NETWORK PROJECT FOR THE DECENTRALISED AND CENTRALISED DISSEMINATION OF TNP3 RESULTS AND OUTCOMES (TNP3-D)

Report of the Closing Conference
Current and Future Linguistic Needs of Graduates on the European and International Labour Markets

Brussels, 27 September 2007

The Brussels Conference was the climax of a four-year collaborative effort undertaken by experts from some 90 institutions and organisations from across Europe under the auspices of the EU's Socrates-Erasmus Programme (Thematic Network Project in the Area of Languages III - TNP3 (2003-6); Network project for the decentralised and centralised dissemination of TNP3 results and outcomes – TNP3-D (2006-7). The experts had sought to establish which language-related and intercultural skills and competences are required of higher education graduates – language specialists and non-specialists – on the European and international labour markets. Experts had also sought to reach a clearer understanding of what structures for consultation and collaboration were desirable and required - to enable universities to adjust their programmes and offerings to changing and emerging needs and to allow employers to gain a better understanding of current and future trends.

The results of TNP3 were presented at four decentralised dissemination conferences. The discussions conducted at these conferences provided an even clearer picture of regional differences and European trends (cf. regional conference reports). The Brussels Conference was designed as a forum for the presentation for discussion of major outcomes of TNP3 and of the TNP3-D regional conferences; in the event, some xxx participants from within and outside the TNP3-D partnership participated in the event.

The Conference attracted a high level of attention. Participants were addressed by two Members of the European Commission: Mr Ján Figel', Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth, and Mr Leonard Orban, Commissioner for Multilingualism (cf. Appendices 1 and 2).

The Conference focussed on two of the three TNP3 sub-themes: *Languages for language-related industries and professions*, and *Languages for enhanced opportunities on the European labour market*. Pertinent findings and outcomes of TNP3 and of the four TNP3-D regional conferences were presented by Elisabeth M Lillie (University of Ulster, UK) and Célio Conceição (Universidade do Algarve, PT)

(cf. Appendices 5 and 6). The wider context of the Conference was mapped out by Arthur Mettinger in his capacity as Chair of the Conference Organising Committee and Wolfgang Mackiewicz, TNP3-D Coordinator (cf. Appendices 3 and 4).

At the heart of the Conference were three panels focussing on higher education provision, requirements of the labour market, and consultation and collaboration between higher education and enterprise respectively. The panels were chaired by Mr Germain Dondelinger (Director at the Luxembourg Ministry for Culture, Higher Education and Research), Mr David Coyne (Director at the European Commission's DG for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities) and Mr Lid King (National Director for Languages, Department for Children, Schools and Families, UK). Panellists had been provided with detailed briefing notes agreed between the project coordinator and the panel chairs. The notes were designed to relate TNP3/TNP3-D outcomes to the policies, aims, practices, and experiences of key stakeholder representatives (cf. Appendix E).

Panel One, which was devoted to the theme of *Languages in higher education for mobility and employability,* focused on the frequently observed discrepancy between the language requirements resulting from the Bologna aims of mobility and sustainable employability, and a lack of appropriate language-related policies, strategies and practices in higher education institutions across Europe. More specifically, the panel was expected to establish to what extent the consultative members of the Bologna Follow-up Group representing university institutions and organisations – EUA, EURASHE, and EUS – are committed to promoting individual multilingualism and linguistic diversity. (Unfortunately, the representative of the Council of Europe invited withdrew from the panel at short notice.) In addition, the panel was to provide an opportunity for the presentation of a pertinent case study: Campus Europae's declared policy on promoting student mobility and language learning – where the main interest was on the degree to which this policy had been implemented by the members of the consortium, and had met with a positive response from stakeholders. In other words, Panel One looked at the higher education side of the multilingualism coin.

Mr Stefan Delplace, representing EURASHE, backed the findings of TNP3 and of recent studies that SMEs, the traditional employers of graduates from non-university higher education institutions, had become international players, requiring staff with multilingual skills. He also confirmed one of the findings of the TNP3 consultation conducted among graduates, i.e. that a substantial percentage of young graduates seek and find employment abroad. He expressed the view that multilingual competence was becoming increasingly important – both for graduates' opportunities on the labour market and for employers.

Mr Delplace also reflected on the linguistic implications of student mobility. Himself a speaker of one of the EU's less widely spoken and less taught languages, he commented on the fact that institutions located in regions or countries where "small" languages are spoken, tended to be less popular destinations than institutions in big-language countries. He mapped out a scenario for the learning of "small" languages,

expressing the view that students who had learned one of these languages through mobility had found this a rewarding experience.

On the whole, Mr Delplace agreed with the rationale underlying TNP3/TNP3-D, i.e. that multilingual competence enhances graduates' opportunities on the labour market, and that languages are important for enterprise. Although he did not seem to be aware of any specific policies and practices in place in member institutions designed to encourage and promote language learning among students, he expressed himself firmly in favour of integrating languages into curricula. He regretted that the introduction of ECTS as a credit accumulation system had in many cases had a negative effect on institutions' language programmes; because of this, it was all the more necessary to raise students' awareness of the importance of multilingual skills to their future careers, and to provide appropriate and effective guidance to students.

Like Mr Delplace, Mr Bartlomiej Banaszak, representing EUS, stressed the overarching importance of student mobility, and of multilingual skills. He expressed concern about what he regarded as an increasing commercialisation of HE language teaching, making the point that the financial aspect of HE language provision needed to be addressed. He expressed the view that the percentage of mobile students was too low, and that languages and financial constraints constituted the principal obstacles to mobility. He also felt that the less widely used and less taught languages were not sufficiently promoted.

While both Mr Banaszak and Mr Delplace stressed the importance of language learning and language skills for student mobility and employability, Mr Michael Hörig, representing EUA, seemed to be primarily interested in measures designed to facilitate the use of English as a medium of instruction, seeing this as an effective way of furthering the internationalisation of European higher education. He played down the fact that the EUA's Institutional Evaluation Programme encourages universities to develop and implement an institutional language policy.

Campus Europae (CE), a TNP3-D partner, had been invited to participate in the panel because the consortium seeks to promote student mobility through an ambitious language policy; both mobility experience and a high level of language competence are thought to be crucial to employability on the European labour market. Ms Gillian Moreira of the Universidade de Aveira presented CE's strategy for languages and mobility, which is a combination of language preparation at the sending institution, intensive pre-sessional language tuition at the host institution, language support during the entire period of study abroad, the use of English as an interim language of instruction, the award of credits for successful language learning, and full integration of study abroad. At the same time, Ms Moreira sounded a note of caution. She expressed the view that both higher education institutions and employers needed to be made more fully aware of the benefits and added value of linguistic and intercultural competences – a clear warning that the adoption of institutional policies may not in itself be a guarantee that the view that linguistic competence is relevant to both employability and competitiveness and that, because

of this, universities should introduce measures designed to promote language learning, is universally shared.

The panel chair, Mr Germain Dondelinger, himself the head of a Luxembourg-based company, explained that when it came to making new appointments – he had made 20 new appointments in the previous year – multilingual skills are regarded as a competitive edge. He summed up the panel discussion and the contributions from the floor as follows:

- students should be involved in the planning of language provision
- students should be advised on the importance of multilingual and intercultural skills
- language teaching to non-specialists should be offered free of charge
- a given institution's language policy has to go hand in hand with its recruitment policy
- a given university's mission has to include an institutional language policy
- language provision should become part of curriculum development
- multilingual competence includes L1 competence; students should be made aware of the importance of mastery of their L1
- consideration needs to be given to the specific learning outcomes of language programmes for non-specialists – possibly in relation to "The framework of qualifications for the EHEA" and other qualification frameworks
- motivation is of crucial importance to language learning; this also applies to HE students

Panel Two was designed to elicit responses from specialist and non-specialist employers to the findings of TNP3/TNP3-D regarding *linguistic, language-related, and cultural skills and competences required of higher education graduates on the European labour market*.

