

CONSEIL EUROPEEN POUR LES LANGUES / EUROPEAN LANGUAGE COUNCIL

Fifth General Assembly – Handelshøjskolen i Århus, 27 June 2003, 4.30 p.m.

REPORT BY THE PRESIDENT

In my report this afternoon, I shall be doing two things. I shall report on the various activities the CEL/ELC has engaged in since the Berlin European Year of Languages Conference, and I shall attempt to start a debate about the future of the association.

Executive Committee

Let me start with what may appear to be mundane activities. The new Executive Committee, comprised of Anne-Claude BERTHOUD (Vice-president), Karen M. LAURIDSEN (Treasurer), Wolfgang MACKIEWICZ (President) and Piet VAN DE CRAEN (Secretary), was installed as “acting” Executive Committee by the Board at the time of the Berlin Conference; it was unanimously confirmed by the Board at its 8th meeting held in Brussels on 19 January 2002. In its two-year term of office, the Executive Committee held six meetings.¹ Four of the six meetings were hosted by member institutions, no fewer than three by the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, and I should like to take this opportunity to thank the VUB in general and Piet Van de Craen in particular for the unparalleled support provided.

What did the Executive Committee manage to achieve?

Planning the 4th CEL/ELC Conference

At its first meeting, the Executive Committee undertook a thorough evaluation of the Berlin Conference. It noted that one of the central weaknesses of the Conference had been the format of the workshops – a series of presentations which did not leave any time for discussion. In general, it was felt that the workshops had not been very stimulating. In regard to the 4th Conference, it was decided to make workshop presentations available in writing before the Conference and to have a number of invited respondents comment on the presentations. At the same meeting, the Executive Committee decided to link the theme of the 4th Conference to the Bologna-Prague-Berlin process and to plan the event as a dissemination forum for the Thematic Network Project in the Area of Languages II (TNP2). This explains why six out of eight Conference workshops are directly linked to TNP2. At its second meeting, the Executive Committee decided not to convene a special CEL/ELC Conference organising committee. Instead, the Committee itself assumed responsibility for the planning of the content side of the Conference, as a result of which discussions about the Conference figured prominently at the following Executive Committee meetings.

Conference planning apart, the Executive Committee concerned itself with the following issues.

- the future of the Information Bulletin;
- the Berlin December workshops;

¹ The meetings were held at the following venues and on the following dates: 13th meeting, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, 28 September 2001; 14th meeting, Fondation Universitaire in Brussels, 20 January 2003; 15th meeting, Université de Lausanne, 3 May 2002; 16th meeting, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, 5 October 2002; 17th meeting, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, 31 January 2003; 18th meeting, Lille, 6 April 2003.

- the language policy initiative started by a group of member institutions in the wake of the Berlin Conference;
- the new research initiative decided on by the Board;
- the European Commission's consultation documents "Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity" and "The universities in the Europe of knowledge";
- the Commission's call for expressions of interest concerning the provision of services in the field of education, vocational training, culture, audiovisual policy, sport, citizenship and youth; on behalf of the CEL/ELC, Piet Van de Craen prepared an expression of interest, as a result of which we have been included in a number of restricted calls for tender. More about this later.

There were a couple things which the Executive Committee did not get round to doing. For example, we did not prepare annual reports and we did not produce a mission statement mapping out policies and activities for the next few years. Clearly, these are matters which require urgent attention.

The eighth meeting of the Board

The new Board provisionally elected at the Berlin General Assembly and confirmed by the extraordinary General Assembly held in Brussels on 19 January, held one meeting only². This is a pity because the meeting was in many ways highly productive. It undertook an even more thorough assessment of the Berlin Conference than the Executive Committee. The following points were noted:

- too few people from outside academia
- too few colleagues from southern Europe
- too few people from traditional, research-led universities

The Board approved guidelines for member institutions interested in hosting a CEL/ELC Conference, and it finalised the programme of the 4th CEL/ELC Conference as far as workshops were concerned.

Moreover, the Board conducted a very thorough discussion about what types of activities the CEL/ELC should engage in in order to become more attractive to CEL/ELC members and to attract new members. A strong plea was made for introducing membership activities, such as staff-development workshops. Clearly, this is a ground that will have to be revisited in the coming months. We need a debate about what types of activity should be prioritised and we have to make decisions on this.

The most important outcome of the meeting was brought about by a comment made by Mike Kelly. Mike suggested that the CEL/ELC should reflect on how it might address the research concerns of its members, whereupon the Board decided to launch a research initiative, requesting Anne-Claude Berthoud, Claude Truchot and Piet Van de Craen to take charge of it.

The fact that I did not call a Board meeting earlier this year was entirely due to the CEL/ELC's strained finances. The Board meeting held in Brussels in January 2002 was rather expensive given the the CEL/ELC's limited revenues. This is one of the reasons why I suggested back in April that we should elect a small Board at this General Assembly.

Language policy and language education policy

One of the most visible outcomes of the Berlin Conference was the formation of a group devoted to university language policy. The group, in which nine universities are currently involved³, is comprised of vice-rectors and vice-presidents with special responsibility for education and of language specialists. Those participating are convinced that one of the biggest challenges for education posed by European integration and international co-operation results from linguistic and cultural diversity and that because

² Both the extraordinary General Assembly and the ensuing Board meeting were generously hosted by the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, BE.

³ Handelshøjskolen i Århus, DK; Freie Universität Berlin, DE; Vrije Universiteit Brussel, BE; Université de Lausanne, CH; University of Limerick, IE; Université Marc Bloch, FR; Università degli studi di Torino, IT; Universität Wien, AT; Universitatea Babeş-Bolyai, RO (as corresponding member).

of this, multilingualism and multiculturalism have to be put high up on the agenda of universities. In line with the Berlin Declaration, they are further convinced that each university should develop and implement its own specific language policy for education, research and development and for services related to them, which interprets the general principle of individual and societal multilingualism in terms of the university's specific profile and mission, and that the development and implementation of institutional language policies can be greatly facilitated by European co-operation.

The deliberations of the group, which to date has held five meetings, have had a major impact at all levels, as will have become clear at the policy workshop conducted earlier today.

- in all the participating universities major changes have been introduced or are underway, including the formation of special committees charged with developing institution-wide language policies;
- university language policy has become a national issue in a number of states;
- in October 2002, the Executive Committee sent a note on "The Bologna Process and the Issue of Languages" to the authorities and organisations carrying forward the Bologna process – a note which has certainly had an impact on the policies propagated by the European University Association;
- at the end of February, the president delivered the keynote speech at the annual SCIC-Universités Conference;
- in March this year, the Executive Committee responded at length to the Commission's consultation document "Promoting language learning and linguistic diversity";
- in April, the CEL/ELC president provided major input at the consultation conference organised by the European Commission.

What still needs to be produced is a framework for the development and implementation of university language policies; this will now become one of the objectives of TNP3.

There are clear indications, that the issue of university language policy is gaining momentum. The Group is keen to involve additional universities and to hear about promising initiatives taken in other universities. Hence the consultation among CEL/ELC members carried out by Angela Chambers. Of course, the financial climate is not favourable to the introduction of new policies and provision – but there is considerable interest across Europe, which is evidenced by the many invitations extended to members of the Executive Committee to talk about language policy at institutional, national, European and international events. We have recently started to publish these speeches on the CEL/ELC Website, and we are soon going to begin to publish pertinent documents on the CEL/ELC Website, such as the Policy Group's mission statement, a grid for the description and analysis of the status quo, for the identification of needs and for the planning and putting in place of new measures, case studies of institutional language plans and policies and so on and so forth. The new form of co-operation, whereby university leaders sit down together with language specialists, will be further developed in TNP3.

The research initiative

The research initiative started by the Board at its eighth meeting is directed by our vice-president, Anne-Claude Berthoud. The group convened by the Board held its first meeting in early October last year, conducted a preliminary workshop Brussels on 1 February⁴ and met again in Strasbourg in late March. As a result of these meetings, the aims of the group are now quite clear.

- we want to initiate and carry out research directly linked to changing needs resulting from European integration and the opening up of Europe to third countries – what we have provisionally come to call policy-oriented research. To this end, we have started to draw up a list of research themes;

⁴ Both meetings were generously supported by the Vrije Universiteit Brussel.

- we want to promote interdisciplinary research methods. To this end, we have started to design research scenarios, building on scenarios developed at institutional and national level;
- we want to involve researchers from across Europe; hence the letter sent by Anne-Claude Berthoud to our contacts in CEL/ELC member institutions;
- we want to lobby the European Commission in order to secure funding for the research envisaged; to this end we have started talking to colleagues in DG Research.

If I have whetted your appetite, please go along to the research workshop tomorrow morning.

The CEL/ELC model of the European Language Portfolio (ELP)

The CEL/ELC has a long-standing record of co-operation with the European Commission. Co-operation with the Council of Europe is a more recent development. The CEL/ELC president sits on the European validation committee convened by the Council of Europe for the assessment and validation of models of the European Language Portfolio developed and presented by institutions, authorities and organisations from across Europe. In 1999-2000 the CEL/ELC carried out a project for the piloting of the ELP in a number of member institutions. The project was co-ordinated by Brigitte Forster Vosicki of the Université de Lausanne, and in the wake of the project, Brigitte – with the support of colleagues at the Université de Fribourg – developed a CEL/ELC ELP model, which was validated without any discussion by the validation committee last October. Those of you who have seen the model will share my view that this is a quality product. Unlike CercleS, we decided to entrust the production and distribution of our model to a publishing house. I am aware that not all of our member institutions are happy about this decision. However, I should like you to bear in mind two things. Neither Brigitte nor we in Berlin have the capacity to handle the distribution of the ELP, and – we were keen to put out a product which has the right feel and touch and with which owners can identify.

