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The Council of Europe (CE), including now (end of 2008) 47 member States, is very active in enhancing Europe's cultural heritage promoting unity in diversity particularly in educational fields. The CE has for long run cross-European projects focusing on the transmission of democratic values to young people and preparing them for life in a multilingual and multicultural Europe (Council of Europe, 2000). For one of its outstanding cross-European projects, the *Modern Language Project*, the Council has defined objectives, such as:

- to promote large-scale multilingualism by assisting member states in encouraging all Europeans to achieve a degree of communicative ability in a number of languages and to continue their language learning on a lifelong basis;
- diversifying the range of languages on offer and setting appropriate objectives for each language;
- improving the education/training of language teachers and promoting learner-centred, communicative methodologies.

Another large project of the CE, *Language Policies for a Multilingual and Multicultural Europe* (1997-2000), has the following aims:

- to help national authorities to promote multilingualism and multiculturalism and to increase public awareness of the part played by languages in forging a European identity;
- to develop ideas, approaches and strategies to promote linguistic diversification and to improve the quality of language education;
- to promote foreign language learning from the very start of schooling, making every pupil aware of Europe's linguistic and cultural diversity;
- to develop further and apply common European reference instruments for planning and assessments of language learning, mutual recognition of qualifications and co-ordination of politics;
- to elaborate instruments and co-ordinate networks for the design and implementation of modular courses;
- to develop further the intercultural dimension in language education.

The European Commission (EC), for its part, is following a very (pro-)active language policy focusing on diversity. One of the most influential items may be seen in the recommendations contained in the *White Book -Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society*. Concerning language education, they may be summarised as follows:

- Every EU citizen should be able to use three community languages (after completion of secondary school).
- Community language learning should be developed 'as early as possible'.
- A better quality of language and intercultural learning must be improved, and a more balanced language ecology should be promoted;
- Increasing language competence increases mobility and also gives better possibilities for seeking jobs in different EU member states.

The CE and the EC declared 2001 as the *European Year of Languages*. The reason is that Europeans should become more aware of the need to develop reasonable competence in several languages (Sheils, 1999). The argument is clearly for diversity. The increase in the scale and quality of language learning has been concentrated on the English language, and this fact is perceived as *problematic* by education policy makers. Restricting foreign language learning to ensure a common knowledge of English as a universal second language might erect barriers to young Europeans' appreciation of the rich cultural diversity of the continent and full participation in the cultural life of different countries (Trim, 1999). Therefore, it is important to

promote the learning of less widely used or taught languages (Sheils, 1999). As Leonard Orban, Commissioner of Multilingualism, suggests:

Languages and multilingualism are part and parcel of this enlarged Europe. We all belong to a Union which sets a high value on its diversity, which is European *because of* and not in spite of this diversity. In this diverse Europe, languages are bridges that give us the means to communicate with each other, to understand each other's cultures, to build on our shared values. (Speech/08/132: 1 [7 March 2008]. Retrieved April 10, 2008. Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/commission\\_barroso/orban/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/orban/index_en.htm))

*How do these policies affect multilingual education in schools?* The two enlargements of 2004 and 2007, with the expansion from 11 to 23 languages, have indeed marked a turning point for European multilingualism in our education system. The EU communication 'COM 2005 595 final', *A New Framework Strategy for Multilingualism*, sets very clearly the positions of two related parameters -*multilingualism* and *European values*:

The European Union is founded on 'unity in diversity': diversity of cultures, customs and beliefs -and of languages. Besides the 20<sup>1</sup> official languages of the Union, there are 60 or so other indigenous languages and scores of non-indigenous languages spoken by migrant communities.<sup>2</sup>

It is this diversity that makes the European Union what it is: not a 'melting pot' in which differences are rendered down, but a common home in which diversity is celebrated, and where our many mother tongues are a source of wealth and a bridge to greater solidarity and mutual understanding.

Language is the most direct expression of culture; it is what makes us human and what gives each of us a sense of identity. Article 22 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union<sup>3</sup> states that the Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity. (European Commission, 2005: 2)

According to key data provided by the Eurydice report on the teaching of languages at school in Europe (Eurydice, 2005), the percentage of primary school pupils learning a foreign language is increasing but the average number of foreign languages taught in secondary schools is still some way from the target set in Barcelona<sup>4</sup>. In that sense, the Commission's conclusion (European Commission, 2005: 4) is unambiguous when it asserts that '*There is a growing tendency for 'foreign language learning' to mean simply 'learning English'*'; the Commission has already pointed out that '*English is not enough*' (COM [2003] 449).