The non-specialist sector was represented by a major international corporation, a small enterprise based in one of the new Member States, and a Brussels-based non-governmental organisation.

Ms Irena Lemut Čeh, general manager of a small Ljubljana-based enterprise trading in and producing highly specialised technical equipment, notably equipment for the medical field, painted a picture that largely confirmed the findings of TNP3/TNP3-D consultations. The employees of the company are fairly young, highly educated people with degrees in engineering, hard sciences, economics, molecular biology, and food technology. Proficiency in other languages is highly important. Members of staff have to be able to speak the language of the customer – Serbian, Croatian, and Macedonian -, and they have to be fluent in English, the language used by the companies whose products they sell. Members of staff also undergo training organised by producer companies, and in this context, German, Italian, and French, and increasingly Spanish are required. The company often has difficulty in finding the right kind of candidates – people who have the technical background required and, at the same time, have the necessary intercultural and linguistic skills. If need be, newly hired staff are required to take language courses.

Ms Michaela Seidel-Braun of the DaimlerChrysler Corporate Academy in Stuttgart gave an overview of the policies and practices regarding the use of languages inside what was then DaimlerChrysler, of the language profiles of the various staff categories, and of the Academy's language training programme in place in Germany. While the corporate languages were German and English, sales people needed other languages as well. The following points stood out in her contributions:

- engineers often do not have any English at all
- emphasis is placed on what staff can do in English – or another language, for that matter -, and not what they know of the language; hence, language training at the Academy is output oriented
- universities still put too much weight on such things as grammar and literary studies
- at managerial level, staff were expected to have what Ms Seidel-Braun called international English, plus intercultural skills
- intercultural training was not a matter of teaching dos and don'ts; rather, trainees should be guided to discover their own values; they should understand which values are negotiable and which values they should forget about
- "register" and "politeness" are of great importance
- language is just a tool – no more, but no less
- higher education institutions should ask students who have done work placements for feedback, so that they can bring students' experiences to bear on their own language training

Mr Diogo Pinto, representing the European Youth Forum, an INGO comprised of more than 90 national and international organisations with a total of more than 80 million individual members, told conference participants that English was not enough. The staff at EYF's Brussels headquarters needed to have English and French. His organisation had to rely on the translation of documents. He expressed himself in favour of promoting multilingualism; in this context, he specifically mentioned the languages spoken in South Europe.

Ms Elizabeth Robertson, speaking on behalf of the European Union of Associations of Translation Companies (EUATC) and herself the director of a translation company, largely confirmed the findings of TNP3/TNP3-D regarding changes and changing needs in the language industry. However, she also pointed out that we lack a complete picture of the language industry in Europe, as we do not have any statistics on freelance translators and interpreters. Ms Robertson specifically mentioned the following developments:

- There are significant changes in the languages that figure prominently in translation. For example, Japanese has been overtaken by Chinese.
- More and more translation into English is done by non-native speakers.
- Speed is now the most important factor in translation work.
- Software is the basis of translation today.

Ms Gailė Dagilienė introduced the Translation Centre for bodies of the European Union (CdT) in Luxembourg, whose operation very much resembles that of commercial translation agencies, in that the Centre heavily relies only has some 100

in-house translators and heavily relies on freelance translators. She highlighted a number of points that had been stressed at the regional conferences, but also introduced a few additional ones. For example, she thought that the most important qualification required of a translator was "curiosity of mind", i.e. a willingness to explore the unknown. At least as important was an excellent command of the mother tongue. As regards specialisation, she felt that there would always be a need for two different types of translators – flexible generalists, who can switch from one topic to another, and highly specialised translators. In a similar way, she suggested that there was a need for multilingual translators with a command of a number of "popular" languages, as well as for translators with rare language combinations, who can command a small, but important segment of the market. In summarising her intervention, she stressed the importance of the following competences: an inquisitive mind; an excellent command of the L1; speed and flexibility; broad general knowledge or a highly specialised knowledge.