I am convinced that the ELP has enormous potential. The problem is that this potential can only be realised if learners and teachers know how to use the ELP. This is a tremendous challenge, which cannot be met by Brigitte alone. In view of this, the CEL/ELC will have to give very serious consideration to the issue of staff training. I hope that it will be possible to co-operate in this with colleagues and institutions both inside and outside the CEL/ELC.

Berlin December workshops

Both in December 2001 and December 2002 the Freie Universität Berlin hosted and provided support for a CEL/ELC workshop. In December 2001, Valère Meus of the Universiteit Gent and I myself co-ordinated a workshop on “Integrated approaches to the use of ICT for purposes of language learning and language teaching”, which provided useful input to the TNP2 subproject on New learning environments. Last December’s workshop was on “European language policy and implementation”; among the invited speakers were Joe Sheils of the Council of Europe and Sylvia Vlaeminck of the European Commission. I very much hope that we shall be able to continue the tradition of the Berlin December workshops. Last year, we did not know until late October whether the usual financial support would again be available, as a result of which invitations went out too late. This year, I propose to send out an announcement in late September, even if I do not know at the time what kind of support will be provided by FUB.

Projects launched from within the CEL/ELC

What I have said so far will have made it clear that policy development is one of our strengths. Our other strength is providing a platform for projects – co-operation projects, curriculum and materials development projects and, hopefully, in the future, research projects as well. I shall only mention some of the projects in passing – each of the projects would deserve a report of its own.

- Our second thematic network will be completed at the end of September. The principal outcome will be a major document prepared by the three subprojects, into which we will integrate the outcomes of this Conference.
- Yesterday, we were informed by the European Commission that our application for a third TNP has been successful, which means that TNP3 can be started on 1 October 2003. This will be a completely new type of project in that we shall involve a wide range of stakeholders from outside academia. A major launch conference is scheduled to be held at FUB on 23-24 January 2004.
- The DIALANG Project is now in its seventh and final year. We were granted an additional lease of life in order to allow us to complete the development work and to pave the way for the commercialisation of the system. It has now become clear, however, that commercialisation is not a realistic proposition after all. The Project is what it is because of political considerations. The next few weeks are likely to be decisive for the future of the system. Meanwhile, I would like to invite you to download the Beta version of the System freely available on the Internet. You will find a note on this in Bulletin 9 just out.
- The ALPME Project for the development of modules designed to prepare teachers for multilingual education, which was a direct outcome of TNP1, has just been completed. There is a plan to turn it into a European Masters programme, possibly under Erasmus Mundus.

While there can be no doubt that the CEL/ELC has achieved quite a lot over the past two years, there is no denying that in other respects we have been less successful.

Dissemination

When discussing the activities of the Executive Committee, I briefly referred to the fact that unlike other European associations, we do not yet produce activity reports. Indeed, dissemination is one of our weaknesses. Last year, we only managed to publish one bulletin instead of the two issues promised to our members – and this through no fault of our editorial committee chaired by Angela Chambers. We hope to make up for this this year. Bulletin 9 is out on the Web thanks to Sietze Looijenga and will be out in print very soon. Bulletin 10, devoted to Bologna, is nearly ready, and if all goes well, Bulletin 11 will be out before the end of the year. I should like to take this opportunity to thank Angela on behalf of all of us for the great job she has done over all those years. Many thanks also to Mike Grenfell and Daniel Toudic, the other two members of the editorial committee.

The Website has been another problem area. It has to be admitted that many of the good things we managed to achieve went unnoticed by the wider language community simply because they never found their way into the Website. Things have improved recently as Sietze has devoted more of his spare time to the Website – for which many thanks to you Sietze. However, I do not think that we can or should expect Sietze to provide this kind of service free of charge indefinitely. We have to find a solution to this.

Moreover, putting things on the Website is only one side of the coin. The other side is producing and translating texts. For example, the outcomes of the various meetings held over the past two years have not been disseminated. The Policy Group's activities are not mentioned anywhere – and so on and so forth. Clearly, this has to change.

Membership; the CEL/ELC's finances

This brings me to two other, closely related points: membership and the CEL/ELC's finances. Our treasurer, Karen M Lauridsen, will later this afternoon present the exact figures to you. At this stage, I should just like to give you a general picture.

