

From the President

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First of all, I should like to invite all our members - as well as everyone else convinced that higher education has a crucial role in promoting multilingualism and linguistic diversity - to the 4th CEL/ELC Conference to be held at the Handelshøjskolen i Århus (DK) on 26-28 June 2003. The theme of the Conference, The Role of Languages in the European Higher Education Area, highlights the fact that the question of languages is of fundamental importance not just to European integration in general, but particularly to the creation of a European higher education area (EHEA) and – I should like to add – to the creation of the European Research Area (ERA). It is also to draw attention to the fact that Bologna can only be successfully implemented in what we have come to call the area of languages if serious consideration is given to content issues, such as the definition of learning outcomes and of core content linked to professional profiles, the development of learner-centred methodologies within the lifelong learning paradigm and the identification of reference points for quality enhancement.

Both these issues – the development of university language policies and the implementation of Bologna in the area of languages - will figure prominently at the Conference. At a workshop on university language policy, we shall review recent developments at European, national and institutional level, some of them triggered by the work of our own European University Language Policy Interest Group. The implementation of Bologna will be very much at the heart of the six workshops at which experts from the sub-projects of the second Thematic Network Project in the Area of Languages (TNP2) will present their findings and recommendations for discussion. All the Conference workshops are designed to stimulate discussion and exchange of experiences. We are keen to see whether our ideas meet with a high level of acceptance both inside and outside academia, and we are equally keen to hear from colleagues about innovative initiatives and developments in their institutions and countries.

The policies developed by the CEL/ELC and the recommendations coming out of TNP2 are, of course, directed at both higher education institutions and the wide range of external stakeholders. Our efforts to encourage the development and implementation of university language policies are a good case in point. Since the Berlin EYL2001 Conference, a number of universities represented in the Policy Interest Group have adopted new measures and strategies designed to promote multilingualism within their walls. At my own university, the Freie Universität Berlin, students enrolled in newly created bachelor programmes of whatever specialism will have the opportunity to take up to 22 credits – out of a total of 180 credits – in languages. At the Université de Lausanne, a Commission du Rectorat has recently been convened made up of representatives of all the faculties as well as the student body, and university services charged with developing an institutional language policy embedded in the bachelor-master structure – and this in co-operation with the neighbouring technical university. These are just two examples. In addition, the group has made an effort to reach out to other CEL/ELC member institutions, notably by circulating a questionnaire designed to elicit information about innovative developments and initiatives. We have now circulated the questionnaire a second time, and I should be grateful if those of our members who did not respond the first time round could do so now. I feel personally gratified that the notion of a university language policy is becoming more and more of an issue in institutional development plans and that it has found its way into the European Commission's consultation document Language learning and linguistic diversity.

The fact that the Commission has taken the idea of university language policies on board is very encouraging in that the CEL/ELC has, over the past two years, made determined efforts to influence policy development at national and EU level. Karen M. Lauridsen, for example, chaired a working party under the auspices of the Danish rectors' conference which produced a document on higher education language policy. I myself co-authored a policy paper on language education in German higher education institutions, which is now before the German Ministry of Education and Research and the German rectors' conference. Moreover, the principles developed by our Policy Interest Group formed

the basis of the CEL/ELC's response to the questions contained in the Commission's consultation document.

However, it has not all been plain sailing. For months now, we have been trying hard to have the question of languages incorporated into the communiqué that will be released on the occasion of the post-Bologna meeting of higher education ministers to be held in Berlin in September. In late September 2002, the CEL/ELC Executive Committee issued a note on the Bologna Process and the Issue of Languages for the attention of the authorities and organisations carrying forward the Bologna Process, pointing out that three core issues of the Bologna Process, i.e. mobility, the European dimension of higher education and the European dimension of employability, all required special efforts on the part of the signatory states and higher education institutions – particularly efforts regarding opportunities and incentives for students to acquire multilingual skills and competences. Whereas the European University Association (EUA) and the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB) welcomed the initiative, the ministries' response has been lukewarm. While it is clear that responsibility for the content side of the Bologna Process must rest with the universities, it should be equally clear that the Process cannot be carried forward unless the universities are enabled to adopt a multilingual ethos across the board. If only for that reason, a clear signal from the Berlin Conference would be more than opportune.

However, it is not only the ministries that need further convincing. In spite of all the hard work put into three successive Thematic Network Projects by hundreds of experts from across Europe, the fact remains that we have not yet achieved reorientation in the area languages on a wide front. This is why we now feel that a different approach is needed. We need to create structures at all levels designed to encourage co-operation between universities and other sectors of education, universities and the language industry, and universities and the economic environment. It is this conviction that lies at the bottom of the proposal for a new thematic network project, TNP3, which we submitted on 1 March this year. The new TNP envisages three sub-projects: (i) Languages for language-related industries and professions; (ii) Languages for enhanced opportunities on the labour market; (iii) Languages as an interface between the different sectors of education. In addition, there will be a transversal working group on education and research. Unlike in previous TNPs, the sub-project working groups will represent the whole range of university and non-university stakeholders. The new TNP will be launched at a major European conference to be held in Berlin on 23-24 January 2004.

The fact that the new TNP will for the first time directly address the issue of research in the area of languages is an indication of a more general change in direction. To date, education and research have, at EU level, belonged to different camps. They come under different directorates-general, with different funding mechanisms and priorities. Now, for the first time, the European Commission has published a document – The role of the universities in the Europe of knowledge – which covers both education and research. (The CEL/ELC Executive Committee will respond to the document – and in doing so, it will have to remind the Commission that you cannot discuss the role of the universities in the knowledge society without addressing the question of languages.) In addition, the humanities have become a priority area in the 6th Framework Programme. The CEL/ELC started its own research initiative early last year, and Århus will be the first CEL/ELC Conference to feature a workshop on research. In mid-May, our vice-president, Anne-Claude Berthoud, wrote to all CEL/ELC members to draw their attention to the workshop and inviting them to propose themes to be included in the initiative.

In describing recent and current CEL/ELC activities, I focused on what have all along been our strengths: influencing policy at various levels and providing a platform for the launch of co-operation and development projects – and, maybe, soon for research projects as well. In other respects, we have been less successful, for example in disseminating information and examples of good practice and in providing services to members. Six years after the Lille conference, the time has come to take stock and to ask ourselves what should be the priorities and purposes of the CEL/ELC in the next five years or so. And this will then have to have implications and consequences – for example, for the way in which the association functions and is financed. At the time of the founding of the association we thought that it would be possible to attract some four to five hundred members. Six years on, it should be clear that this will never happen unless we make radical changes. Just what these changes

should be, will have to be discussed and decided by the new Board to be elected at Århus. And the discussion will have to start at the General Assembly in Århus.

I very much look forward to seeing you in Århus.