*And how far can policy deciders design language education policies which really promote a global and coherent approach to plurilingual education?* We find the answer to this question in the Council's publication known as '*The Guide*' -*From Linguistic Diversity to Plurilingual Education: Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe* (Council of Europe, 2007). The current Main Version of the *Guide* is a document which has been enriched and reorganised by means of a consultation process which took place between the Conference '*Languages, Diversity, Citizenship: Policies for plurilingualism in Europe*' (Strasbourg, 13-15 November 2002) and the policy Forum '*Global Approaches to Plurilingual Education*' (Strasbourg, 28-29 June 2004).

Defending the position that EU policies for language education should promote the acquisition of several languages to different levels at different times, the *Guide* deals with policy developments both in schools and formal education and in lifelong learning. By describing how language education policy can provide an inclusive and coherent view of multilingual education, its concern is with the '*whole*' of language education, including education in the mother tongue

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<sup>1</sup> 21 with the inclusion of Irish from 2007; 23 when Bulgarian and Romanian were added.

<sup>2</sup> See the *Euromosaic* study at:

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/lang/languages/langmin/euromosaic/index\\_en.html](http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/lang/languages/langmin/euromosaic/index_en.html)

<sup>3</sup> Official Journal C 364, 18.12.2000: 1.

<sup>4</sup> Barcelona European Council, 15 and 16 March 2002, Presidency Conclusions, part I, 43.1.

when it is the official and/or national language of the area in question. So it is significant to indicate that the *Guide* is not concerned only with ‘foreign’, ‘second’, or ‘minority’ languages.

One final point I want to examine here has to do with the educational tools provided within this context and which, in practical terms, can help both schools and language professionals. Schools and language professionals naturally have an essential role to play in allowing all Europeans to acquire the competences necessary to communicate in several languages and to have the possibility of experiencing different cultures. This is now:

- a right and a necessity;
- the basis for intensified co-operation, whether it be bilateral, trilateral or multilateral, local and trans-border, professional or economic, cultural or university-related, individual or within the framework of an association;
- the guarantee for increased mobility and exchanges;
- the assurance of better access to information through media and ICT.

The challenge is formidable for language teachers and schools (Vez, 2008: 2-3). First of all, they are faced with young people whose learning experiences succeed one another without ever coalescing to form a whole, and who play several roles and live in several time frames. Secondly, schools are faced with accelerating loss of community, which is weakening reference points both spatial and temporal (*spatial*, because the new communications media are bringing the distant close; *temporal*, because the collective memory based on the things that people have shaped and lived through together is being lost, scattered and fragmented into individual or group memories). This loss of community also leads to a break with the reality principle, as people surrender to the wish to follow their own urges and instincts. Thirdly, schools are faced with ‘*virtualisation*’, as the information networks detach themselves from human experience, with multimedia manufacturing an alternative reality, and the illustrated press increasingly relying on computer-generated images, rather than straight photographs. Lastly, schools are faced with the new emphasis on self-image, self-development and freedom of the individual, which disconnects people from group projects.

It is clear from this analysis that languages have a strategic role to play. It is also clearer why the CE and the EC have paid so much attention to language and culture. This is also why they are committed to projects and activities: i) which allow individuals and groups to overcome the language and culture barrier, and decompartmentalise education, training and research; ii) which promote and develop physical and virtual mobility; and iii) which help to give people a sense of belonging.

*In which way are these projects and activities a guarantee for better schools and better language educators in a multilingual Europe?* I shall now pay attention to the language and intercultural initiatives of the CE’s *Language Policy Division* as valuable educational tools which have proved over the past few years to be a great contribution to an enrichment of what one may call “*European togetherness*”, or European citizenship (*‘citoyenneté Européenne’*).

The research work of the Language Policy Division, widely known in the 1970s with the publication of *The Threshold Level*, was followed in the 1990s by the development of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR)* -published in 2001 (Council of Europe, 2001)- which: i) provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc in a European dimension; ii) describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively; iii) defines a scale of ‘common reference levels’ of proficiency which allow learners’ progress to be measured at each stage of learning and on a life-long basis; and iv) promotes an action-oriented approach to language learning in Europe.

The *European Language Portfolio (ELP)* is another planning instrument which contributes to promoting learner autonomy and encourages life-long learning<sup>5</sup>. It reflects the CE’s concern with respect for diversity of cultures and ways of life and is a tool to promote multilingualism and interculturalism through the integration of three elements: i) the *language passport*

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<sup>5</sup> See: [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/portfolio/Default.asp?L=E&M=/main\\_pages/welcome.html](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/portfolio/Default.asp?L=E&M=/main_pages/welcome.html)

(describing intercultural learning experiences); ii) the *language biography* (including information on linguistic and cultural experiences gained in and outside formal educational contexts); and iii) the *dossier* (giving value to the heritage language or languages of oneself).

On the basis of examination of most of the interpretations and data presented so far, it may be argued that the *ELP*<sup>6</sup> can play an important role in this collaborative attempt to meet the challenge of multilingual and intercultural communication in our European school system: i) with its encouragement of all kinds of language learning; ii) with its objective of providing additional motivation for language learning in schools and encouraging mobility of European citizens; iii) with its role as a tool for social and professional integration; iv) with its potential comparison of language learning in different European countries; and v) with its importance as an interface and its need for diversification.

In October 2003, the Language Policy Division put forward its first pilot version of a *Manual for relating Language Examinations to the CEFRL*. This *Manual*<sup>7</sup> is the result of a working group who has been able to put into practice the ideas and suggestions produced during the Helsinki Seminar in July 2002, in particular the need to assist member states, national and international providers of examinations, etc, in relating their certificates and diplomas to the *CEFRL*. The *Manual* will help users to: i) describe the examination coverage, administration and analysis procedures; ii) relate results reported from the examination to the common reference levels of the *CEFRL*; and iii) provide supporting evidence that reports the procedures followed to do so.

Much more recently, the Division has just launched the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters*<sup>8</sup> which is currently being piloted throughout EU countries. As a tool to foster respect for diversity, dialogue and social inclusion, the *Autobiography* has been developed to promote intercultural dialogue guiding learners to think critically about an intercultural experience, i.e. an encounter with people from another social group (people from another country, from another ethnic group, from another religion, from another region of the same country, from another level or class or stratum of the same society). The *Autobiography* is accompanied by a *Facilitator's Guide* with details of the rationale, including the underlying model of intercultural competence, and specific guidelines concerning how to use and make the most of this tool.

*But, in which way is all this support influencing the language professionals?* Now that the *CEFRL*, the *ELP*, the *Manual* and the *Autobiography* have been launched and are being developed as powerful educational tools through intensive and extensive international co-operation, the language teaching profession has demanded more and more coherence and transparency in language certification from formal and informal EU institutions. The DIALANG project and ALTE (Association of Language Testers in Europe) have already adopted the six-level scale of the *CEFRL*. But the mutual recognition of language qualification awarded by 'all' relevant EU institutions (in the sense that there is no doubt that a student's B1 in oral interaction obtained in a primary school in Granada is the same as the one given to a student in Leeds) is still a claim for the coming years. In that sense, the *Manual* aims to: i) contribute to competence building in the area of linking assessments to the *CEFR*; ii) encourage increased transparency on the part of examination providers; and iii) encourage the development of both formal and informal national and international networks of institutions and experts.

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<sup>6</sup> It is worth noting that there is an American version of the *ELP*, called *Linguafolio*, which is now being trialled by 5 States. The Virginia Department of Education began a pilot phase of the *LinguaFolio* Virginia for high school and university students in 2004-2005. Since then the program has expanded to include five states: Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, and Georgia. See: <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/linguafolio/index.html>

<sup>7</sup> See: [http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/Linguistic/Manuel1\\_EN.asp#TopOfPage](http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/Linguistic/Manuel1_EN.asp#TopOfPage)

<sup>8</sup> See: [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic%5CAutobiogrWeb\\_EN.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic%5CAutobiogrWeb_EN.asp)

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