

**Communiqué issued on the occasion of the
Fourth Conference of the Conseil Européen pour les Langues / European Language Council
held at the Handelshøjskolen i Århus (DK) on 26-28 June 2003**

The Conseil Européen pour les Langues / European Language Council (CEL/ELC), an association of universities and academic associations seeking to promote multilingualism and linguistic diversity in Europe, held its 4th Conference in Aarhus (Denmark) on 26-28 June 2003. The Conference was attended by some 200 experts, university leaders and other stakeholder representatives from across Europe, among them representatives of the European Parliament, the European Commission, the European University Association (EUA), the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA), the Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe (UNICA), the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB), the Danish Language Council and the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research. The Conference theme *The Role of Languages in the European Higher Education Area* was to draw attention to the fact that the question of languages is of direct relevance to the creation of a European higher education area as envisaged in the Bologna Declaration of 1999 and of a European research area as foreseen in the Conclusions of the Lisbon Council of March 2000. European integration in the university sector can only succeed if the issue of languages is given proper attention.

During the three-day meeting, experts engaged in the second Thematic Network Project in the Area of Languages – TNP2 (Socrates-Erasmus Programme, 2000-2003) presented provisional results and outcomes of the Project for discussion. They addressed the issue of improvements and innovations in language-related higher education programmes and provision from the point of view of their relevance to employability in general and to the language professions in particular. They reaffirmed the importance of the lifelong learning paradigm, and the contribution of language programmes to the aims of the Bologna-Prague-Berlin process.

The principal results and outcomes of the Conference can be summarised as follows.

1. The Conference affirmed the basic principle underlying the founding of the CEL/ELC in 1997, that the promotion of multilingualism and of linguistic diversity is of fundamental importance for European integration in all spheres and that the universities have a crucial role in this respect.
2. Findings from TNP2 presented at the Conference suggested that the structural changes envisaged in the Bologna-Prague-Berlin process provide an opportunity for improving higher education programmes and provision in the field of language learning and teaching as well as programmes for the training of language specialists such as teachers and translators and interpreters, notably through encouraging the universities and authorities to reflect on learning outcomes and career profiles and through facilitating greater flexibility in regard to course design and learning modes.
3. Conference participants noted with satisfaction that since the Berlin European Year of Languages Conference (June 2001) considerable progress had been made in regard to the development and implementation of university language policies. They acknowledged the work undertaken by the *European University Language Policy Interest Group*, formed by nine CEL/ELC member universities from across Europe, in which vice-rectors responsible for education and language experts had jointly reflected on how best to promote language learning and linguistic diversity in their institutions. Conference participants welcomed the prospect of other CEL/ELC member institutions being invited to join the effort. They also

welcomed national initiatives promoting the development of university language policies and plans which were presented at the Conference.

4. A variety of speakers from different professional backgrounds expressed the view that multilingual communication is an essential precondition for European integration in the political, economic and educational spheres. They stressed the fact that languages are a major economic factor, and that – especially in view of the impending enlargement of the Union – renewed efforts have to be made to improve the teaching and learning of languages in all sectors of education as well as the training of language professionals. In addition, they called for the diversification of language teaching and learning. Conference participants were impressed by reports of training schemes put in place by industrial corporations in a number of Member States. These provided evidence of the relevance of language capacity to economic success, and could stimulate curriculum development in universities.
5. Conference participants recognised the need for the universities to enter into a comprehensive dialogue with employers in order for both sides to reach a clearer understanding of current and future linguistic and language-related needs. In this context, they welcomed the fact that the European Commission had approved the application for a third Thematic Network Project in the Area of Languages to be launched on 1 October 2003 (TNP3), in which activities will be undertaken jointly by university experts and representatives of the wide range of non-university stakeholders and which is, among other things, to address the issue of changing needs in language-related industries and professions.
6. The Conference saw the public launch of the CEL/ELC's new research initiative. Those announcing the launch stressed the need for policy-oriented interdisciplinary research in the area of languages. Among the proposals presented were projects designed (i) to assess the cost of 'non-multilingualism' and, by implication, the benefits to be derived from multilingual communication and (ii) to provide a research base for improved language teaching and learning, notably through multilingual education. In this respect, Conference participants expressed the hope that languages will become a priority topic in the 6th Framework Programme. Conference participants were also informed that the issue of research would figure prominently in TNP3.

The Board of the Conseil Européen pour les Langues / European Language Council