



Network project for the decentralised and centralised dissemination of TNP3 results and outcomes

SYNTHESIS REPORT “EAST” (SUB-PROJECT 2)

Languages for Enhanced Opportunities on the European Labour Market

Introduction

This updated regional synthesis report for Eastern Europe should be read against the general background provided in chapter two of the TNP3-D Dissemination Document, in which the main results of TNP3 are presented under four headlines, i.e.: changes in the labour market, evolving and emerging language needs as a result of a new labour market context, innovative curricular offerings and consultation/collaboration between higher education (HE) and professional stakeholders to meet the new needs, and recommendations to carry professional language development further. The present updated regional synthesis report was meant to cover recent developments in eight countries: Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. However, national updates are only available for four of these: Austria, Germany, Poland, and Slovakia, and therefore the following cannot present a complete picture of the situation in Eastern Europe. However, partly also based on the data and experience submitted in the regional reports covering the other three regions identified by TNP3-D, it is probably safe to say that many of the trends and developments described below, based on the available four national updates, will most likely also cover the remaining four countries.

It should be pointed out, though, that the situation in the labour markets, the educational systems and as regards emerging needs is different in some of the countries covered by this report, due to political and economic background and educational traditions, and due to the fact that two of the countries covered here were EU12 member states, while six have become members more recently in the EU25 enlargement.

Economic, societal and labour market development

Briefly summarised, the TNP3-D Dissemination Document characterises today's European labour market as being influenced by globalisation and the expansion of Europe itself which has led to a movement of labour-intensive manufacturing

processes towards lower-cost countries. Consequently, the demand for linguistically and interculturally well qualified and mobile labour is increasing in highly skilled occupations, calling for increased flexibility, re-training and upskilling. Working teams have become internationalised, multicultural, interdisciplinary with a tendency to make organisational structures flat, which calls for well organised team work and implies more interaction, exchange and negotiation.

This general trend is also reflected in the present regional synthesis report. The most obvious and overarching general phenomena in the development of all countries involved are rapid internationalisation, or globalisation, pervasiveness of ICT, and growing economic prosperity. In the more recent EU countries covered here, these developments together with the opening up of the European labour market, have caused substantial mobility of the workforce, increasing foreign investment, decrease of unemployment (partly due to emigration) and heightened needs for language and communication skills in order to cope with the multilingual and multicultural contacts in basically all professions.

Economic growth rates, as mentioned in the national update reports, run at almost 8.3% in Slovakia, 6.5% in Poland, 2.4% in Austria and accompanying decreases in unemployment rate, although some countries (Slovakia: 10.8% and Poland 10.5%) are still behind the 7.4% European average average of 7.4% (May 2007), whereas the figure for Austria was 3.4%. When the unemployment figures are further broken down by education levels, there is an expected common trend in all countries. The higher education people have gained, the lower percentage among the unemployed they represent.

Both Poland and the Slovak Republic attracted a large number of foreign investors with over 67 and 40 bn euros, respectively, from EU funds that will be invested mostly in infrastructure. It can also be mentioned here, that efforts are being made in the whole region within V4 initiatives to earmark Lisbon related expenditure. It will presumably result in investing in new technologies, promoting many new and specific activities. It is taken for granted that outsourcing, cross-cultural mergers, strategic alliances and off-shore businesses will mushroom.

Such mobility may be on a frequent short-term basis, or on a more permanent one. But economic migration also concerns less skilled employment, translating as a need for language competences and intercultural understanding at more basic levels as well. Overall, the business context includes trade both within the EU and outside, carried out by large, medium and small companies of both national and multinational natures. Competition, performance and productivity are the driving forces across all countries, encouraging all states to reach optimal levels of participation in the labour market.

In proportions varying according to the country concerned, there is an influence of the expansion of Europe itself with a strong tendency of labour-intensive manufacturing process being shifted to lower-cost countries. This creates

different requirements for graduates' profile. One of the examples can be automotive industry in Slovakia that has several assembly plants across the country, rolling out 3 different car makes. This tendency creates demand for secondary school graduates with technical and language skills, rather than university graduates of any specific profile.

