



CONSEIL EUROPEEN POUR LES LANGUES / EUROPEAN
LANGUAGE COUNCIL
(CEL/ELC)



Ninth General Meeting
Hogeschool-Universiteit Brussel,
Campus Koningstraat, 7 December 2008, 9.30 a.m.

REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT

Delegates,

colleagues and friends,

European projects

I started off my report delivered at the 8th General Assembly by talking about CEL/ELC-related European education and research projects past, present, and future. I expressed the view that we had entered a new phase in that for the first time the Board had coordinated the preparation of no fewer than three grant applications submitted by Board members under the Lifelong Learning Programme, and I expressed my pleasure at the fact that news had just come in that all three applications had been successful. In addition, I had occasion to refer to work being undertaken in the DYLAN research project, which builds on the research initiative launched by the CEL/ELC in the early years of this decade.

There is no need to go into further detail, as these projects were presented at the Forum on Friday.

Unfortunately, other plans and ideas entertained by some of us did not come to fruition. In last year's report, I explicitly mentioned the initiative – originally started by UNICA – for the creation of an *Ecole doctorale européenne sur le multilinguisme*.

In the event Michal Krzyzanowski of Lancaster University and Piet van de Craen prepared a grant application under the Erasmus Programme. The application was not successful, and at this point it is not entirely clear whether a modified application will be submitted under the 2009 call, whether a number of the project-partners to be will launch the project without Community support, or whether the plan will be buried altogether. Other ideas did not even get anywhere near a grant application, notably recommendations for projects put forward in the TNP3 final report.

I am mentioning this because I think we need to be realistic about the preparation and launch of European projects.

- Preparing a grant application requires a substantial amount of time, and it requires specific expertise.
- Colleagues are finding it increasingly difficult to involve themselves in European projects – be it that they are too busy in their jobs, be it that senior managements are reluctant to allow them to work for projects that do not yield direct financial returns – full economic costing is the magic phrase here.

- And anyway, there is a limit as to the number of projects anyone of us can be involved in at one and the same time.

Later today, I propose to suggest to the Board that we consider the possibility of convening a number of focus groups, which could well result in the preparation of grant applications. I shall also suggest that we should invite colleagues from other organisations to join these interest groups.

European Journal of Language Policy / Journal européen de politique linguistique

At the 8th General Assembly, Mike Kelly presented his proposal for a new journal. The Journal is to be launched in April 2009. Later this morning, Mike will report on the state of play. I just want to say that a majority of Board members accepted Mike's invitation to join the Editorial Board. Moreover, the Board held intensive discussions about the specific profile of the Journal, including priority themes, the types of potential authors to be considered, and audiences to be targeted.

Membership

Later this morning, I will deliver the financial report for 2007-8. At this stage, I would just like to say this. On paper, we have 157 members. This figure has remained stable for quite a few years now; each year, a few members withdrew, and each year we managed to attract a few new members. It has to be admitted though, that on average only half of our members have actually paid their membership fee. Last year, for example, a total of 82 members paid their membership fee. To the best of my knowledge, this is not unusual for associations of this kind and size. However, we have a more fundamental problem. Many institutions have joined the CEL/ELC in the past because a particular colleague was keen to become involved. When this colleague transfers to another institution or retires, the member institution in question is likely to ignore our letters, or withdraw from the association. One can draw various conclusions from this. (i) The CEL/ELC is a transversal association; we represent the area of languages in an all-encompassing manner. If we then look at individual member institutions, we may well find that there is little communication between the various administrative units that have a stake in languages - modern language departments, the language centre, the school for translation and interpreting and so on. This, for me, is another reason why we have to create special interest groups. (ii) Contrary to what we think should be the case, in many member institutions the area of languages – language teaching, teacher education, the training of language specialists – is not high on the agenda. It is a sad fact, for example, that language teachers by and large have a low status in HEIs across Europe. There are no easy solutions to this.

However, if I may speak from my own experience, I think it is important that HE language teachers should stick to what they can do best, and try to be innovative as best they can – even under adverse conditions.

After all, some of the policies currently being pursued by HEIs cannot be properly implemented without the support of language specialists. The word “internationalisation” should ring a bell.

