

**PROMOTING LANGUAGE LEARNING AND LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY  
CONSULTATION**

**INITIATED BY THE COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES**

**RESPONSE BY THE  
CONSEIL EUROPEEN POUR LES LANGUES / EUROPEAN LANGUAGE COUNCIL**

***Introductory remarks***

The Conseil Européen pour les Langues / European Language Council welcomes the initiative taken by the Commission to invite all stakeholders to give their views on how language learning and linguistic diversity can be promoted both at European and at Member State level. As a European association linking universities and associations specialising in languages, it will, in its response, emphasise the role that higher education can and should play in pursuit of the aims of the Consultation.

Language teaching – like education and training in general – is organised at institutional, local, regional or national level; however, it is to prepare learners for life and work in a supranational European Union. Language teaching can only fulfil this function if all those involved – parents, learners, teachers, institutions and authorities – come to appreciate the importance of European integration in general and of European linguistic and cultural diversity in particular. The sad truth is that by and large European integration and the ideas and values attached to it have failed to take root in the hearts and minds of Europeans. We have not yet succeeded in putting Europe through from top to bottom, as it were. Even people in high-ranking positions often fail to appreciate the difference between international co-operation and communication on the one hand and co-operation and communication in an increasingly integrated Europe on the other. One sometimes gains the impression that the Member States collectively preach multilingualism, but individually neither make an effort to sell multilingualism at home, nor take effective and appropriate action in their fields of responsibility.

Language teaching cannot be considered in isolation. We shall not be able to achieve a breakthrough in language teaching and learning on a broad front unless the European dimension is awarded more prominence in education in general. All teacher education has to have a European slant. All teacher trainees should, for example, be encouraged to learn a Community language as part of their studies.

Looking at the Union as a whole, it has to be admitted that education, particularly school education, is largely underresourced. However, even in those Member States and regions where adequate funding is available, teacher education, particularly language teacher education, has often remained traditional - with the main emphasis being placed on studies in the subject area – and has failed to take note of changing professional needs. And even in Member States where innovative policies and practices have been adopted they have not so much been linked to the creation of a multilingual ethos, but rather to the development of a high level of proficiency in one language only, namely English.

Whatever measures are now being considered, they will only help us succeed in achieving the breakthrough envisaged by the European Council in Barcelona if some of the more fundamental issues mentioned above are addressed effectively. In particular, all stakeholders have to come to appreciate that European integration and linguistic and cultural diversity in Europe are directly relevant to them themselves.

## The Commission's Questions

- (a) *In what concrete ways should the European Commission help Member States to ensure that all citizens are able to communicate in a least two languages in addition to their mother tongue(s) and meet the objective set by the Barcelona Council of teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age? How should provisions at European level be adapted? How could best use be made of existing instruments?*

### 1. Development of a multilingual ethos

There is more than anecdotal evidence that the European Year of Languages 2001 to quite some extent succeeded in raising awareness of the importance of individual and societal multilingualism in Europe. What it did not and could not achieve was general re-orientation among all the stakeholders.

#### Recommendation:

The European Commission should provide targeted support for networks and associations that are known to be able to influence public opinion in the Member States. In co-operation with the Member States, it should – as part of the Action Plan – appoint national language promoters to advise public authorities and to address the public at large with a view to achieving a high level of acceptance for the promotion of multilingualism and linguistic and cultural diversity.

### 2. Dissemination of pertinent information, targeted research

The European Commission has, over the past ten to fifteen years, gathered a host of invaluable knowledge and information about effective language teaching, of which stakeholders in the Member States are largely unaware. In addition, innovative and successful practices have been adopted in various parts of Europe, which are unknown outside their immediate environments.

#### Recommendation:

The Commission should create, or support the creation of, an electronic platform – a Languages Portal - for the dissemination of pertinent information and practices. In particular, the Commission should provide – in a user-friendly format - information about conditions that have to be met if early language teaching, multilingual education, the use of new technologies etc. are to be successfully implemented, and it should underpin such information with examples of innovative best practice. In addition, the Commission should support targeted research, notably action research, designed to ensure and facilitate the successful implementation of innovative teaching/learning methods.

### 3. The development of multilingual literacy

A number of educationists have recently argued that early foreign language teaching does not make sense as a large number of children at that age still have considerable difficulty in mastering their mother tongue or the official language of the country/region they live in. While there is no denying that the presence in the classroom of a high percentage of children whose mother tongue is not identical with the language of instruction – as is the case in many parts of the Union - can have negative consequences as regards the development of literacy in general, this cannot mean that we should abandon the concept of early foreign language teaching altogether. It can only mean that major efforts have to be made in order to ensure that

immigrant children acquire an appropriate level of proficiency in the language of instruction. In a multilingual Union, literacy can ultimately only mean multilingual literacy. What is important is language education in general.

Recommendation:

The Commission should help disseminate examples of innovative best practice as well as support action research designed to demonstrate that rather than hinder the development of literacy in the mother tongue/language of instruction, the early teaching/learning of a foreign language is likely to enhance competence in the mother tongue/language of instruction. Here again, special emphasis should be placed on conditions that have to be met if the full benefits of early language teaching are to be reaped.

4. Languages as a transversal issue in all EU programmes and projects

As a result of the Lisbon and Barcelona Councils, languages have become a transversal issue pervading the whole of education and training.

Recommendation:

In addition to the LINGUA action line, all programmes in education and training should have one or more than one languages strand. Moreover, all organisations seeking Community support for mobility schemes and co-operation projects should be requested to give an account of their language policies and practices and how the measure(s) for which Community support is sought is/are designed to promote language learning and linguistic diversity.

5. Policy-oriented research

The Lisbon and Barcelona Council Conclusions stress the importance of multilingual competence for life and work in the European knowledge society. Foreign languages are counted among the 'new basic skills'. It is doubtful, however, that this view is widely shared by employers, to mention just one important group of stakeholders. On the contrary, recent surveys conducted among employers and graduates have revealed that they rate the knowledge of a second language (!) and intercultural competence rather low as regards higher education graduate profiles. There is reason to believe that many employers are unaware of current trends and future developments on the European labour market (cf. increased mobility between jobs and geographically).

Recommendation:

The Commission should, as part of its 6<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme, seek to initiate European research projects designed to demonstrate the relevance of multilingual and cross-cultural competences and skills to individual careers, to economic success and to society as a whole.<sup>1</sup>

6. Consultation between higher education institutions and the socio-economic environment

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<sup>1</sup> For further proposals regarding research designed to promote individual multilingualism in Europe, see the summary of the CEL/ELC workshop conducted in Brussels on 1 February 2003 under the theme "Quelles recherches pour la promotion du plurilinguisme en Europe" prepared by Anne-Claude Berthoud of the Université de Lausanne, to be published in CEL/ELC Information Bulletin 9 later this year. An advance copy of the summary has been made available to the Commission at the request of the Language Policy Unit.

It was noted above that employers often have only vague ideas of current and future linguistic needs; similarly, universities often fail to properly understand their responsibility for preparing students for the European labour market open to the world.

Recommendation:

The Commission should support projects designed to promote co-operation between higher education institutions and stakeholders from the socio-economic environment with a view to developing process recommendations designed to ensure regular updating of language provision in higher education institutions.

- (b) *What scope is there at European level for practical steps to increase the range of languages taught, in order to better represent the linguistic diversity of the Union?*

1. Development of institutional language policies

It is an argument often heard from authorities that the range of languages taught cannot be increased because of a number of insurmountable constraints, such as shortage of teachers, lack of a critical mass of learners etc. At the same time, there are examples of how imaginative head teachers have overcome these difficulties and introduced a wider range of languages.

Recommendation:

The Commission should support European networks of schools, training institutions or universities whose members seek to develop and implement comprehensive language education policies designed to increase the range of languages taught inside and outside the curriculum.

2. Support for language teaching to prepare for and support mobility

One of the declared aims of the Union's mobility programmes is to bring about more balanced mobility flows between majority and minority language states. Whilst considerable progress has been achieved in this respect in the 'old' EU, mobility between the 'old' EU and the candidate countries in CEE is still a fairly one-sided affair.

Recommendation:

The Union should provide increased targeted support for the teaching of the languages of the candidate countries to mobile students in higher education both in the countries themselves and in the 'old' EU.

3. Widening the eligibility to LINGUA Assistantships

At present, eligibility to Lingua Assistantships is limited to future teachers of foreign languages. While there may be perfectly good reasons for this, there is more than anecdotal evidence to suggest that future non-language teacher trainees and even students not intending to become teachers can provide excellent service to the schools they are assigned to.

Recommendation:

Lingua Assistantships should be opened to future teachers of subjects other than languages and to university students in general with a view to extending the range of languages available in individual schools - including provision outside the curriculum. Particular consideration should be given to encouraging students to go to countries or regions whose languages are

related to their own language, so that they can demonstrate to learners that they already possess some 'knowledge' of a foreign language - knowledge which can be easily expanded.

