

## Council conclusions on language competences to enhance mobility

(2011/C 372/07)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

HAVING REGARD TO

1. The conclusions of the Barcelona European Council meeting of 15-16 March 2002, which called for further action to improve the mastery of basic skills, in particular by teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age <sup>(1)</sup>.
2. The Council conclusions of 19 May 2006 on the European Indicator of Language Competence <sup>(2)</sup>, which reaffirmed that foreign language skills, as well as helping to foster mutual understanding between peoples, are a prerequisite for a mobile workforce and contribute to the competitiveness of the European Union economy.
3. The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning <sup>(3)</sup>, which includes communication in foreign languages among the key competences necessary for personal fulfilment, active citizenship, social cohesion and employability in a knowledge society.
4. The Council conclusions of 25 May 2007 on a coherent framework of indicators and benchmarks for monitoring progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training <sup>(4)</sup>, which called on the Commission to further examine the development of indicators on language skills.
5. The Council Recommendation of 20 November 2008 on the mobility of young volunteers across the European Union <sup>(5)</sup>, which recommended that Member States increase awareness of the importance of intercultural competences and language learning among young people in order to reduce barriers to their cross-border mobility.
6. The Council Resolution of 21 November 2008 on a European strategy for multilingualism <sup>(6)</sup>, which invited the Member States to promote multilingualism with a view to strengthening social cohesion, intercultural dialogue and the European construction, the European economy's competitiveness and people's mobility and employability, as well as to promote EU languages across the world.
7. The Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training 'ET 2020', which identified as priorities for the period 2009-11 the need to enable citizens to communicate in two languages in addition to the mother tongue, the need to promote language teaching, where relevant, in vocational education and training (VET) and for adult learners, and the need to provide migrants with opportunities to learn the language of the host country <sup>(7)</sup>.
8. The 2010 joint progress report of the Council and the Commission <sup>(8)</sup> on the implementation of the 'Education & Training 2010' work programme, which noted that there was a need to enhance key competences in VET and adult learning and, in particular, that more attention should be given in these fields to communication in foreign languages.
9. The Europe 2020 strategy adopted by the European Council on 17 June 2010 <sup>(9)</sup> and its two flagship initiatives: *An Agenda for New Skills and Jobs* <sup>(10)</sup>, which recognises the potential contribution of language competences to a more dynamic labour market, and *Youth on the Move* <sup>(11)</sup>, which emphasises that better language skills will inevitably be needed in order to make mobility both possible and worthwhile.
10. The Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 on promoting the learning mobility of young people <sup>(12)</sup>, which acknowledges the importance of language learning and acquiring intercultural competences starting at early stages of education, by encouraging quality linguistic and cultural preparation for mobility in both general and vocational education.

RECALLING THAT

The Barcelona European Council meeting in 2002 identified language competences as an essential component of a competitive knowledge-based economy. Knowledge of foreign languages is a life-skill for all EU citizens, enabling them to enjoy both the economic and social benefits of free movement within the Union.

Providing the widest possible access to mobility for all, including disadvantaged groups, and reducing the remaining obstacles to mobility, constitute one of the main strategic objectives of EU policy in the field of education and training.

<sup>(1)</sup> SN 100/02, par. 44, second indent, p. 19.

<sup>(2)</sup> OJ C 172, 25.7.2006, p. 1.

<sup>(3)</sup> OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, p. 10.

<sup>(4)</sup> OJ C 311, 21.12.2007, p. 13.

<sup>(5)</sup> OJ C 319, 13.12.2008, p. 8.

<sup>(6)</sup> OJ C 320, 16.12.2008, p. 1.

<sup>(7)</sup> OJ C 119, 28.5.2009, p. 2.

<sup>(8)</sup> OJ C 117, 6.5.2010, p. 1.

<sup>(9)</sup> EUCO 13/10.

<sup>(10)</sup> doc. 17066/1/10 REV 1.

<sup>(11)</sup> doc. 13729/1/10 REV 1.

<sup>(12)</sup> OJ C 199, 7.7.2011, p. 1.

While the free movement of workers within the EU single market can contribute to reducing the mismatch between labour force skills and labour market needs, learning and professional mobility continue to be severely hampered by a limited knowledge of foreign languages.

#### REAFFIRMING THAT

While responsibility for the organisation and content of education and training systems rests with the individual Member States, European cooperation plays a useful role in identifying the language competences to be developed, as well as the most effective methodologies and the most favourable conditions for doing so.

#### AND IN THE LIGHT OF

The Presidency conference on *Multilingual Competences for Professional and Social Success in Europe* held in Warsaw in September 2011, and of the conference of EU Ministers in charge of compulsory education held in Gdańsk in October 2011.

#### NOTES

— The work being done by Member States in the framework of the open method of coordination, with the support of the Commission, in order to strengthen the contribution which language education can make to enhancing the employability of young people in a labour market where knowledge of foreign languages can provide a distinct advantage.

— The activities of the Business Platform for Multilingualism established by the Commission in order to foster better use of language competences as a means of increasing the competitiveness of EU business, and especially that of small and medium-sized enterprises.

— The outcomes of the Civil Society Platform on Multilingualism on securing lifelong language learning opportunities for all, in order to enhance the social inclusion of citizens with disadvantaged backgrounds, as well as to promote linguistic diversity and intercultural dialogue.

#### WELCOMES

— The Commission's *Report on the implementation of Council Resolution of 21 November 2008 on a European strategy for multilingualism*, detailing the initiatives taken and the progress made in promoting language learning and linguistic diversity.

— The 2011 update of the *Inventory of Community actions in the field of multilingualism*, mapping the activities undertaken by the different Commission services in this field over the last

three years, which strongly emphasises that multilingualism policy improves employability for EU citizens and competitiveness for EU businesses.

— Publication of the Policy Handbook *Language learning at pre-primary school level — making it efficient and sustainable*, which represents a step forward in raising awareness of the importance of language learning from a very early age.

— Publication of the report *Providing communication skills for the labour market* as a result of the work done by the 'Languages for jobs' thematic working group within the 'ET 2020' framework.

#### AGREES THAT

1. Learning mobility — meaning transnational mobility for the purpose of acquiring new knowledge, skills and competences — is one of the important ways in which citizens can strengthen their employability, enhance their intercultural awareness, creativity and personal development, as well as participate actively in society.

2. A good command of foreign languages is a key competence essential to make one's way in the modern world and labour market. Multilingualism is not only part of the European heritage but also a chance to develop a society which is open, respectful of cultural diversity and ready for cooperation.

3. Maintaining and developing — within available resources — European tools and programmes which support language learning in both formal and non-formal education contexts has a useful role to play in enhancing learning and professional mobility.

4. While general language programmes help to develop essential communication skills for everyday use, methodologies such as content and language-integrated learning (CLIL) in both general education and VET can be particularly effective in enhancing the mobility and employability of workers.

5. In order to promote CLIL, teachers and trainers — in particular in VET — should be encouraged to acquire high quality language competences and should have access to high quality teaching resources.

6. A broader choice of languages, including less-widely used languages and the languages of neighbouring countries, should — where possible and appropriate — be offered at all levels of education in a lifelong learning perspective, and greater information and guidance about these should be made available by appropriate language and cultural institutions.

7. The development of language competences among people, in particular children, with a socio-economically disadvantaged, migrant or Roma background or among those with special educational needs can contribute to ensuring better social inclusion and future professional development.
8. High quality language teaching and learning — for instance, of specialised, employment-related language — are essential for the internationalisation of higher education institutions and enhancing graduate employability.
9. Making provision for language learning throughout life, including at senior age, is also important in view of current demographic trends and of the need to ensure equal opportunities for a growing percentage of elderly EU citizens.

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES TO

1. Step up efforts to achieve the Barcelona objective, for example by enhancing the provision, quality and relevance of language teaching in general education, VET and higher education, as well as in the context of lifelong learning.
2. Acknowledge the importance of evaluating performance in language teaching and learning as an important aspect of the quality assurance process.
3. Improve the initial and in-service training of language teachers and the language-related training of teachers of other subjects, as well as enhance and facilitate their mobility, eliminating administrative barriers as far as possible.
4. Encourage innovative forms of European cooperation, experimentation and new approaches to language teaching and learning, such as content and language-integrated learning (including in bilingual schools), opportunities for language immersion mobility and, where appropriate, more extensive use of ICT also in creative language learning environments.
5. Broaden — where possible and appropriate — the choice of languages offered in education and training, promoting the teaching of less widely used languages and (especially in border regions) the languages of neighbouring countries, in order to facilitate cultural, social and economic exchanges.
6. Consider including a cultural dimension in language curricula, where appropriate, as an important component for future learning and professional mobility.

7. Promote measures aimed at helping both children and adults with a migrant or Roma background to learn the official language (or languages) of the host country and, if different, the language of instruction. In addition, consider the possibilities for enabling children from such backgrounds to maintain and develop their mother tongues.
8. Explore ways of recognising and validating the native language competences of children and adults with a migrant background.
9. Encourage schools, vocational and higher education institutions to adopt integrated approaches to language teaching and learning.
10. Promote dialogue between the education world and the world of work by taking better account of the language needs of the labour market, by offering regular guidance to pupils and students throughout their educational careers and by supporting language learning in the workplace.
11. Explore the possibilities for public-private partnerships aimed at securing the provision of language skills suitable for the labour market, in particular as a means of preparing for mobility and work placements abroad.
12. Encourage the promotion of language learning initiatives and of environments conducive to language learning.

INVITES THE COMMISSION TO

1. Support Member States' efforts in the field of language teaching and learning, making full use of EU programmes and European tools for education and training.
2. Extend the work on language policy initiated under the first work cycle of 'ET 2020' within the thematic group on early language learning to include other levels of education (primary, secondary, etc.), whilst also having special regard to the VET and adult learning fields.
3. Consider submitting a proposal — drawing on the results of the European survey on language competences due to be published in 2012 and operating within available resources — for a possible benchmark on language competences, with a view to promoting continuous improvement in language education.
4. Launch and disseminate Europe-wide studies and surveys on language learning methodologies and tools, bearing in mind qualitative aspects and avoiding additional administrative burdens and costs, and make the results available to practitioners and national decision-makers.

5. Support and facilitate the exchange of information on accessible language learning resources, and encourage the Member States to make practical use of the guidelines and tools developed within EU language policy.
6. Pursue its support for the Business Platform for Multilingualism and for stakeholder initiatives of this kind.

AND INVITES THE MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION TO

1. Support mobility for the purpose of language learning, in order to help learners to overcome initial linguistic barriers and motivate them to acquire competence in at least two foreign languages.
2. Exchange experience and best practice, in order to improve the effectiveness of language education in equipping young people with the appropriate mix of linguistic competences and with the ability to continue acquiring new skills in accordance with future needs and interests, by promoting languages through existing and future platforms and networks for teachers and trainers.
3. Highlight the need for specific language content for professional purposes, particularly in VET and higher education, as a means of enhancing mobility and employability.
4. Further develop tools — operating within available resources and minimising administrative burdens — for monitoring progress in the field of language learning, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, in order to identify the most effective practices and areas requiring improvement.
5. Explore ways — taking existing good practice into account — of enhancing the recognition and validation of language

competences acquired through non-formal and informal education.

6. Consider using the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR) in order to:
  - promote closer links between the CEFR and the National and European Qualification Frameworks,
  - widen opportunities for the certification of language competences acquired by pupils and students by the end of compulsory education and in higher education.
7. Provide a link between vocational education and training qualifications that include language skills and the CEFR, whilst making good use of the resources and experience of all relevant European institutions and stakeholders, in particular the Council of Europe and its European Centre for Modern Languages.
8. Continue to provide support via the EU programmes in the fields of education, training and youth for cooperation between educational institutions as well as for exchange programmes for pupils and students, including those in vocational education and training, in order to help them improve their language competences.
9. Support, where appropriate, both at national level and through European cooperation, the development of teaching and learning materials for less widely taught languages.
10. Without prejudice to the forthcoming negotiations, consider making language learning a priority area in the next generation of EU programmes in the field of education and training.