

# Public language policies: between institutional and substantive policies

Peter Knoepfel

Anyone in Switzerland who follows Federal Assembly debates, visits the Confederation's website, wishes to consult a piece of legislation or a specific Federal Council report in his or her native language, or has relations with a specific federal unit as a citizen or a professional will notice that plurilingualism is generally well established in this country. The first evaluation report of the Federal Delegate for Plurilingualism dated March 2015 confirms this observation. It seems this situation is undergoing consolidation based on a public policy analysis that takes a critical look at the institutional language policies followed essentially by language services and, more recently, in execution of the measures set out in the strategic objectives in connection with the promotion of plurilingualism, which are decided upon by the Federal Council every four years and are implemented mainly by the federal departments. Although in purely quantitative terms the targets set for the Federal Administration's linguistic representativeness are reached by the departments in different ways, there are still doubts at present concerning the language skills of the employees, and particularly managers, of the Federal Administration in qualitative terms.

However, a look at the substantive policies that have (marginal or crucial) repercussions for national linguistic cohesion reveals a much more worrying situation. This is demonstrated by means of a (rough) analysis of the cantons' language policies with regard to the teaching of a second national language and a first foreign language (English) during compulsory education, where it can be seen that there is growing opposition to following the applicable federal legislation (LangA). Will the Confederation find itself obliged this year to intervene in this area over which the cantons once had complete authority?

Contact :  
Peter Knoepfel  
Institut de hautes études en administration publique  
Quartier UNIL Mouline, Bâtiment IDHEAP  
CH - 1015 Lausanne  
+41 21 692 68 40  
peter.knoepfel@unil.ch



## Peter Knoepfel

Doctor of Law, honorary professor at the Faculty of Law, Criminal Science and Public Administration of the University of Lausanne, honorary professor of law at the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, previously full professor of public policy analysis and sustainable development at the Swiss Graduate School of Public Administration (IDHEAP, 1982-2014) and president of the IDHEAP (1994-2002). Peter Knoepfel is an international luminary in the area of environmental policy analysis and has been leading research projects financed by Swiss, German and European authorities for over 30 years. He is a member of many scientific committees and still lectures as a visiting professor both in Switzerland and abroad. He has written and edited a large number of academic books (70), articles and contributions to collective works (270) on environmental policies, sustainable development and natural resources management.

His main publications include the textbook *Analyse et pilotage des politiques publiques* (2006, with C. Larrue and F. Varone, Ruediger Verlag), translated into several languages, the book *Analyse des politiques suisses de l'environnement* (2010, with S. Nahrath, J. Savary, F. Varone and J. Dupuis, Ruediger Verlag) and, as editor, *Manuel de la politique suisse* (latest edition in 2014, NZZ Verlag), *Manuel d'administration publique suisse* (2013, NZZ Verlag) and the book *Environmental policy analysis. Learning from the past for the future* (2007, Springer).