When we created the association in June 1997, we thought it would be possible to attract some four to five hundred members within a couple of years' time. We went for institutional membership, that is to say we were keen to have universities join, rather than departments or language centres or individuals because we were preparing ourselves for the launch of EU projects, which require the participation of institutions, rather than departments or individuals. We introduced an annual membership fee of 200 €, which has remained unchanged over the years. We now have to acknowledge that the formula adopted in 1997 may no longer be appropriate, if ever it was. Last year and this year, a number of members have withdrawn. Admittedly, we have also been able to attract a couple of new members – but the general trend is negative. The trend is reinforced by the fact that only 85 out of 155 member organisations paid their membership fee for 2002. In other words, real membership is down to 85. This is an unsatisfactory state of affairs, mainly because we shall only be able to continue to have our voice heard if we can show that we speak for a large number of stakeholders. It would be interesting to know why institutions joined in the first place. What did they expect to get in return? Networking and collaboration? Information about new programmes, about examples of good practice and the like? Did they expect the CEL/ELC to provide services such as staff-training seminars? Did colleagues expect the CEL/ELC to provide them with a structure within which they could pursue their own professional or research interests? Did departments in northern and western Europe hope that the CEL/ELC would be able to stem the tide which has since led to a sharp decline in modern languages and modern languages departments on those parts of Europe?

I do not have any answers to these questions. However, we have to ask these questions and we have to find answers to them, just as the new Board and the new Executive Committee will have to ask themselves in more general terms where our priorities should be in the next two to four years; whether we should open up membership to individuals, departments or private enterprises, for example; whether we should drop the membership fee altogether and rely on sponsorship money and members' participation in projects. Whatever we do, we shall have to look carefully at each type of activity which so far has been financed from central funds and decide whether we want to continue past practice. Can we still afford to print the Bulletin and disseminate it by surface mail, for example?

In regard to the CEL/ELC's finances, Mike Kelly has suggested in a note sent to me that maybe we should make subscription nominal or scrap it altogether. This would mean that members would have to fund their participation in CEL/ELC activities from their own resources or from their participation in projects which can fund the activity. The financial implications would be that the CEL/ELC, including secretariat activity, would be funded as part of whatever projects the CEL/ELC was running or as committed by sponsoring institutions. Of course, this is close enough to the de facto position at present. In this context I should like to return to the tender business. Following the application submitted in late January this year, the Commission has included the CEL/ELC in the list of natural or legal persons that are invited to bid for public contracts in response to limited calls for tender. If we get our act together, we may well be able to land a number of contracts involving a substantial number of colleagues in member institutions. In other words, we have to look for new sources of funding.

These, then, are the questions that the new Executive Committee and the new Board will have to address.

- what should be the association's principal aims and activities over the next four years?
- what cost savings can be made in regard to CEL/ELC core activities?
- from what sources should the association's core activities be funded in future?
- should membership be opened to departments, language centres, individuals, private enterprises, authorities – to mention just a few? I am also asking this question in the light of the aims of TNP3.

I would hope that the new Executive Committee and Board will start debating these and similar issues soon after the Conference and that they will come up with first answers by early next year.

In a sense, I started this discussion three months ago, when in the wake of the 18th Executive Committee meeting I wrote to the members of the Board suggesting that we should change the function of the Board and turn it into a considerably smaller committee whose members would each hold a specific portfolio. In order to make this possible, I further suggested that those members of the Board whose term of office would under normal circumstances continue until 2005 should resign at the time of this Conference in order to allow the General Assembly to elect a new and smaller Board. Most Board members responded positively to my suggestion.

Before I complete my report, I should like to do two things.

1. I should like to inform you that our first and to date only honorary member, Domenico Lenarduzzi, received an honorary doctorate from the Université Libre de Bruxelles on 29 December 2002. Domenico has not been well in recent months, which explains why he cannot be with us today. I am sure you will all want to joint me in sending him our best wishes.
2. Finally, I should like to express my sincere gratitude to a number of colleagues and member organisations.
 - I should like to thank the other members of the Executive Committee for their co-operation and support over the past two years.
 - I should like to thank the members of the Board for their advice and support.
 - I should like to thank the members of the editorial committee for all their hard work.
 - I should like to thank Sandra Kosanke and Sietze Looijenga for their invaluable assistance and support.
 - I should like to thank the Handelshøjskolen i Århus, the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, the Université de Lausanne, the Université Marc Bloch (Strasbourg), the Universität Wien and my own university, the Freie Universität Berlin, for sponsoring CEL/ELC key and core activities.

But of course, my most heartfelt thanks have to be reserved for Karen M Lauridsen, her team and her University. Thank you for everything you have done to make this Conference possible.