



### Press Release

## **“Subsidiarity is a word” for Google, or is it?**

*Referred to more than 30 times in the Lisbon Treaty, “subsidiarity” has been included in the new Google Dictionary but is still “not a word” in Gmail...or in Microsoft Word*

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The Assembly of European Regions (AER), the largest organisation of regional authorities in wider Europe, has welcomed [Google Dictionary's](#) recognition of “subsidiarity”, a word mentioned more than 30 times in the European Union’s Lisbon Treaty.

Launched last week, Google’s online dictionary provides several definitions of the word, most of them taken from other sites such as [Wikipedia](#), and offers translations of the word in several languages. Subsidiarity is “the principle that decisions should be taken as closely as possible to the citizen”.

*“This is welcome news, but it’s not enough,” says **Richard Medic**, AER’s spokesman and leader of [“Subsidiarity is a word”](#), a movement demanding recognition of the word in dictionaries and spell-check applications worldwide. “For a start, some of the definitions Google’s English dictionary has collected are simply wrong, and that adds to the confusion propagated by other shoddy online dictionaries”. The popular website [Dictionary.com](#), for example, defines subsidiarity simply as “of secondary importance”.*

Google’s [“Gmail”](#) service, says AER’s “Subsidiarity Man”, presents a second problem. Typing the word “subsidiarity” in Gmail attracts a red correction line, suggesting that the word has been misspelt or does not exist.

*“How can Google’s Gmail not recognise a word that its dictionary and translation sites do? Spell-check applications have a huge influence on the way we use language. So when people type “subsidiarity” in Gmail and are confronted with a red correction line, one of two things usually happen: they either accept the suggested alternative (in this case, ‘subsidiarily’ or ‘subsidiary’) or avoid using the word altogether. That does not bode well for citizens’ understanding of such a core European value.”*

The linguistic paradoxes within Google’s online services reflect a similar phenomenon in the Word application of its corporate competitor, Microsoft. While the French and German versions of MS Word do recognise “subsidiarity”, the Italian and English versions still do not. And yet the red correction line in the English version is contradicted by the MS Word Thesaurus application, which does list the word.

*“All this reflects the utter confusion among ordinary Europeans when it comes to the ‘s-word’. If we’re going to take the Lisbon Treaty seriously then we have to take the principle of subsidiarity seriously. Securing recognition of the word and consistency of its definition across all dictionaries, spell-checkers and languages is the only way that citizens can start to recognise and*

*understand the word – and citizens’ buy-in is the first step to properly implementing the subsidiarity provisions of the Lisbon Treaty.”*

**Notes:**

Launched in May 2008, [AER’s “Subsidiarity is a word” movement](#) is demanding recognition of the word in dictionaries, spell-check applications and languages worldwide. Dozens of dictionaries have recognised the word in response to AER’s open letters of demand, while the movement continues to gather “subsidiarity supporters” via [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and the [YouTube](#) publicity stunts of the movement’s leader, “Subsidiarity Man”.

*The **Assembly of European Regions (AER)** is the largest independent network of regions in wider Europe. Bringing together more than 270 regions from 33 countries and 16 interregional organisations, AER is the political voice of its members and a forum for interregional co-operation.*

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