The increasing number of immigrants in all the EU27 countries has started a transformation from mono-cultural to multicultural societies and working environments. At the same time the mobility of native experts, mainly highly educated ones, is rising and currently represents a new group of expats that accounts for nearly one million of Poles and 400 thousand Slovaks. In Poland, this has given rise to serious concerns about the fact that a large proportion of the workforce has moved to live and work abroad and has led to serious shortages in workforce emerging in certain fields so that many companies encourage incoming foreign workers. Several Western EU member states lifted embargo on hiring specialists from new member states imposed after the enlargement process. It should be mentioned, too, that language graduates are increasingly pushed to be employed outside language related industries and they receive positions requiring language expertise as technical writers, webmasters, translators and interpreters, PR and HR managers.

Finally, it is worth mentioning here that nearly all the updated reports mentioned that their states adopt protective measures for the national language

2. Evolving and emerging language needs

This second question raised by TNP3 points out five key needs. As presented in the Dissemination Document, there is first of all heightened awareness of the professional relevance of linguistic and intercultural competences. The need for such competences implies serious reflection on which languages, which skills and to what levels; English alone is clearly inadequate, but is often taken for granted; as such it indeed has a special status. A second need in the challenge of defining what work-related language competency means: needs depend on many factors such as the language itself, the country, the specific level of job and professional area, etc. More precise needs analyses are clearly necessary, particularly regarding the relation of "general" language to "specific" language. Thirdly, the corollary is then the need to link such perceived situations of professional language use to actual foreign language skills and competences as learning (and teaching) targets. This need leads in turn to refocusing teacher training in order to meet new, lifelong, learner needs. Finally, both for students and for teachers, there is seen to be a need for knowledge of the language learning process itself and of language systems (both "neighbouring" and otherwise).

In formerly mono-cultural countries, such as Poland and Slovakia, the ability to understand cultural complexity and to communicate with people from other cultures have often not been accorded much priority by education policies.

Rather, to achieve competence in foreign languages and insight in their cultures has traditionally been perceived as the individual's own responsibility. However, no specific data regarding the needs of employers in the two countries are included in the national updates.

In Germany figures indicate that about 75% of all business enterprises have international contacts and that 37% of these regularly need foreign language competence and knowledge of foreign markets. Demand for rare languages is a new phenomenon linked to exporting and importing activities of companies, which requires language and cultural competences in Arabic, Russian, Chinese and other Asian languages. A recent study carried out by the German Chamber of Trade and Commerce show that 77% of business enterprises respond that the university graduates they want to employ ought to possess competence in at least two foreign languages. Other figures indicate that on average only 21% of all employees need foreign languages in a professional context. In Austria the corresponding average figure is 33%. However, these figure increases with the level of education and thereby with type of job.

With regard to university graduates it is possible to identify three different qualities and ranges of linguistic competences: 1) excellent written and oral mastery; 2) working knowledge allowing for independent and proactive work on materials, participation in discussions, meetings; or 3) limited knowledge giving confidence to reactively follow all types of communication in a foreign language. There is a consensus that the ability to establish and retain work relations with people of different nationalities and from different cultural backgrounds is based on professional socialising, which is fully developed without the presence or intervention of mediators and it originates and grows due to a proactive approach of both parties having excellent or working knowledge of the target language and being successful in communication.

In Austria there is a new demand for Slavonic languages and Italian. This change has been caused by lack of demand for and provision of German language in the neighbouring, Eastern European countries. Methodology and experience of call centres gave rise to new commercial offers to compensate for the shortage of linguistically prepared staff. Modelled information exchange, conditional options, recognised and addressed in a foreign language inspired many service providers to apply the same methodology to their regular conversational model activities without investing much time and money into language education of those employees positioned at the lower end of the hierarchy. They try to link pragmatically step by step a foreign language, both professionally and socially, to real communication situations which their staff has to cope with. There is no doubt that these people can hardly use proactive approach mentioned above, hopefully, it will promote their regular and proper language learning in future.

