[MT] Use of Maltese Language in Broadcast Media

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Klaus J. Schmitz
Consultant, Cologne

On 16 April, the Advisory Committee on Quality and Ethics in Broadcasting of the Malta Broadcasting Authority published a document entitled: "Consultative Document on the Use of the Maltese Language in the Broadcasting Media". Concerned by the challenge posed by globalisation to a language community as small as the Maltese one, this document is intended to prepare the ground for a wider debate in Malta on the use of language in broadcasting.

The document states that previously, "the Maltese language in general was faced by fewer challenges and threats than today as is the case with the haphazard importation of foreign words and use of English words together with Maltese words in the same sentence". The irony of this, according to the Broadcasting Authority, is that "the more the threat to the Maltese language has grown, the less broadcasting remained a means for its protection and promotion". In its analysis of the reasons, the Authority cites the growing number of persons taking part in broadcasting, while pointing out that it does not wish to attack pluralism. Instead, it appeals to those carrying out broadcasting functions to assume the responsibility which this role brings along. There are plans to consult with other competent bodies to establish well-defined criteria in order to safeguard the Maltese language in the broadcasting sector.

The document contains a list of problems which are considered to be causes for concern. In addition to its criticism of the incorrect use of the Maltese language, the document notes, inter alia, the "bad use of idioms and literal translation of foreign idioms", the "mixture of Maltese and English (or words originating from other languages) in the same sentence" and the "literal translation of foreign sentences, structures and reports". Anyone wishing to make comments or proposals on the subject is invited to write to the Chief Executive of the Broadcasting Authority by 31 May 2001.

The Consultative Document is a further contribution to the language debate in Malta, a subject closely connected with the country's colonial past and struggle for independence. Malta's population has long been divided over the question of which language should prevail. The current population of Malta stands at around 380,000. More than twice that number of Maltese live abroad, mainly in Canada and Australia. Maltese communities abroad have preserved Maltese as their common language.

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Section 5 of the Constitution states that the Maltese language is the National language of Malta. However, Maltese and English are the official languages for use by the Administration. Maltese is the language of the courts.

Since its independence and the subsequent withdrawal of the British army, formerly the country's main employer, Malta has undertaken significant efforts to attract tourism and foreign investment. The two decades that followed independence have also seen a strong increase in the use of Maltese. Many feel that this has been to the detriment of English. Amid fears that Maltese citizens would be facing more obstacles in their careers at home and abroad, much of the general language debate has focused on the perceived deterioration of English in Malta. The process the Broadcasting Authority wishes to set in motion may also help to add a new dimension to the general language debate.

Dokument Konsultattiv Dwar L-Ilsien Malti Fix-Xandir, 16 April 2001

http://www.ba-malta.org/pressreleases/downloads/lsien%20malti.rtf

Consultative Document on the Use of the Maltese Language in the Broadcasting Media, 16 April 2001

http://www.ba-malta.org/pressreleases/2001/m_pr2001.htm

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