Of course, the issue of membership has other aspects as well.

For example, the Board holds the view that it is rather unfortunate that there are colleagues who have participated in successive CEL/ELC-related projects, but have failed to bring their institutions into our association.

I would not want to go so far as to say that institutions that are not members cannot participate in our projects – but the least we can do is to write to project partners and invite them to come in. In future, there will be an additional incentive – the Journal, which members will receive free of charge.

The Board

Since the 8th General Assembly, the Board has met three times – immediately after the General Assembly, in mid-June, and mid-October respectively. At the 20th meeting held immediately after the General Assembly, the Board re-elected the outgoing Executive Committee: Wolfgang Mackiewicz (President), Anne-Claude Berthoud (Vice President), Michael Kelly (Secretary), and Ole Helmersen (Treasurer). In accordance with the policy adopted by the Board elected at the Aarhus General Assembly in 2003, the Executive Committee did not hold separate meetings, except for a virtual meeting in mid-February, which, at the invitation of the President, was also attended by Karen M. Lauridsen.

In addition to the Journal and membership, the Board addressed the following issues.

Articles of Association

Like many European associations, the CEL/ELC is an International Non-profit Organisation (INPO) under Belgian law. It was officially founded in 1997. Four years later, at the General Assembly held at the time of the Berlin EYL2001 Conference, we attempted for the first time to amend the articles of association, which from now on I shall refer to by the French term *statuts*. Some of you will also remember that at the Berlin General Assembly, and at the following meetings held in Aarhus and Copenhagen in 2003 and 2005 respectively, we came up against the problem of not reaching the quorum demanded by Article 18 of the *statuts*, according to which a General Assembly can only vote on amendments to the *statuts* if two thirds of the active members of the association are present. Strictly speaking, “active members” means those members that paid their membership fee before 30 June of the year in question. It has to be admitted that we never applied this regulation literally. Because we failed to reach the necessary quorum in Berlin, Aarhus and Copenhagen, we called two extraordinary General Assemblies, at which the two-thirds quorum does not apply.

Looking back, it is anything but clear to me why we failed to have the amendments agreed at the extraordinary General Assemblies brought into force.

I think one of the main difficulties was that the Belgian law governing INPOs had been changed, and that, being unaware of this, we had failed to take this into consideration when discussing and agreeing our amendments.

At last year’s General Assembly, I felt confident that at long last – as I then put it – a breakthrough had been achieved.

Piet van de Craen had introduced me to a law firm that works for the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, and this firm drew up new *statuts*, incorporating both the amendments agreed by our General Assemblies and changes in the Belgian law governing international associations.

Because of this turn of events, Sandra and I made every effort to ensure that the General Assembly scheduled to be held on 28 September 2007 would reach the necessary quorum. And with 46 members present or represented out of 67 members

that had paid the 2007 membership fee by that date, we seemed to be on safe ground.

Unfortunately, we were in for further disappointments.

Soon after our General Assembly, we were told by the law firm that under Belgian law a General Assembly at which amendments to the association's *status* are to be voted on have to be held in the presence of a public notary.

We were advised to call two further General Assemblies to be held in the office of a public notary identified to us.

The Board discussed the new situation at great length at its mid-June meeting. We felt that we could not possibly go back to our members and tell them that another two General Assemblies – an inquorate meeting and an extraordinary meeting - would be required in order to bring the new *statuts* passed by the 8th General Assembly into force. We decided to consult other Brussels-based INPOs with a view to finding out what procedures they had observed when amending their *statuts*. I shall spare you further details.

You may well ask – is it all worth the effort? I am afraid it is. For one thing, we do have to bring the *statuts* into line with the new Belgian legislation. For another, we need to expand membership to other organisations and individuals, and we have to make voting procedures more manageable so as not to be paralysed by the unrealistic quorums set out in the original *statuts*. In other words, we must resolve the impasse over the *statuts*.

So then, what now? Piet has established contact with a public notary, “a young, pragmatic man”, who has found a way out of this mess.