This overall situation makes private language schools flourish, inviting all age groups to be their clients. As for the demand for particular languages, the hegemonic position of English is indisputable, but also other European and non-

European languages are being offered. From survival skill levels to highest level of CEFR, as a part of their aggressive marketing, can be found among the offerings of both groups of languages.

Higher Educational Institutions stick with their “traditional” approach accelerated by exchange programmes. Undergraduates do accept the necessity of a career plan where foreign language competences have a firm position with the process of a language acquisition being heavily supported by the use of ICT. There are some differences in the region, e.g. Germany and Poland have included a wide range of foreign languages into their offerings. HEIs` budgets in the Slovak Republic, however, do not allow for a wide range of foreign languages due to continuous cuts and amendments to the Act on HEIs. Learning less widely taught or rare languages is predominantly based on individual career ambitions. In the whole region, all HEIs, certify languages according to CEFR, and, depending on the programme, two or three foreign languages are made available for students, if not obligatory. However, the pedagogy and practical teaching of plurilingual competences in the framework of life long learning is developing only slowly in many of the countries covered in this report. On the whole, though, it is possible to identify a trend showing that both language specialist studies and non-language study programmes are getting attuned to the labour market needs thanks to the fact that linguistic and intercultural competence are being sought by employers.

3. Curriculum innovation

Across most European countries, including the countries dealt with in this report, competence in at least one foreign language is generally a desired or required part of a university degree, although actual teaching of or ECTS-recognition of language course is far from the rule everywhere. There is a certain evolution in language training, breaking down barriers between modern language degree programmes and those targeting specialists of other disciplines; the former tend to branch out to other disciplines, the latter include increasing exposure to languages.

Specifically, in the Eastern European countries, serious content changes based on the implemented Bologna process can be identified. However, integration of the development of language and communication competence outside specific language programmes in university programmes is still insufficient. Yet, there are some examples of good practice. For instance, the newly amended act on HEIs in Austria has created favourable conditions for students who opt for a language among several available.

In the bachelor degree programmes at German HEIs, there is a new offering: The so- called ABV (general occupational preparations) with 6 professionally focused competences in the framework of 30 credits of which 5 to 15 must be practically oriented. Similarly, in the Slovak republic and Austria, business and European studies faculties encourage their students to study a third foreign

language with a lowered number of lessons. Also students' specializations have changed, so that they are frequently combined either with another field of study or with a foreign language.

Another substantial change has occurred in university programmes provided in a foreign language. The language of instruction is more often than before a different European language than English, e.g. at Mannheim University, Germany, there is a complex programme offering master degree in French combined with an exchange scheme and work placement for students in France. This is one of examples how to bridge the gap between study and work. In the new curricula, methodologies of teaching concentrate on acquiring several aspects of the language, i.e. grammar accuracy, phonetic accuracy, idiomatic use of the language, authentic vocabulary, phraseology as common components of general language. Students often get the best possibilities to familiarize themselves with these aspects in connection with studying in a foreign country with the target language spoken as an official language. Therefore, it is attempted to make such stays compulsory within the programmes. Although students' work load is currently facing a barrier constituted by lack of time and space, subject based field terminology as a part of language for specific purposes, is included in all programmes. It must be emphasised, however, that refined language of a specialist requires a lot of reading and networking in the professional field to incorporate terminology into his/her active vocabulary. Foreign language education at HEIs must not neglect creating opportunities in work placement schemes and in the near future necessary steps should be taken to make all these analysed general and professional aspects obligatory within the undergraduate preparation. Simultaneously, the students' awareness about the mentioned issues must be raised and their involvement encouraged.

Even though it is important for universities to track their graduates' career, there is no official alumni organisation in Slovakia, nor in Poland, whereas both German and Austrian universities have made solid progress. In order to survey needs of regional enterprises Students' Career Centres have been established. They liaise between students, universities and companies and their experience gives an opportunity to update programmes.

For instance, as an example of good practice, Vienna University Alumni Club provides regular contacts and feedback from the alumni. Members of the club are top representatives of industries and Vienna university and they contribute to a national paper published by the club. More than 800 graduates are invited to annual meetings enabling communication with academia and work places. Seven EU member states and one on the American continent act as relay points for alumni living and working nearby.

So far, very few new study programmes are being designed to address the intercultural issues in general. These are currently fragmented into departments of particular language and culture, but no synergy effects have been made use of.

The brief account given above clearly underscores the need to conduct university audits to track show they cater for language learning. In none of the countries of the region have the elaboration of explicit higher education language policies become systematized, although there are notable exceptions in some universities in some of the countries.

4. Consultation/collaboration between HEIs and their social partners to meet new needs.

Despite increased exposure to languages in the university context and everyday use of language skills in the companies where graduates are working, the case often is that graduates' language competences turn out to be underused. Many companies still employ specialised in-house translation departments or outsource the translation of official texts, documents or promotion materials into foreign languages to external specialists, although hiring an expert, who also has a good command of a required foreign language, as part of companies' permanent staff could result in significant cost cutting on language specialist.

The growing awareness on the part of all stakeholders can intensify professional insertion of graduates after joining their first employers. The importance of constant dialogue is very important, in some countries it is also legislatively enforced. The newly amended act on HEIs in Slovakia has increased the powers of supervisory boards that are composed of representatives of the labour market. It is expected that in this way market needs will be transposed into curriculum and pedagogical changes more efficiently.

The European Language Portfolio is available in 5 languages English, French, Slovak, German and Polish. All versions are validated by The Council Of Europe and represent the transparent lifelong documentation of language and intercultural competences and experiences. If compiled for a longer time, it might reveal undergraduates profile of skills, formal and informal education, exposure to languages abroad for situations relevant to future job descriptions. However, the ELP is still not considered by the companies as a tool for recognition of language proficiency. Neglecting its potential, at the same time employers fail to appreciate self-directed language learning, which can be observed in detail when you study an individual's language portfolio. Last but not least, the ELP also unveils a lot information about candidate's perseverance and determination, which are prediction factors for success in the career development.

There is a concern to ensure transparency and legibility of completed educational programmes. Mutual recognition of qualifications, including language degrees and certificates is essential to optimal utilization of the workforce. The reports mention, however, that difficulties in recognition may exist at the national level as well. Seemingly, employers' framework of

reference as regards language certificates tends to be quite traditional and out of step with modern demands. Moreover, employers often rely on their own assessment and verification of language competences, e.g. by interviewing the candidates in the foreign language and playing simulation games. This gives them information about limited range of language skills, on the other hand it offers additional information about the candidate's potential and personality traits. Neither standardized formal language certificates nor non-standardized testing during the interview of candidates, take into account that teamwork, project management, technical communication, documentation, intercultural communication belong, after harmonisation of HEIs curricula across the EU, to a graduate's broader profile that will be manifested in real practice.

Smaller countries' perception is that language proficiency in several languages is an important factor for career development or promotion in the corporate hierarchy, and, last but not least, can be a source of financial advantage. Many graduates have international certificates and there is a regional office LUCE for the accreditation of language programmes in Unicert.

Lifelong language learning should continue after joining a company. Even though companies are organising in-house language courses, mainly in business and legal English, the corporate training philosophy is focused on practical tasks and related skills and does not result in systematic development of generic language learning competences. While professional mother tongue communication skills and competences are improving their foreign language equivalents lag behind. Regular appraisal carried out in companies also seldom leads to plurilingual initiatives.

5. Recommendations to carry professional language development further.

The Dissemination Document makes four major recommendations: language training needs to focus on output (language and intercultural competences necessary in the labour market) rather than on the more traditional input (content). This output must be thought of in terms of CEFR levels and descriptors, and must further develop the latter in terms of language for specific/professional purposes, along the lines of the EQF. In order to accurately assess just what this output corresponds to, however, regular career tracking and needs analyses must be carried out, with results then informing the language training offer. Finally, specific thought must also be given to the choice of languages offered, and their levels, in a plurilingual spirit. A paradox observed is that with the expansion in the number of persons entering HE across Europe—a reflection of the (new) need for a greater number of more highly educated persons in a knowledge-based economy—it is not clear to what extent students have a clear view of their professional /academic goals, including the role of languages

Based on the national reports submitted for this subproject, there seems to be no doubt that there is space for many types of actions within individual countries

if the aims of making languages play a key role on the European labour market are to be fulfilled. The reports document necessity not only strengthen consultation between academia and the world of work, but also among institutions of higher education across the EU.