- (c) *Section III notes that language teaching is crucial to the success of any endeavour to promote languages. In what further ways could the European Commission help Member States to improve the quality and quantity of teacher training and monitor the effectiveness of language teachers?*

1. Facilitating employment in other Member States

A number of Member States suffer from an acute shortage of school teachers in general and language teachers in particular. It seems unlikely that this can be remedied by the Member States in question themselves – at least not in the short run. Because of this, enabling instruments should be created designed to facilitate the employment of language teachers in other Member States.

Recommendation:

The Commission should suggest measures to the Member States designed to make it easier for language teachers to seek and obtain employment in other Member States.

2. Facilitating the recruitment of people from non-educational backgrounds

As the Commission has pointed out more than once, in future there will be more mobility – both between jobs and geographically. It stands to reason that this should also hold true for the teaching profession. Whilst there is mounting evidence of teachers leaving the profession in frustration after a few years, there is far too little effort to enable people from other backgrounds to join the teaching profession.

Recommendation:

The Commission should initiate a pilot project designed to collect information about and to assess training programmes for people desirous to join the language teaching profession after having completed another higher education programme and after having gained experience in another type of employment. The pilot project should lead to recommendations for the design of such programmes to be adapted and implemented across the Union.

3. The profile of a European language teacher

In many countries, language teachers have a low status. In addition, language teacher trainees are frequently not equipped with the necessary professional skills and competences.

Recommendation:

The Commission, in co-operation with the Member States, should encourage the development, at European level, of a professional profile or professional profiles of a European language teacher, including recommendations for the core content of teacher education programmes and for in-service training. In order to enhance the status of language teachers, the status of a European language teacher should be created. Consideration should also be given to the question as to whether it might be possible to create a scheme for the personal accreditation of a 'European language teacher'. In addition, it would be worth considering a project for the development and trialling of a portfolio for the European language teacher. (For further details,

see the study prepared by Professor Mike Kelly and his team at Southampton University, *The Training of Teachers of a Foreign Language*, August 2002.)

4. The creation of a European support network for language teachers

While in some Member States there are excellent national and regional resource centres, in other Member States language teachers are left to struggle on their own.

Recommendation:

The European Commission should promote the creation of a European support network for language teachers designed to provide information and advice on specific methodologies and approaches as well as guidance in regard to continuing teacher education.

5. Monitoring the effectiveness of language teachers and teaching

In general, school teachers who have obtained the required formal teaching qualifications are left to their own devices. In other sectors of education, even paper qualifications are often not required. This leaves a big question mark over the quality of the teaching provided.

Recommendation:

The Commission should encourage the development of models for providing guidance to new teachers and for monitoring the performance of language teachers in general.<sup>2</sup>

- (d) *Greater assessment of language skills is a key priority. In what ways should the European Commission help Member States to develop a transparent system of validating or certifying language skills?*

1. Development of a complementary European language testing system

Whilst there is wide-ranging agreement that the skill-specific proficiency scales of the Common European Framework of Reference form a suitable basis for language assessment, the implementation of the scales in examinations offered at institutional, regional or national level is a different matter altogether. At the same time, it should be clear that greater transparency and comparability of certification would be highly desirable both at national and at European level – and this for all sectors of education.

There seems to be growing scepticism about the validity of certificates issued by schools and higher education institutions – a trend that is increasingly being exploited by commercial providers, who claim that their certificates have been calibrated against the CEF proficiency scales.

In addition, at least one Member State seems to have taken the initiative, propagating the development of an item bank that could be used by any Member State wishing to do so.

Whilst it should be clear that it would be foolhardy to try to replace certification in place in the various Member States with a uniform European certification system, it would be useful to offer the Member States an instrument that could be used by institutions and authorities issuing certificates alongside and in combination with their own exams, thereby giving greater transparency, validity and comparability to the certificates; in addition, this kind of instrument would enable language teachers and other people involved to gain a better understanding of the CEF proficiency scales.

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<sup>2</sup> First ideas for this can be obtained for the study prepared by Professor Mike Kelly and his team at Southampton University and from the second Thematic Network Project in the Area of Languages (TNP2).

Recommendation:

The European Commission should support the development of a language testing instrument designed to perform the functions indicated above.<sup>3</sup> It would be particularly useful to have an instrument designed to measure proficiency at the end of compulsory education.

- (e) *A common thread throughout this document is the importance of linguistic diversity for the European Union. In what ways could the Union best integrate support for 'regional', 'minority', 'migrant' and sign languages into its transnational cooperation programmes in the fields of education, training and culture?*

1. Literacy in immigrant languages

While there is every reason to take measures to ensure the survival, development and status of regional and minority languages, it should be clear that at European level priorities may have to set slightly differently. Here, we are currently faced with the problem that the impending increase of official EU languages has led to increasing demands for the adoption of one Community language, i.e. English.

There is, however, a problem that almost all Member States are currently faced with: how to ensure that migrant children acquire full literacy in their mother tongue while at the same time also acquiring full literacy in the official language of the region or country in which they reside.

Recommendation:

The Commission should launch a pilot project designed to describe and analyse the state of affairs regarding the above problem across the Union, with a view to developing recommendations and mapping out scenarios - underpinned by examples of best practice - that could help Member States overcome the difficulties recognised.

- (f) *In what ways could the European Commission help Member States to create a more 'language-friendly' environment of the kind described in section IV?*

1. The importance of television

In this day and age, the media, particularly television, have an enormous influence on the way people feel and think. In many Member States, foreign-language films etc. broadcast on TV are dubbed, and TV channels from other Member States are hardly available in any of the Member States although modern technology would make this possible.

Recommendation:

The Commission should use its influence to create conditions which would allow the reception of TV channels from all the Members States in every single Member State. This would stimulate the curiosity of people; it would provide a vivid picture of the Union's linguistic and cultural diversity, and it would enable learners of a particular Community language to have daily contact with that language.

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<sup>3</sup>The CEL/ELC, which was instrumental in the launch of the DIALANG Project, feels reluctant to recommend that the System, which is nearing its completion, be further developed to serve this purpose. However, in view of the considerable amount of Community funds, time and effort invested in the System and of the fact that it is the only instrument available that offers comparable tests for as many as 14 European languages, it would be foolhardy to ignore the potential inherent in the System.

## 2. Co-operation of providers at local and regional level

The Lisbon Council of March 2000 stressed the importance of the formation of learning partnerships of different providers. Nowhere is the formation of learning partnerships more desirable than in the field of language learning. Neither can any one provider satisfy all the demands in a given locality or region, nor are would-be language learners aware of the various learning opportunities available, nor are the providers themselves fully aware of demands and of what services they could provide to others than their normal target audiences.

### Recommendation:

The Commission should help launch a pilot project or commission a study designed to describe and assess and to provide information about successful language learning partnerships formed at local or regional level to encourage institutions and other providers as well as local and regional authorities to create or stimulate the creation of language learning environments based on language learning partnerships.

- (g) *Finally, Member States hold the key to success in any move to promote language learning and linguistic diversity. What steps should Member States themselves take in each of the areas highlighted in this document?*

***Note: The following recommendations are directed no so much at Member States, but at higher education institutions, which are on their way to becoming European players as members of a European Higher Education Area and of a European Research Area.***

### Recommendation 1:

Higher education institutions should enable students of whatever specialism to take a certain number of credits – for example, 15 credits – in languages as part of their regular first degree programme.

### Recommendation 2:

Universities are in a unique position to increase the range of languages taught. They should, wherever possible, see to it that non-specialists are admitted to courses in less widely used and less taught languages targeted at specialists.

### Recommendation 3.1:

There is not a clearly defined professional profile of university teachers engaged in language education. Universities should seek – through national or European partnerships – to define this profile and to develop and implement modularised continuing education programmes for the training of higher education language teachers.

### Recommendation 3.2:

Universities and other institutions responsible for language teacher education should play an active role in reforming teacher education across Europe. In particular, they should see to it that initial and continuing training programmes are brought into line with real professional needs.

### Recommendation 4:



In order to facilitate comparability and transparency across Europe, universities should structure their language provision and exams in accordance with the proficiency levels of the Common European Framework of Reference. They should make maximum use of the DIALANG System.

Recommendation 5:

The universities more than anyone else have a special responsibility for maintaining the vitality of regional and minority languages and for integrating immigrants into the society of the host community. They should exercise this responsibility in teacher education and in the training of translators and interpreters as well as in teaching and research in general.

Recommendation 6.1:

In order to expand provision, universities should form learning partnerships with other providers such as cultural institutes, adult education institutions etc.

Recommendation 6.2:

Universities should regard it as their responsibility to provide quality language teaching to target groups other than students.

Recommendation 6.3:

Universities should form partnerships with schools in an effort to enthuse students for language learning.

Overarching recommendation:

Every university should develop its own specific language policy for education, development and research reflecting not only the institution's priorities and strengths but, more importantly, European linguistic and cultural diversity and the needs arising from it.