Communication with Members – the Consultation

In the wake of the mid-February virtual meeting of the Executive Committee, the Board launched the Consultation of CEL/ELC member institutions and organisations which I announced at last year's General Assembly. As I explained in my cover letter, the Board was eager to learn what issues members would wish the Council to address and what activities they would wish the Council to engage in. The consultation was driven by the Board's conviction that ten years after its founding, the CEL/ELC should take a fresh look at its mission and plan new activities for the next five to ten years.

In the event, a total of 31 members completed and returned the questionnaire, among them six Board members. Disappointing though the low return rate may have been, the Board at its mid-June meeting expressed its appreciation of the quality of the responses received. It was felt that five issues stood out. A substantial number of respondents expressed the view that the CEL/ELC should

- (i) support the further development and implementation of institution-wide language policies with a view to promoting lifelong language learning, and language learning among all students;
- (ii) promote closer contacts with the world of work with a view to bringing HE provision more into line with the needs of the labour market;
- (iii) seek to initiate and support research in the area of languages;
- (iv) initiate and support work designed to develop the scope and implementation of the Common European Framework of Reference for

- Languages, notably with a view to professionalizing the assessment of language competences;
- (v) improve its provision of information to members, including improvements to the website.

The Board will continue its discussion of the implications of the Consultation early in the New Year.

Strategy Workshop

Originally, the Board had planned three workshops for 2007-8. In the event, only one of the workshops envisaged could be conducted – a workshop on strategy, held at, and generously supported by the Freie Universität Berlin.

The workshop, prepared by Ole Helmersen, Brigitte Forster-Vosicki, Anne Räsänen, Gail Taillefer, and Ian Tudor, was intended for internal consumption. The idea was that colleagues from member institutions would exchange information about practices in the fields of Europeanisation and internationalisation, language provision under Bologna, and definition of learning outcomes. Daniel Toudic, who allowed himself to be persuaded at short notice to be our *rapporteur*, identified the following fields for action:

- development of a Common European Framework for the training of trainers, including intercultural skills
- development of adaptations of the Common European Framework for languages of the wider world
- a study of or research into the effects of multilingualism and monolingualism on the production and transfer of knowledge
- dissemination of existing, and development of new learning outcome frameworks
- development of strategies for the linguistic and intercultural support of the internationalisation of higher education

Generally speaking, the programme of the workshop was probably *trop riche*. However, the consultation and the workshop taken together should allow us to draw up an action plan for the coming five years or so.

Mission statement

At its 17th meeting held in late January 2007, the Board for the first time decided that it should prepare a new mission statement for the Council. To this end, it convened a small working party comprised of the president, the vice president, the secretary and Karen M. Lauridsen. Those of you who can still remember what happened in the months that followed – preparation of grant applications, a delayed start of TNP3-D, Karen's serious accident – to mention just a few developments – will not be surprised that the group failed to take action. It was not until the June meeting this year that the Board had occasion to seriously consider this issue. The Board agreed that the basis of our future priorities and activities would have to remain the *objet social* set out in our *statuts*. However, it further agreed that a short statement of the Council's vision should be developed, which could be valid for a period of up to five years.

This should be broadly in line with the 'objet social' and should include the following aims of Council activities -

- To have a significant impact on reflection and discussion on issues of language policy in Europe.
- To be recognised as a key interlocutor by the major European institutions, in particular the European Union and the Council of Europe.

- To pursue continuing dialogue with other European organisations with an interest in language issues, to include the EUA and ACA, and perhaps also CERCLES, students' organisations, and ENQA.
- To help institutions of education across Europe to address the issues arising from changes in their multilingual and multicultural contexts, and to encourage collaboration between institutions at European level.

In order to implement this vision, it was agreed that the Council would require a specific programme of actions, which should be reviewed annually. The programme should draw on the CEL/ELC's key strengths in developing policy ideas and in carrying out major policy-related projects. In this context, the Board also agreed that the Council should seek to establish a small number of working groups to reflect on particular policy issues, and that the themes of these groups should be proposed during the course of the forthcoming events – that is to say, the Strategy Workshop, the Forum, this Assemblée Générale, and the next Board meetings.

Hence my idea of special interest groups.

