguard it so as to achieve improved mutual understanding and genuine dialogue.

The European Union, at least within its provisional borders, has ensured the movement of goods, capital and people. It is time for Europe to take on the duty of circulating knowledge, works and imaginary worlds, thereby reviving the flourishing times of historical Europe. It is time for Europeans to learn to talk to one another in their different languages. Showcasing the languages of Europe will help reconcile citizens with Europe. Translation plays a vital political role.

For a language is not solely an instrument for communication or a service; nor is it simply heritage or an identity to be preserved. Each language is a different net thrown across the world, it exists solely in its interaction with others. In translating a language, we accentuate its uniqueness and that of the other one: we must understand at least two languages to realise that we speak one.

Since a language is about transcending identities and experiencing differences, translation must be at the core of a European public area that we must all take responsibility in building, in its citizen-based and institutional dimensions, and in its cultural, social, political and economic components.

This is why we call for the implementation of a genuine European translation policy, which will have two cornerstones: mobilising all actors and sectors in cultural life (teaching, research, interpreting, publishing, arts, media); giving structure to the European Union’s internal approaches as well as its external policies, by ensuring in concrete terms the inclusion of other languages in Europe and the knowledge of Europe’s languages elsewhere in the world.

In translation, the European project will draw on renewed vigour.