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Press release | 19.06.2018

Bridging the digital language divide

Press release from EFA MEP Jill Evans (Plaid Cymru)

Greens/EFA MEP **Jill Evans** (Plaid Cymru) hopes her new report *'Language Equality in the Digital Age'* will make an important contribution to bridging the digital language divide.

This could lead to Siri speaking Welsh, or Alexa speaking Lithuanian, whilst making it easier for sign language users to have full access to new digital technology.

The report was approved today with broad cross-party support in the European Parliament's Culture Committee.

The report notes that whilst so much of our everyday activity now takes place online, in reality a linguistic digital divide exists. This means that speakers of smaller and lesser used languages, including sign language, face significant challenges compared to users of larger or more dominant languages.

The EU's 500 million citizens share around 80 different languages, but online some languages dominate, whilst others are virtually excluded.

Help may be at hand however with the use of new technologies which can adapt to meet the needs of a multilingual online space. The report calls on the European Commission to take action to support the development of digital products that work across a broad variety of languages.

The rapporteur, Greens/EFA MEP **Jill Evans** (Plaid Cymru) commented:

"Whilst many minority or smaller languages are thriving as community languages, it is often a different story online, where English often dominates.

"This is not only a problem for minority languages. Many EU languages are majority languages in the real world but have become minority languages in the digital world.

"The creative use of new digital technologies will help us bridge the digital language divide. This will mean better access for the significant number of Europeans who speak languages which are often not supported by platforms such as Siri or Alexa, for example.

"I'm pleased that we've achieved broad cross-party support for this report.

"It's now time for the European Commission to bring forward a range of measures to help bridge the digital language divide – including allocating the area of 'multilingualism and language technology' to the portfolio of a Commissioner, a key suggestion in this report.

"The technology already exists, we now need to see the political will to achieve real change."

The report notes that *Language technologies are found behind many everyday digital products, since most of them use language to some extent. Mobile communications, social media, intelligent assistants, and speech-based interfaces are transforming the way citizens, companies and public administrations interact in the digital world.*

To improve language equality in Europe through using new technologies, the report calls for:

(1) improving the institutional frameworks for language technology policies,

(2) creating new research policies to increase the use of language technology in Europe,

(3) using education policies in order to secure the future of language equality in the digital age,

(4) increasing the support for both private companies and public bodies to make better use of language technologies.

The report was adopted by the European Parliament's Culture and Education Committee with 22 votes in favour, 0 against and 4 abstentions.

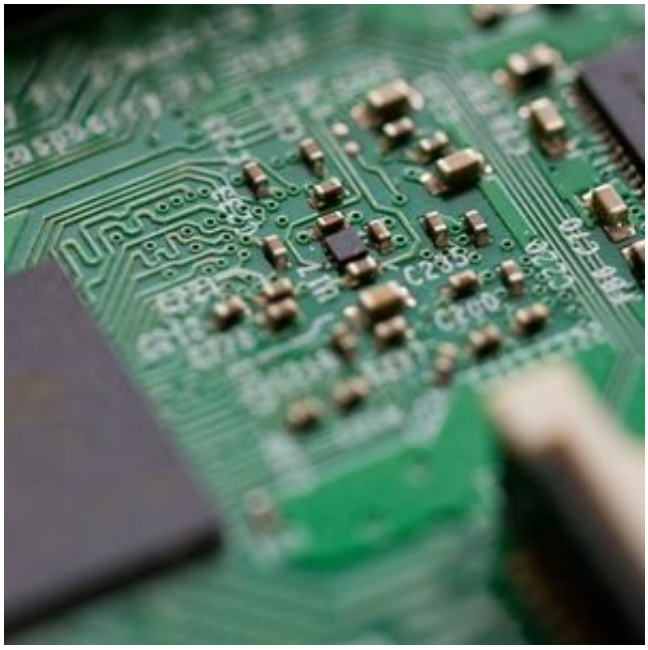
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The draft report can be found here: Jill Evans' draft report on 'Language equality in the digital age'.

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