Ms Nolwenn Kerzreho, a recent graduate from Rennes II now working as a technical writer for an IT services provider in France, talked about her principal tasks, which include the preparation of user guides, proof-reading, and terminology. Not surprisingly, in this highly specialised segment of the market, English is the no. 1 language. She confirmed Ms Seidel-Braun's statement regarding the wide-spread lack of English among engineers.

Because of the different backgrounds of the panellists, there were only a few general issues that evolved from their contributions, and from the interventions from the floor.
- Both in the specialist market and in the labour market in general, language is not enough to ensure a successful career. Young people have to have sound knowledge of something else. It is the combination of linguistic competence and a sound command of established knowledge in a particular field that makes all the difference.
- In translation, rare language combinations can be an asset.
- General language teaching and the training of language specialists have to reflect real language use, and language mediation in the market.
- Collaboration between higher education institutions and the market is desirable, but not always easy to arrange, as employers are reluctant to free up time for this purpose.
- The qualifications of teachers and trainers are of fundamental importance.
- Language teaching should be closely linked to intercultural training.

Panel Three focused on the key transversal issue TNP3/TNP3-D sought to address, i.e. *consultation and collaboration between universities and other stakeholders.* Representatives of the social partners, of pertinent European higher education networks, and of the European Commission were requested to reflect on the potential and limitations of structured consultation and collaboration – notably with regard to aims, actors, and levels and contexts.

Ms Irene Seling, representing BUSINESSEUROPE, came out strongly in favour of structured dialogue between universities and enterprises. In this context, she

mentioned the fact that in Germany it is now common for representatives of enterprises to sit on university boards and committees, including programme boards, where together with university people they engage in the development and innovation of curricula. At the same time, she felt that especially in Germany universities have so far failed to expand their offerings to include continuing education – ranging from individual modules to complete part-time masters. She expressed the view that employers were ready to cooperate with universities in the development of such offerings.

Mr Mats Pahlman of EUROCADRES was at pains to point out that his organisation and its European and national member organisations, representing professional and managerial staff, were keenly interested in improving the exchange of information between the social partners and higher education (institutions) at all levels with a view to, among other things, better matching higher education programmes to the needs of employers and of professional and managerial staff. He pointed out that EUROCADRES regards itself as a stakeholder in the processes designed to lead to the creation of the European Higher Education Area and of the European Research Area.

Ms Kristina Cunnigham of DGEAC's Multilingualism Policy Unit spoke in the wake of the "Languages mean Business" Conference organised by the Commissioner for Multilingualism. The Conference was intended as a first step towards a structured dialogue between the Commissioner and European business leaders. Ms Cunningham told those present that most speakers at the Conference had referred to the crucial role of universities in making sure that graduates had the necessary language skills. She expressed the view that, generally speaking, both the education sector and enterprise needed to become much more active. She made a significant distinction between large companies and SMEs. While the former were fully aware of their linguistic needs, but had in many cases failed to communicate these needs to the education sector, SMEs were not always aware of the competitive edge to be gained by investing in multilingual staff and language strategies. She called on universities to carry out research, at local, regional and national level, on the relevance of language skills to business success; companies could only be convinced by facts and figures. She also reported that during the Conference it had become clear that companies tend to have difficulty in developing pertinent practices on their own. Ms Cunningham suggested that local platforms be created where businesses, education providers and local authorities could identify linguistic needs and discuss how to meet these needs. She felt that this would be particularly important for SMEs unable to invest in language training themselves.

The higher education sector was represented by the coordinators of two European network projects for whom consultation and collaboration with enterprise is a major concern.

