

Multilingualism in Europe
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**Session 1: Multilingualism in the framework of the Europe 2020 strategy and
the Erasmus for All programme**

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Ladies and gentlemen

Colleagues and friends

Before all else, I should like to say how pleased and honoured I am to have been invited by our Commissioner to speak at this Conference. For one thing, my association, the Conseil européen pour les langues / European Language Council – in other words the CEL/ELC -, is delighted – and grateful - that the European Commission continues to be firmly committed to the principle of multilingualism in general and of individual multilingualism in particular, and that it has seen fit to organise this huge event to demonstrate its commitment. For another, I am ever so pleased that the draft Erasmus for All programme – or whatever the programme may be called in the end - foresees a further increase in the number of individuals to benefit from learning mobility – staff mobility, student mobility, Master degree mobility and Youth mobility. After all, I am largely what I am because I had the opportunity to study two terms at the University of Leeds fifty years ago.

The CEL/ELC was founded in 1997 with support from the European Commission – in the wake of the Commission's White Paper on Teaching and Learning of 1995, which set out five general objectives for the building of a learning society. One of these objectives was "Proficiency in three Community languages". Allow me to quote the key sentence – "It is becoming necessary for everyone, irrespective of training and education routes chosen, to acquire and keep up their ability in at least two

Community languages in addition to their mother tongue” – in other words, the famous 1+>2 formula. Among other things, the White Paper stressed the relevance of individual multilingualism to employability.

As is well known, the objective put forward in the White Paper was later modified to bring it into line with the Lisbon Strategy, which set out an ambitious economic and societal agenda for the first decade of the 21st century. Language learning came to be regarded as being highly important not just for employability in the border-free Single Market, but for the EU's economic performance - that is to say, for European competitiveness. At the Barcelona Council, whose tenth anniversary we are celebrating at this Conference, the heads of state and government called for improving the mastery of basic skills, “in particular by teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age”. The exclusive focus on the official languages of the Union was dropped in favour of an inclusive language policy, linked to the lifelong learning paradigm. Needless to say, there is a direct link between the Barcelona formula and objective, and the place individual multilingualism now occupies in the Europe 2020 agenda, where it is linked to smart and inclusive growth and jobs.

And this is where learning and employment mobility come in. In the words of the Commission's “Youth on the Move” Communication of September 2010, “Learning mobility is an important way in which young people can strengthen their future employability ... It helps them to access new knowledge and develop new linguistic and intercultural competences” – in line with labour market needs.

Before I look at individual multilingualism in relation to some of the Key Actions included in the Commission's “Erasmus for All” Communication, I should like to briefly explain why I think we need to take a fresh look at the very concept of multilingualism. I happen to believe that as a result of trans-European mobility – including virtual mobility – and migration into the Union, the traditional distinction between mother tongue and foreign languages has become somewhat artificial. Moreover, we cannot take it for granted that mother-tongue proficiency equals 100% competence – in fact, this is probably an exception rather than the rule, and this not only with children and young people whose first language is not the language of schooling. At the same time, a lot of language learning takes place outside formal education, and because of this, we urgently need to develop tools designed to assess the outcomes of informal and non-formal language learning. In view of this, the European Commission's Proposal for a Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning of 5 September, which calls on Member States to establish national systems for the validation of non-formal and informal learning by 2015, is a timely initiative.

And there is one more thing. We should perhaps stop talking of linguistic diversity in Europe – of course, there is a lot of diversity as we now have some 350 non-European languages in the EU – and focus on what we Europeans have in common.

We need to exploit the fact that we have language families and that because of this we can engage in mutual understanding and in the accelerated learning of languages related to a language or languages we already have.

The original 1+>2 formula probably did not put sufficient emphasis on the dynamic nature of multilingualism, or on the need thereof. Different contexts require different linguistic repertoires and levels of competence. For example, it may well be the case that the language of instruction of a higher education programme is English. In that case, students will have to have a high level of competence in English, including in reading and writing. In addition, however, students for whom the local language is not part of their repertoire will be well advised to learn that language to a proficiency level that facilitates social integration. In other words, when we speak of linguistic competences relevant to employability, we have to recognize that these competences have to be seen in terms of dynamic repertoires, subject to continuous development in line with the lifelong learning paradigm – be it that a language which is part of an individual's repertoire has to be further developed in response to changing needs, be it that a new language needs to be added to the repertoire.

Another aspect of this dynamic language competence is the ability for self-assessment. People have to be able to assess their linguistic competence or competences in relation to specific requirements – their strengths and weaknesses that is – and to take remedial action. This is, of course, in line with the Commission's and the Parliament's emphasis on learning-to-learn skills.

Finally, it stands to reason that technology will become ever more important for language learning and language use. Pupils and students have to be prepared for this. In other words, technological tools for language learning and language use constitute yet another facet of linguistic competence relevant to life and work in the Union.

Allow me now to turn to the issue of multilingualism in relation to "Erasmus for All" and to specific actions and objectives foreseen in the Commission's Communication, and in its Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing "Erasmus for All".

Chapter II of the Proposal lists six "Specific objectives" in the areas of education, training and youth – I shall give you an abbreviated version of them.

- (a) To improve the level of key competences and skills regarding in particular their relevance for the labour market and society ...
- (b) To foster quality improvement, innovation excellence and internationalization at the level of educational institutions ... notably through enhanced transnational co-operation between education and training providers ...
- (c) To promote the emergence of a European lifelong learning area ...
- (d) To enhance the international dimension ...notably in higher education ...

(e) To improve the teaching and learning of languages and promote linguistic diversity – to which the Parliament added “and intercultural awareness”.

(f) To promote excellence in teaching and research activities in European integration through the Jean Monnet activities ...

Needless to say, even the five objectives that do not explicitly mention “languages” are likely to have language-related implications.

I am now going to turn to the issue of multilingualism in relation to Key Actions and key activities foreseen in the new programme. I must admit that I am not sure I properly understood the types of co-operation activities foreseen in the documents prepared by the Commission and the Parliament. Still, here we go.

Key Action 1 – Learning mobility

Just to remind you – in the Commission’s Communication, Key Action 1 foresees four key activities – staff mobility; mobility for higher education students (including joint/double degrees) and VET students, including Transnational traineeships for VET and HE students; Master degree mobility; youth mobility. (The Parliament has added “pupil mobility in the context of school partnerships”.) I am going to focus on student and Master degree mobility, including transnational traineeships.

The European Commission is fully aware of the fact that the success of “learning mobility” cannot just be seen in quantitative terms – as a matter of number crunching. Hence their emphasis on the aspect of quality. Quote – “The main criterion for funding will be quality, demonstrated through educational content and teaching and learning methods, recognition of learning outcomes, linguistic and intercultural preparation, and improved arrangements within host organisations.” In a staff working document, the Commission is even more explicit. The following measures are mentioned+.

- (i) Linguistic preparation for all mobility actions for a minimum of two months through the Erasmus for All programme.
- (ii) Assessment of linguistic preparation as a condition for benefiting from EU funding for learning mobility in all sectors, with different levels of competence to be established for teachers, staff, youth workers and higher education students. Language courses will be offered to those who cannot demonstrate a sufficient competence to make their mobility a worthwhile experience.
- (iii) For the most widely used languages (EN, DE, FR, ES and IT), online courses will be offered. For the other languages, traditional courses will be funded.

Needless to say, I was immensely pleased when I learnt of this action plan, even though I personally believe that technological tools for the learning of our LWULT languages are equally important. The Erasmus Charter in its present form makes it obligatory for higher education institutions “to ensure the highest quality in the

organization of student and staff mobility” – but it does not mention the word “languages”. I do not want to sound too negative, but it is certainly true that to date a substantial number of universities do not make sure that the students they send to partner institutions under Erasmus student mobility have the level of competence in the local language expected by the host institution. And here we must remember that a stay abroad does not automatically ensure that the mobile person in question learns the language of the host country or region. To my mind, the following three-stage procedure should become normality – linguistic and cultural preparation before the start of the study visit proper, language support provided by the host institution, and assessment by the host institution or the sending institution of the level of proficiency achieved by the end of the mobility period. Language support provided by the host situation can mean many things – credit-bearing courses, language tandems (including provision of technological learning tools, or a combination of these) – but to my mind, it is important that students do not have to pay for whatever provision is made, and that the learning outcomes achieved through informal and non-formal learning are fully documented. In other words, every effort has to be made by all concerned to make sure that learning mobility results in a significant improvement in language competence.

Of course, there is another side to the coin. There are Member States where higher education institutions run their BA programmes in English. In principle, I have nothing against that – but these institutions normally say – as do institutions offering Master and PhD programmes in English – that students are not required to have any knowledge of the local language. In other words, there may be very little motivation for learning the local language – and I personally think that this is not what the Union is all about.

As you will have gathered, I am very much in favour of including the issues of linguistic preparation and support and of the assessment of the language competences acquired as a result of learning mobility in the new Erasmus Charter.

However, before I go any further, allow me to return to Key Action 1, Key Activity 3 – Master Degree mobility. On the face of it, this is primarily about funding. But may I say this. This activity also raises a number of language issues. It stands to reason that many of these Masters will be taught in English. Again, I have absolutely nothing against that – but higher education institutions have to make sure of two things – that all students have an adequate command of English and that their external students have or can gain a command of the local language required for social integration. Of course, I talked about this before. Again, I would suggest that the receiving institutions should be requested to describe their language strategies in the Erasmus Charter.

Key Action 2 – Cooperation

Again, I cannot comment on all the Key Activities foreseen. However, there are two Key Activities that seem to be specifically relevant to the issue of languages.

- (i) Knowledge Alliances. There is every reason why a Knowledge Alliance should be created to promote European co-operation between higher education institutions (HEIs) and businesses, business representative organisations, and social partners to underline the key role of multilingual “European comprehension” and to reach agreement on the language competences enterprises – especially SMEs – require facing global competition. Needless to say, we have the Business Platform for Multilingualism, but we also have to think of knowledge alliances at regional level to be brought together at European level.
- (ii) Strategic partnerships between education establishments.
 - (a) A partnership of higher education institutions for the identification, development and dissemination of innovative practices for the linguistic and intercultural support of the learning mobility of higher education students.
 - (b) A partnership of schools and authorities from different regions in the EU designed to exchange and disseminate successful practices to manage linguistic diversity in schools.

This theme is directly related to the EU’s policy of increasing intra-EU mobility, and migration into the EU. While it is true that all children and young people in formal education with a mobility / migration background – starting at pre-school level – must be given the opportunity and be encouraged to become fully literate in the language of schooling, they should also be enabled to maintain and develop their first language(s), while their peers from the host country should be encouraged to learn languages other than those offered in the curriculum. Forms of non-formal learning, and of assessment and validation of non-formal learning would seem to be particularly important in this context. The complexity of the issue should not prevent us from addressing it.
 - (c) A partnership of institutions offering vocational education and training, designed to promote language teaching / learning in IVET, and to bring provision more into line with vocational needs (both in terms of the languages offered and the skills taught).
 - (d) A partnership of bilingual schools, including learning mobility for students.

Needless to say, I can think of a number of other priority multilingualism themes related to specific sectors of education. It remains to be seen in what way the calls of the new programme will prioritise specific themes and issues.

Before I conclude, I should like to make a strong plea in favour of the inclusion of a transversal sub-programme specifically devoted to the issue of multilingualism – language teaching, learning, and assessment. This sub-programme should provide

financial support for projects addressing burning issues that are potentially relevant to a variety of settings of formal, informal, and non-formal language learning projects for the development and piloting of innovative policies, strategies, practices and tools, including the exchange and dissemination of examples of successful practice. In addition, this sub-programme should provide encouragement for cooperation between different types of educational institutions, as well as between educational institutions and authorities, on the one hand, and employers, employees, employer and employee organisations, and the social partners, on the other.

Here are a few of the burning issues I have in mind.

- (i) New approaches to language learning in higher and adult education – for example, modes of accelerated language learning.
- (ii) Learning-to-learn competences directly relevant to language learning.
- (iii) Sets of descriptors for language and intercultural skills related to situations of professional language use, anchored in the Common European Framework.
- (iv) Heterogeneous learner groups calling for new modes of language teaching and learning.
- (v) Tools and instruments for the validation of informal and non-formal language learning outcomes (maybe in combination with the validation of informal and non-formal learning of other transversal skills and competences).

The themes and issues I singled out for mention have been discussed for some time now both inside and outside my association – in the CEL/ELC Consultative Group “Rethinking Multilingualism”, in the Business Platform for Multilingualism and an LLP Network project launched from within the Platform, in the OMC Working Group “Languages for jobs” and the new Group “Languages in Education and Training”, and in a project supported by the Council of Europe’s European Centre for Modern Languages. A number of the issues were first raised by the Commission’s High Level Group on Multilingualism and in my last Socrates Thematic Network Project in the Area of Languages. It would be great if the new programme were to offer a framework for progression from reflection to action and innovation in the area of multilingualism.

THANK YOU.