In proportion varying according to the country concerned, further neglect of multicultural, multilingual and interdisciplinary issues at work, might result in decreased efficiency and productivity, which the European labour market cannot afford in the global competition. There is no doubt that the special status of English and its dominance worldwide as the language of business, science, entertainment, etc. will continue. However, English is frequently far from enough. Speaking clients' languages will create psychological advantage and contribute towards successful intercultural interaction. This calls for national and institutional language policies, that will contribute to achieving the goal to become knowledge-based competitive Europe. The drawing up of university language policies is an important tool in this area.

The adopted policy would naturally require facilities, among them those which would enable students to become fairly independent of time and place in their study behaviour. Provision of independent learning possibilities, self-access resources, e-learning, all in combination with revised curricula where language and communication competences are integrated in the teaching of other disciplines.

At HEIs special attention must be paid to language for specific purposes along with the particular field within European Qualification Framework of Reference. We can presume that non-European languages connected with prospective business clients and markets, outsourcing and further cooperation will highlight the necessity to acquire language and cultural competences.

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Sources

This report is based on:

Updates of national reports by Martin Stegu and Herbert Angermeyer,
Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien, AT

Guido Mensching and Robert Hagen, Freie Universität Berlin, DE

Jolanta Urbanikowa, Uniwersitet Warszawski, PL

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Annex: Case study on the enhancement of graduates' opportunities on the European / international labour market

Country: Poland

- *Expert submitting the case study:*

Jolanta Urbanikowa, Uniwersitet Warszawski

Date of completion of case study: 27 July 2007

WARSAW UNIVERSITY LANGUAGE PROVISION SYSTEM (USNJO)

The USNJO has been established as a result of the Resolution no 341 of June 2005 of the Senate of Warsaw University on the University System provision and Language Proficiency Certification crowning a number of successive Rector's regulations adding up to university language policy.

Languages for all first cycle students (including in-coming students);

Minimum exit requirement: B2 acc. CEFR in one language a sine qua non for the award of a diploma; exam taken at Warsaw University or recognition of certificates recognised by ALTE; the requirement anticipated the new Decree of the Minister of Science and Higher Education (12 July 2007) on minimum curricular requirements whereby B2 level was introduced as an obligatory exit level for all fields of study in the first cycle.

Polish language courses for in-coming students;

Sing language included in the offering

ECTS credits

A joint offering of 50 languages by a consortium consisting of the Centre for Foreign Language Teaching, the Faculty of Applied Linguistics and East-Slavonic Studies, Faculty of Modern Languages, Faculty of Polish Studies, Institute of Oriental Studies, Centre for Open and Multimedia education, Centre for Foreign language Teacher Training and European Education;

Conventional courses (general and special purposes) and on-line courses (Moodle educational platform);

Framework syllabus: in reference to CEFR

Target levels: in terms of CEFR

On-line registration for courses and examinations and tracking students achievements by a University Support System of Studies (software and database) (USOS)

On-line placement tests (Moodle) coupled with the registration system.

Access: a language ticket of 240 hours (tokens) to be used during the first cycle studies, financed from the university budget;

Free choice of level and language;

Dialang also recommended as a placement tool along with the in-house on-line placement tests;

Certification: examinations offered twice a year (A2, B1 in less widely used languages, B2, C1, C2 in popular languages); tests designed by experts from language studies faculties in co-operation with experts from the Centre for

Foreign Language Teaching, according to a format created by a team of specialists from the English Studies Institute, approved by the Coordination Board for Certification of Language Proficiency consisting of Chairs of examination commissions; until 2006 a Language Diploma Supplement was awarded, from 2006/2007 a Warsaw University Language Certificate replaced the former. The new system has been evolving taking inspiration from the European context (Council of Europe and EU: concept of multilingualism; CEFR; ELC and the TNPs)