Mr Doru Talaba of the EUE-Net Network expressed the view that collaboration between higher education and enterprise needed to be expanded and improved. He singled out three areas for special mention: (i) Quality assurance regarding

internships, especially internships abroad; (ii) a kind of European barometer for professional profiles of graduates, and job profiles sought after on the labour market; (iii) non-formal and informal training for entrepreneurs offered by universities. Mr Talaba made the point that the issue of multilingualism was relevant to all three areas. He expressed himself in favour of (i) the assessment of language skills acquired during internships abroad; (ii) a multilingual format of the barometer envisaged; (iii) the inclusion of linguistic and intercultural competences in training schemes for entrepreneurs. He seemed to be of the opinion that language and intercultural training should be more closely integrated.

Mr Robert Wagenaar of the Tuning Project described a consultation on transferable skills / generic competences carried out within the Project by means of a questionnaire among employers, graduates, and academics. He emphatically made the point that Tuning members are agreed that universities should consult relevant social and professional groups before elaborating or reformulating their degree programmes. However, in referring to the fact that both the employers and the graduates consulted had ranked "international competences", such as "understanding of cultures and customs of other countries", "knowledge of a second language", and "ability to work in an international context" relatively low, Mr Wagenaar admitted that one could not ignore the question as to whether there are generic competences that are particularly relevant to emerging needs; it was important to try to look into the future in an attempt to anticipate future developments.

While there was broad agreement on the need to improve and expand consultation and collaboration between universities and employers, there was some divergence of views as to the precise format and purpose of such consultation and collaboration. Without doubt, universities would be well advised to seek to obtain a clearer picture of the competences required by employers and of graduates. However, the panel also confirmed a view that TNP3/TNP3-D partners had come to share during the course of their cooperation, i.e. that consultation cannot be a one-way process. Universities have research potential and expertise that enables them themselves to reach a thorough understanding of current and future linguistic and intercultural needs of graduates and employers; they should carry out such research, and, if at all possible, they should do so jointly with employers. In all this, universities have to bear in mind that we live at a time of increasingly rapid change. For example, the linguistic landscape of Europe has changed beyond recognition within a matter of years, as has communication inside Europe and between Europe and other parts of the world. Needless to say, the increasing speed at which new developments come about must have a direct bearing on the consultation methods applied. Otherwise there is a danger that a consultation will provide information about yesterday's, rather current or emerging needs.

In her closing address, Karen M Lauridsen (TNP3-D Deputy Coordinator) mentioned a number of issues that require further reflection and action.

(i)   TNP3/TNP3-D had revealed that when it comes to linguistic and intercultural needs, the situation varies from country to country and even within one and the same locality. This plus the fact that further change could be expected in years to come raised the question as to how education in general, and higher education in particular could prepare students for life and work in linguistically unpredictable environments.

(ii)   Language learners and users had a wider range of tools and resources at their disposal than ever before; additional tools and resources would become available in the future. Were we doing enough to enable students to make appropriate use of these tools and resources?

(iii) How did the Council of Europe's *Common European Framework of Reference* relate to the *European Qualifications Framework* and the *Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area?* – a question raised but not really addressed in Panel 1.

(iv)   And finally, on what basis could we decide what in all this was the responsibility of the education systems, and what should be the responsibility of the work place or of students and graduates themselves? Lifelong learning had to be linked to the concept of work-based learning – a key factor in pursuit of the aim of ensuring the sustainable employability of university graduates.

Karen M Lauridsen commented on the fact that the Brussels Conference marked the end of more than twelve years of European university cooperation in the area of languages. These years have seen significant, if not dramatic changes in the non-university environments, accompanied by an increasing awareness of the importance of education in general, and higher education in particular to Europe's economic performance, social cohesion in our societies, and sustainable employability. The cooperation networks provided clear evidence of the fact that through European cooperation we can gain a clearer understanding of the needs resulting from the said changes – however different the precise needs may be when looked at across Europe -, and that through engaging in joint reflection we can find solutions to new challenges. Perhaps most important, through European cooperation we came to realise that universities have a responsibility – for their students and graduates, and for society as a whole. We, the higher education languages community must and will never lose sight of this responsibility.