Honorary members

Both the existing *statuts* and the amended *statuts* foresee the possibility of admitting persons as honorary members who are “reconnues pour leur compétence académique et/ou professionnelle dans le domaine des langues”. So far, the Council has admitted one honorary member only – Domenico Lenarduzzi. At its October meeting, the Board decided to invite Sylvia Vlaeminck and Noël Muylle to become honorary members. Unfortunately, due to prior commitments, neither of them can join us here today. So we shall have to find another occasion at which we can present them with the official documents of admission.

Participation of the President in European expert groups and in European meetings

Expert groups

Last year, I told you that I had been invited by the Commissioner for Research to join the Advisory Group on Socio-economic Sciences and the Humanities for the 7th Framework Programme. Advisory groups of this kind are reviewed every two years. The Group in question was reviewed earlier this year. I was invited to continue for another two years, and I was also asked to chair the Group.

In early July, DG Research convened an expert group on Assessment of University-Based Research; I was invited to join and chair this Group. I continue to be a member of the Council of Europe's European Validation Committee, whose mandate is likely to be extended to 2010. I was recently invited by DG EAC to join the EU-China Steering Group on Multilingualism, as was Ineta Dabasinskiene of our new member, Vytautas Magnus University Kaunas.

Jolanta and I were invited by UNICA to join a Language Core Group charged with reflecting on languages and mobility.

Presentations

In the past fourteen months, I have received a substantial number of invitations from the European Institutions, international organisations, and member organisations and institutions to make presentations at seminars and conferences.

I spoke at the second conference organised by the Commission's Directorate-General for Translation, and at an internal seminar organised by the Parliament's Directorate-General for Translation. I spoke at the 2008 CIUTI Forum and the CIUTI

Assemblée Générale. For health reasons, I had to cancel a few other speaking commitments. I know that other members of the Board also spoke at major events. Ian Tudor, for example, spoke about Bologna and multilingualism at a conference organised by the University of Valencia.

Evaluation Committees etc.

Soon after last year's Assemblée Général I was invited to chair a group of external experts charged with the external evaluation of the Ecole de traduction et de l'interprétation at the Université de Genève. And last, but by no means least, I had the honour and pleasure to sit on the committee that was convened to assess Brigitte Forster Vosicki's doctoral thesis entitled *Vers un cadre commun de référence pour les formations en langues dans l'Espace européen d'enseignement supérieur : Les critères de qualité de Bologne et l'enjeu de profils plurilingues et pluriculturel adéquats*.

I have mentioned these activities because they allowed me to raise the profile of the Council. I should be grateful if member representatives could inform our Secretariat in Berlin about similar activities of theirs, which we could then announce on our website.

Let's do everything we can to make the Council even more visible.

Outlook on the future

Over the next two years, many of us will be busy, making sure that our projects will be a success. In addition, plans are underway to prepare a couple of new grant applications, for example an application for a KA2 Multilateral Project for the development of European benchmarks or standards for Mandarin Chinese.

However, by far the most important single event will be the launch of our new Journal in the first half of next year.

I am confident that at long last we shall be able to resolve the saga of the *statuts*. Once this has been accomplished, we shall launch a campaign for the recruitment of new members – universities, schools or school networks, enterprises, and individuals – it is my ambition to become associate member No. 1.

We shall draw up a brief mission statement, taking into account the outcomes of the discussion we are going to have later this morning.

And I hope we shall be able to convene a couple of special interest groups.

I think it is too early to plan our next workshops – they should be planned by the focus groups we are going to create.

However, all this will only make sense, and the Council will only have a future if we succeed in bringing about a generation change. We need to attract more young people who are keen to carry the torch of multilingualism in teaching and research and who share our belief that collaboration at a European level is the best way of developing new ideas and of ensuring continuous innovation.

Thanks

Before I conclude, I should like to express my gratitude to a number of colleagues and Member institutions.

- I should like to thank fellow-members of the Board for their advice, cooperation and support over the past fourteen months.
- I should like to thank Sandra Kosanke for her assistance and support.
- I should like to thank the Hogeschool-Universiteit Brussel and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel for their hosting our meetings this weekend.
- I should like to thank my own University, the Freie Universität Berlin, for its unwavering support, and for continuing generously to sponsor our activities.
- I should like to thank you all for your continuing interest in and support of the activities of the Council.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION.