

# The work of the Language Policy Unit in the European Commission's Directorate-General for Education and Culture

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**Paul Holdsworth**

Directorate-General for Education and Culture,  
European Commission

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The recently-created Language Policy Unit of the Directorate-General for Education and Culture at the European Commission brings together under one roof responsibility for all the Directorate-General's activities - and its substantial programme of investment - in the promotion of foreign language teaching and learning and the safeguarding of linguistic diversity. Headed by Sylvia Vlaeminck, the small but busy unit has overall responsibility for the development of policy in the field of language teaching and learning, and oversees the implementation of the many different language actions run by the Directorate-General:

- the language actions in the Socrates programme for cooperation in education
- the language actions in the Leonardo da Vinci programme for cooperation in vocational training
- the action in support of regional and minority Languages,
- the development of innovative methods and approaches, and
- the European Year of Languages 2001

### **Innovative initiatives to promote language learning**

The Commission's basic roles are to encourage cooperation amongst Member States and to promote innovation and the sharing of best practice in the field of foreign language teaching and learning. The Unit's basic purpose, then, is to help:

- create the conditions in which language teaching and learning can flourish
- encourage European citizens to take advantage of the possibilities available to learn and speak foreign languages
- preserve linguistic diversity.

Whilst much of their time is spent on the management of the many funding programmes in this area (of which more later), the staff of the Unit also take seriously their role as catalyst for change: encouraging strategic developments and innovation in areas of particular importance. The Unit has thus been able to support practical projects, which are already making a difference to the lives of language learners and teachers. Here are some examples of recent initiatives.

#### ***White Paper 'Teaching and Learning'***

In its 1995 White Paper on education and training *Teaching and Learning: Towards a learning society*, the Commission set as an objective that all EU citizens should be proficient in three European languages (their mother tongue plus two other community languages). In many countries it is normal for people to be able to use up to three languages. In the European Union, such people are well placed to take full advantage of European citizenship and of the single market. They are better able to move between countries for educational, professional or other reasons. Their linguistic skills are attractive to employers. The European Commission wants everybody to share those benefits. The White Paper considered language learning at all ages: lifelong language learning.

#### ***European label for innovative initiatives in language teaching and learning***

The European Label<sup>[1]</sup> stimulates interest in language learning by highlighting innovative language

learning projects at all stages of education and training, from pre-school to adult education. The first awards were made in 1998, the pilot year of the scheme. The Label is coordinated by the European Commission, but managed on a decentralised basis by Member States, along with Norway and Iceland. It is awarded by juries in each Member State, according to criteria agreed at European level and to additional national criteria. It can be awarded to any initiative in the field of language teaching and learning, whatever type of organisation is responsible. Successful applicants can use the Label and the associated logo on their premises and in publicity material.

### ***Early language learning***

The chances of creating a Europe of multilingual citizens will be greatly improved if those citizens have access to language learning at primary school or before. Following a conference of experts and decision-makers, 'Early Learning and After', in Luxembourg in 1997, European Union Education Ministers adopted a Resolution (98/C/1) calling upon Member States to encourage the early teaching of languages and European cooperation between schools providing such teaching. The Commission-funded publication, *Foreign languages in primary and pre-school education*[2], is based on an analysis of existing projects and sets out the conditions for successful early language learning.

### ***Content and Language Integrated Learning***

An excellent way of making progress in a foreign language is to use it for a purpose, so that the language becomes a tool rather than an end in itself. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) involves teaching and learning a subject (such as geography or science) through a foreign language. The Commission has helped develop a network, 'Euroclil', of practitioners, researchers, teacher trainers and other parties interested in this approach. The network produces regular bulletins and has an Internet site (<http://www.euroclil.net>), including a materials bank, a calendar of events, and a discussion forum for teachers and language assistants.

### ***Multilingual comprehension***

The aim of multilingual comprehension is to enable as many Europeans as possible to understand each other and to interact, communicating in their own language - a realistic option in a European Union where there is such a wealth of languages. It is usually much easier to learn to understand a foreign language than to speak it fluently. This is especially the case where languages are for historical reasons closely related, for example Dutch and German or Italian and Spanish. European communication can be greatly enhanced if more people can learn to understand one another's languages, so that participants in multilingual conversations or correspondence can speak or write their own language, whilst still being largely understood. Fluent understanding also tends to be a step on the way towards fluent speech.

A seminar on multilingual comprehension in Europe was held under the auspices of the Commission in Brussels in 1997[3]. The Commission has supported a website for the development and exchange of information in this area (<http://crim.inalco.fr/recomu/>).

### ***Quality indicators and quality systems***

A Quality Guide for the evaluation and the design of language learning or teaching programmes and materials has been developed. This Guide aims to raise awareness of the concept of quality in relation to modern language learning and teaching; to serve as a reference or stimulus for designers of materials and programmes, teachers and trainers, publishing companies, course decision-makers etc; and to provide a tool to help teacher trainers or project managers to design and evaluate courses, review learning and training materials, etc. The Guide is published as a CD-ROM, a tool both for people developing methods and materials and for those using them[4].

### ***Exchange of information***

The Commission subsidises the development of Lingu@netEuropa, a virtual resource centre for the teaching and learning of foreign languages. It is being developed by a 10-nation consortium[5]. Lingu@netEuropa provides useful content, initially for teachers, trainers, policy makers and multipliers and, later on for language learners in general. This will include information and links to quality-assured on-line resources from Europe and further afield. It will offer access to a unique collection of resources, from authentic teaching materials and details of conferences and events to policy and planning documents and research bibliographies. Access is multilingual - in the first instance in six

languages (Dutch, English, French, German, Italian and Spanish). An accessible common interface is being developed, as well as links to other relevant sites. Quality assurance issues will be tackled through a combination of expert advice and user interaction.

### ***European Year of Languages 2001***

It is hoped that by now, the readers of this bulletin will not need any more information about the European Year of Languages 2001! However, you are warmly encouraged to visit its website:

<http://www.eurolang2001.org/eyl/index.htm>

### ***Research***

From time to time the Commission is also able to finance key research initiatives which provide information of value to policy makers. One example of this is the recent opinion survey 'Europeans and Languages' which provides an up-to-date and fascinating snapshot of the declared language skills of European citizens, as well as detailed appreciation of their attitudes towards languages in general and foreign language learning in particular. For details please see:

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/languages.html>

### **Funding innovation and quality**

For many organisations, the list of activities above would be quite enough. However, the main activity of the Language Policy Unit is in fact to manage and coordinate the implementation of the many programmes and actions which fund projects in the field of language teaching, language learning and language diversity. Many readers will be familiar with the first programme in this field - the Lingua programme, which came into force on 1 January 1990 and lasted until 1994. Its objective was to improve the quantity and the quality of language teaching in the European Union. In a short timespan, it helped 19,000 teachers of a foreign language to undertake in-service training abroad, and 83,000 young people and their teachers to improve their foreign language, to mention but two aspects. The work of Lingua was reinforced and integrated into the subsequent Socrates and Leonardo programmes, which are described below.

### **Languages in education - the Socrates programme**

Socrates is the programme for European cooperation in the field of education. Its second phase began in 2000 and runs until 2006. The promotion of language learning is a key theme running throughout it. It has a panoply of actions targeted at different sectors.

#### ***Socrates encourages cooperation between language teacher-training institutions [6]***

Through European cooperation programmes, institutions responsible for training language teachers develop closer working ties with counterparts across Europe and produce practical teacher training courses and materials that draw upon the best experience in Europe. They may focus on the initial or the in-service training of teachers of a foreign language, and aim to improve the teaching of teachers in the pre-primary, primary, secondary, vocational or adult education sectors. Since 1991, almost 22 million euros have been spent to joint-fund these projects.

The benefits of taking part in a European cooperation programme include an increased understanding of the methods and approaches to language teacher training in other participating countries, the sharing of ideas and best practice across national boundaries, and the opportunity to take part in a joint venture in the creation of new knowledge and methods. Details of projects are available at:

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/languages/lang/teaching.html#links>

#### ***Socrates makes grants to language teachers for in-service training [7]***

A teacher of a foreign language can apply for a grant to travel abroad to take part in in-service training of between two and four weeks. Each benefits from a EU grant contributing to travel costs, subsistence and tuition fees. Grants have averaged around 1,100 euros. The courses aim to improve teachers' pedagogical as well as their linguistic abilities, although some courses, particularly in less widely used languages, concentrate on language skills alone. Between 1995 and 1999, a total of 39

million euros was spent on these grants. By the end of the same period, 34,600 teachers from EU and EFTA/EEA countries had taken part in in-service training courses abroad.

### ***Socrates innovates in assistantships for future language teachers [8]***

Future teachers of a foreign language receive a grant to enable them to spend up to 8 months in a school abroad where they both teach their mother tongue and learn a foreign language or improve their language skills. The average total funding per Assistantship is around 4,000 euros.

There are significant differences between Lingua Assistantships and assistantships organised under bilateral arrangements between certain pairs of countries. Lingua Assistants are future teachers of foreign languages - and therefore already have some teaching skills. They are often speakers of languages not already taught in the host school. They therefore bring to the school and local community a linguistic and cultural resource that they might not otherwise encounter. There is thus a large potential to raise pupils' awareness of another, often lesser-known, European culture and help to break down prejudice.

Lingua Assistantships have benefits for assistants and host schools. Assistants improve both their teaching skills and their command of the language(s) spoken in the host country, thus they are better equipped for their future careers as language teachers. Assistants who travel to countries with less widely used languages are often motivated to continue learning the languages concerned on their return, and are potential catalysts for the introduction of such languages into schools.

Host schools have the opportunity to bring a native speaker who is also a trainee teacher into their lessons, to add extra languages to their curriculum or to improve the teaching of existing languages.

Between 1995 and 1999, 13.2 million euros were allocated to this action. By the end of the same period, over 2,800 future foreign language teachers had undertaken Lingua Assistantships.

### ***Socrates helps create new language teaching and testing materials [9]***

Socrates invests in the production and dissemination of new tools for language teaching and learning, and tools for the evaluation of language skills in areas for which the market does not offer the required products or for which the resources are disseminated outside the conventional production and distribution routes.

Transnational cooperation projects develop resources for learners that are not yet available on the market. In many cases their targeted nature - either because they involve the less widely used and taught languages, or because they adopt an innovative methodology or target special learning needs - makes it difficult to cater for their production in an exclusively commercial context. Since 1990, approximately 30 million euros have been spent on producing practical language learning and testing tools under this action. The DIALANG project, which will provide citizens with access to diagnostic assessments of their language skills over the Internet - and in which members of the ELC are involved - is just one example. For detailed information on the products developed so far, please visit the Lingua Catalogue at:

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/socrates/lingua/catalogue/home\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/socrates/lingua/catalogue/home_en.htm).

### ***Socrates encourages life-long language learning***

The newly-established Lingua Action 1 finances transnational projects which either raise awareness amongst the general public about the benefits of foreign language learning, help to broaden access to existing foreign language learning resources (such as those held by universities) or encourage the dissemination of information about innovation and best practice in the field of foreign language learning amongst key decision takers. The first project supported under this action will commence in the autumn of 2001.

### ***Socrates promotes School Language Projects [10]***

Young people aged 14 and over spend a year working together virtually with counterparts abroad on a project related to their education and training; they then travel abroad to work with them in person, and spend time in their families. These are School Language Projects. This practical use of foreign

languages enables pupils to improve their language skills and their motivation to learn languages, thus making them more confident in using their language skills.

The languages spoken in the partner countries are the target languages of the project. If the partner language does not form part of the curriculum of the school taking part, participating pupils receive a basic introduction to the partner language before their stay abroad. Accommodation in the families of their partners further stimulates the learning of the language as well as the culture of the host country. Each year, about 30,000 young people aged 14+ take part in these projects. Since 1991, over 250,000 pupils, together with their teachers, have travelled in Europe to improve their language skills as part of one of these projects. Over 60 million euros were invested in this action between 1995 and 1999.

### ***The Erasmus action in the Socrates programme***

A significant part of the Socrates budget is devoted to enabling students to follow a course of study at a university in another participating country. In many cases, students require language preparation if they are to do this successfully. Intensive Language Preparation Courses, launched in 1996, make it easier for university students to take part in courses of study at institutions abroad where the teaching is delivered through a less widely used and less taught language. Approximately 1,000 students per year have benefited from this action.

### ***Socrates encourages linguistic diversity***

The target languages of the language actions are all the 11 official languages of the Union, plus Letzeburgesch and Irish. Norwegian and Icelandic, the languages of the European Economic Area (EEA) countries participating in the programme, are eligible as well. The recent opening up of the programme to countries from central and eastern Europe and Cyprus, has meant that eligible languages now include the official languages of Romania, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Poland, Slovakia, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Bulgaria, Malta and Slovenia. Priority is accorded to the less widely used and less taught languages of the Community.

### **Languages in vocational training - the Leonardo da Vinci programme**

Leonardo da Vinci is the programme for European cooperation in the field of vocational training. Its second phase began in 2000 and runs until 2006. It promotes the development of vocationally oriented language skills through transnational pilot projects and exchange programmes.

Multilingualism is a key aim in this field because, in a Europe of free movement - for workers in particular - proficiency in several languages does more than simply promote individual development: it also contributes to a genuine feeling of European citizenship. It opens up new prospects for employment and professional mobility beyond national borders.

Multilingualism also encourages young people to take fuller advantage of the European dimension to training, by extending the range of countries where such opportunities exist. Moreover, numerous studies have shown that a high proportion of businesses lose significant market share because they literally do not speak their customer's language, especially where it is one of the lesser-used languages.

In the first phase of the Leonardo da Vinci programme, 174 pilot projects and 13 exchanges or placements specifically concerned with promoting foreign language training for work were funded. These initiatives accounted for almost 23.5 million euros, almost 5% of the programme budget.

Language measures are maintained and developed in the second phase of Leonardo da Vinci. The main aim is to enhance multilingual and multicultural communication in the training and working environment. Projects design, test and validate, assess and disseminate teaching material, as well as innovative pedagogical methods tailored to the specific needs of occupational areas and economic sectors. This includes the use of language audits, and also innovative pedagogical approaches based on language self-tuition and the dissemination of their results. They contribute to making enterprises, particularly SMEs, aware of the importance of effective communication in a foreign language in a

work-related environment, and to providing them with the tools needed to develop an appropriate language-training strategy.

### **The action in favour of regional and minority languages [11]**

Since 1983, resources have been made available to projects supporting or promoting the indigenous languages traditionally spoken by a part of the population of a Member State of the Union. Around 45 languages in 60 language communities are involved; dialects, migrant languages and artificial languages are not included. Applications supported have included projects such as language courses, teaching and support materials, TV and radio programmes, teacher training and exchanges, cultural events and publications, work on the standardisation of the language, and awareness-raising about regional and minority languages and cultures. The Commission has also supported the exchange of experience and information in this field.

### **Le pourquoi**

Of course, all of this activity has a reason. We promote the learning of foreign languages - why? Because the Single Market requires more and more workers with foreign language skills, and because, now that barriers to the free movement of goods and services are down, it would be a shame if more and more Europeans citizens didn't also make the most of the opportunity to travel in Europe ¼ .

But perhaps the biggest single reason is that foreign language learning provides key skills for the active European citizen. Learning foreign languages involves learning to see life from someone else's point of view, learning tolerance, openness and cooperation skills. It is precisely these skills that every community needs if it is going to be a vibrant and a living community - and that includes the European community.

In a Europe of active citizens - in which citizens are well-informed, open-minded and can understand what life is like for their neighbours, a Europe in which citizens play a full part in the development of the community, then the life-long learning of foreign languages and the respect for the diversity of languages and cultures have a major role to play.

### **Want to know more?**

Why not visit the Commission's website 'Language learning', which is available in all 11 official languages of the Union at:

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/languages/index.html>

### **Notes**

[1] <http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/languages/actions/languagelabel.html>

[2] Blondin, 1998. [Foreign Languages in Primary and Pre-School Education](#), a review of recent research within the European Union. London : Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research. ISBN 1 902031 22 9

[3] A summary, aimed at academic readers, is available from the *Centre de Recherche en Ingénierie Multilingue* in Paris, 2 rue de Lille, F-75343 PARIS (e-mail: [crim@inalco.fr](mailto:crim@inalco.fr)).

[4] Information on the Guide is available at

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/languages/lang/teaching.html>

[5] A prototype is already accessible at: <http://www.linguanet-europa.org/y2/>

[6] Comenius European cooperation projects for the training of school education staff.

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/languages/actions/comenius.html>

[7] Comenius Individual Training Grants.

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/languages/actions/comenius.html#individual>

[8] Comenius Language Assistantships.

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/languages/actions/comenius.html#assistantships>

[9] Lingua action 2. <http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/languages/actions/lingua2.html#Linguaaction>

**[10]** Comenius Language Projects.

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/languages/actions/comenius.html#Action1>

**[11]** <http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/langmin.html>