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Local language healthcare threatened by EU rules

EFA Press release from Mark Demesmaeker and Inaki Irazabalbeitia

MEPs from the European Free Alliance Group in the European Parliament have expressed concerns that new EU rules on recognition of qualifications could have unforeseen consequences for speakers of languages in bilingual areas such as Brussels and the Basque country.

Whilst supporting moves to make it easier for people to work in other EU countries, the new arrangements for recognition of professional qualifications only deal with official EU languages, and then only require a knowledge of one of a country's official languages.

This could be particularly problematic for Dutch speakers in bilingual Brussels or for Basque speakers in the Basque Country. And there are concerns that the ill-effects could be particularly felt in the health sector.

MEPs voted on the new rules for the mutual recognition of professional qualifications in Strasbourg on Wednesday where they were approved by a large margin. A separate vote on deleting language requirements was not carried.

N-VA MEP **Mark Demesmaeker** (Flanders) said:

"We absolutely support the principle of free movement of people. My concern with these rules is the potentially unforeseen consequences when it comes to knowledge of the local language when working abroad.

"This could be a real problem in somewhere like bilingual Brussels where a doctor would only be required to speak one of the country's official languages. There would be no obligation to speak Dutch in order to work in a Brussels hospital, treating patients who may be Dutch speakers. I know from personal experience how difficult it can be for people to be treated by health workers who don't speak their language. That just doesn't make sense and must be changed."

Basque MEP **Inaki Irazabalbeitia** (Aralar) welcomed the principle of the proposal but criticised the effect on non-official languages:

"These rules only require knowledge of one of the official state languages where a profession is to be carried

out for that person's qualifications to be recognised.

"So it wouldn't require a knowledge of Basque to work as a doctor in the Basque Country, for example. A doctor could practice in the Basque Country, Catalonia, or Corsica, for example, without having any knowledge of the local language. That could lead to real communication problems with patients. This situation is simply not in line with the EU's stated principle of respect for linguistic diversity."

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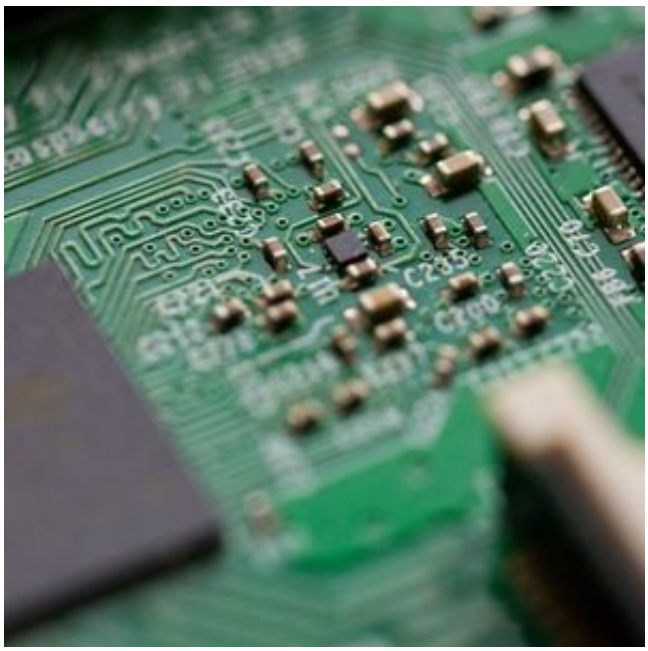


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