



31.3.2017

NOTICE TO MEMBERS

Subject: Petition 1468/2013 by Cristian Secară (Romanian) on projected legislation for the protection of the cultural and linguistic heritage of Member States from developments in the field of modern electronic systems

1. Summary of petition

The petitioner takes the view that electronic text manipulation, including communication, compression, storage, filing, insertion or reproduction, should be possible in any of the EU languages without altering the linguistic nature thereof. He maintains, for example, that cultural and linguistic particularities are being discouraged by mobile devices and their applications currently of the market, pointing out that, while an SMS may contain 160 characters, this may be reduced to 70 if the diacritics distinguishing certain languages (such as Czech, Hungarian or Romanian) are used.

2. Admissibility

Declared admissible on 8 May 2014. Information requested from Commission under Rule 216(6).

3. Commission reply, received on 30 July 2014

The petitioner proposes and requests EU legislation for the protection of the cultural and linguistic heritage of Member States in the field of modern electronic systems.

The EU Regulatory Framework on electronic communication aims at a competitive telecom single market and as such it does not cover the requirements relating to the electronic text processing in the context of linguistic identity. The EU legislator mandated the European Commission in article 17 of the Framework directive 2002/21/EC¹ to draw up a list of standards to serve as a basis for encouraging the harmonised provision of electronic

¹ As amended by Directive 2009/140/EC (Better Regulation Directive).

communication networks, services and associated facilities. However, the use of linguistic features in electronic communications is not covered by the scope of these standards.

In the ICT world we note that, following market demand, device, software and application producers do tend to comply with linguistic requirements of end-users. Indeed, in the phasing-in period of a technological solution or platform, such requirements are not always met, however the currently available text processing solutions do usually respect the cultural and linguistic identity of the end-user. The provision of linguistic features is achieved, not by virtue of regulation, but mostly by standardisation. In the area of communication, technology standardisation has a global scope and is largely driven by industry, rather than by legislative intervention.

Furthermore, it should be pointed out that the new communication platforms and applications have increasingly developed end-user friendly solutions, allowing for the use of any linguistic specificity. For instance instant messaging that is becoming the preferred mode of messaging alongside SMS, especially amongst youth, has fewer limitations with regard to linguistic features of all EU languages.

The META-NET study is quoted in the petition. The META-NET study illustrated that there are differences in how well different EU languages are served by automated language technology solutions (especially machine translation). The Commission is addressing the findings of this study in two funding programmes: firstly, the Horizon 2020 work programme 2014-2015 foresees 15 MEUR funding for the topic ICT17 "Cracking the language barrier" (<http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/opportunities/h2020/topics/88-ict-17-2014.html>), supporting research and innovation projects to progressively put all EU languages to an equal standing when it comes to coverage and quality of automated translation. Secondly, the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) programme (<http://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/connecting-europe-facility>) foresees 4 MEUR funding in 2014 for an action on "Automated Translation" to address the language barriers in pan-European digital service infrastructures (DSIs) for public services. Moreover, standardization issues relating to web multilingualism and localization have been addressed in the project LT-WEB which resulted in standards adopted in the W3C standardization framework (<http://www.w3.org/International/multilingualweb/lt/>).

Conclusion

In light of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and the EU legislative framework on electronic communications, the Commission proposes to reject this petition to legislate for the protection of the cultural and linguistic heritage of Member States in the field of modern electronic systems.

4. REV I Commission reply, received on 31 March 2017

The Commission has been addressing issues listed among the findings of the META-NET study referred to in the original petition in two funding programmes. The Horizon 2020 work programme 2014-2015 included 15 EUR million funding for the topic ICT17 "Cracking the language barrier" (http://cordis.europa.eu/programme/rcn/664802_en.html) to support research and innovation projects aiming at improving coverage and quality of automated translation solutions for EU official languages. The Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) (<http://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/connecting-europe-facility>) has provided 21.5 EUR

million funding in its first three work programmes 2014-2016 for an action on "Automated Translation" to address language barriers in pan-European digital service infrastructures (DSIs) for public services

(<https://ec.europa.eu/cefdigital/wiki/display/CEFDIGITAL/eTranslation>).

New communication platforms and applications are developing increasingly end-user friendly solutions, allowing the use of any linguistic specificity and ending special-character and size limitations. For instance, various instant messaging solutions and social media that have become the preferred mode of messaging over SMS, have fewer limitations with regard to linguistic features of all EU languages.

Moreover, standardization issues relating to web multilingualism and localization have been addressed in the project LT-WEB with the resulting standards adopted in the W3C standardization framework in 2014 (<http://www.w3.org/International/multilingualweb/lt/>).

On 10 January 2017, the European Parliament hosted the STOA event "Language equality in the digital age", where one of the main topics covered was the economic impact of language barriers in Europe and the social implications of the different level of technological support for European languages (<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/stoa/cms/home/workshops/language>).

However, no new requirements have been introduced to the EU regulatory framework on electronic communications or as part of other EU legislative initiatives to cover electronic text processing in the context of linguistic identity or the preservation of linguistic heritage since the Commission's reply to the petition on 30 July 2014.

Conclusion

The issue raised by the petitioner has been considered in various actions. However, the Commission currently does not envisage a legislative initiative for the protection of the cultural and linguistic heritage of Member States in the field of modern electronic communication systems.