

ECML: a Centre to promote language education in Europe

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10  
years

**1995-2005**

**Celebrating the ECML's 10th anniversary**



European Centre for Modern Languages  
Centre européen pour les langues vivantes



# The ECML today – 10 years promoting language education in Europe

*I congratulate the ECML on its valuable contribution to ensuring that the language policies and instruments developed by the experts are transmitted to the people who count the most: the language teachers and language learners of Europe.*

*Terry Davis, Secretary General of the Council of Europe*

***Speaking and understanding one another's language is a fundamental prerequisite for being able to live together in a Europe without dividing lines.***

***To assist in this challenge, the Council of Europe has created the European Centre for Modern Languages, an institution whose specific mission is to improve the practice of language education throughout Europe.***

Founded in Graz, Austria, the ECML has been working since 1995 with leading experts and institutions in the languages field. The Centre's activities are organised within a project-based programme - providing training for multipliers, promoting professional development for practitioners and facilitating the work of networks of specialists on priority issues in language education.

Over the past 10 years, policy and professional development needs have been radically transformed through political developments and the convergence of new information technologies. With a focus on developing innovative approaches to language teaching, the Centre is ideally placed to act as a catalyst and provide means of support for the implementation of educational reform within its member states.

Based upon the underlying values of the Council of Europe, the ECML supports the fostering of linguistic and cultural diversity and the promotion of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism among European citizens.

## It all began over 50 years ago...

*The establishment of ECML in 1995 was a great achievement and important milestone in the development of modern language learning and teaching in Europe.*

*John Trim, Project Director for Modern Languages, Council of Europe, 1971 –1997*

Although the ECML was established in 1995, its origins lie some 50 years earlier. In the aftermath of the Second World War, bitterness and mutual mistrust dominated international relations, further reinforced by the descent of the Iron Curtain and the onset of the cold war. The **Council of Europe** was founded in 1949 as a positive response to counterbalance this development. Following the enactment of the European Convention on Human Rights in 1950, the **European Cultural Convention** in 1955 paved the way for common European language policies.

According to Article two of the Convention, member states should encourage their own nationals to study the languages, history and civilisation of the other nations. Similarly, member states should endeavour to promote the study of their own language, history and civilisation in the other nations.



The first Palais de l'Europe, built in 1949

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In 1963 a Modern Languages Section was established within the Division of Education Culture and Sport with the responsibility of coordinating a major project of international cooperation. This was achieved through a series of seminars hosted in different European countries. John Trim, then Head of the Modern Language Project Group, portrays the pioneering years of modern language policies within the framework of the Council of Europe.

*The seminars hammered out basic principles and habits of consultation in each educational sector and promoted the development of applied linguistics in universities and the use of audio-visual methods in schools. Adult education was the last sector to be involved, but introduced a programme of work on a possible European unit-credit system. By 1977, a draft scheme was produced, the fundamental concepts had been formulated for the reform of language teaching for communication and the first version of The **Threshold Level** had been published.*

*The setting up of a European language centre to manage a programme of reform was envisaged and a more detailed planning was undertaken, but never reached the stage of a formal proposal. Some member governments were suspicious of European centralism and more were reluctant to commit resources to a permanent centre. Instead, the Modern Language Section embarked on a succession of medium-term projects to co-ordinate international co-operation in supporting member governments engaged in modernising language teaching. The programme concentrated on a schools interaction network and a series of workshops for teacher trainers, while the steady extension of threshold level descriptions rose to over twenty languages.*

*The ministerial representatives of member states were closely involved in the project, organising workshops and exchange visits to schools, commissioning and monitoring the authoring of threshold levels. Their commitment lent impetus and purpose to curricular reform, first in the countries of Northern and Western Europe, later in the Mediterranean area and, after 1989, in the new member states of Central and Eastern Europe.*

*The confidence felt by member governments that the concrete results achieved served their own interests, well justified their investing their own resources into the workshops.*

## The need for an operative Centre

*At the end of the last century, when the frontiers between the East and the West were falling, the need for such an institution to support states in the implementation of languages policies became apparent.*

*Dagmar Heindler, Chair of the Governing Board of the ECML 1994-2003*

The impetus for the establishment of a more permanent centre came on the one hand from continued uncertainty regarding the funding of the Council of Europe's intergovernmental programmes and on the other from the dramatic political developments which had led to a new situation in terms of the focus of language education in Europe. Suddenly the possibilities for cooperation between formerly isolated neighbouring countries were concrete, abundant and feasible.

*When, after the fall of the Iron Curtain, the Austrian education system was confronted with a plethora of challenges and opportunities, it was important not only to focus on change within the national system but also to seek international partners and cooperation to take full advantage of the diverse possibilities offered by the political developments.*

*Anton Dobart, Director General of the Division for General Education, Educational Planning and International Affairs, Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture*

In the early 1990s, the social, demographic, economic and political changes associated with globalisation were making language issues a central and problematic aspect of national and international policy, particularly in the educational field. It became increasingly clear that expertise in language policy needed to be made available to decision makers and that it should be based in Strasbourg. At the same time it was felt that the continuing need for close support to member states in the development of modern language provision to meet the requirements of an increasingly interactive European society would best be met by a **permanent, dedicated Centre.**



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Ten years later, this **complementarity** has shown itself to be most productive and the Centre in Graz and what is now the Language Policy Division in Strasbourg have been able to generate powerful synergies and mutually strengthen each other.

*Languages represent a significant area of intervention for the Council of Europe. Improving all forms of communication between states and promoting common understanding among citizens, whose cultural traditions and linguistic practices differ widely, yet mutually enrich one another, is one of the fundamental preconditions for achieving better integration in Europe.*

*Bernard Mis, Vice Chair of the Governing Board of the ECML 1995-2001*



## A seat for the ECML in Austria - Styria - Graz

*Cultural and linguistic diversity represents one of the great strengths of Europe. With the European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz, Austria has, over the past 10 years, played host to a significant institution in the field of cultural policy, whose establishment can be regarded as one of the most successful initiatives of the Council of Europe.*

*Elisabeth Gehrler, Austrian Minister for Education, Science and Culture*

*The province of Styria has long viewed itself as a bridge builder. Languages also create bridges, which serve to bring people together. Languages represent a fundamental means of expressing one's own identity. The European Centre for Modern Languages has now been active in this area for over 10 years and has made an invaluable contribution to both the preservation and promotion of languages and thus the cultural diversity of Europe.*

*Waltraud Klasnic, Governor of the Province of Styria*

*In the mid 1990s, assuring the establishment of a European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz was a particularly important priority for the city government of Graz and for me as mayor. As a city with a long-standing European orientation, we recognised the value of intensive and ongoing cooperation with the Council of Europe through this project.*

*Alfred Stingl, Mayor of Graz 1985 - 2003*

In 1992 Austria, the Netherlands, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland discussed possibilities for supporting educational reforms in Central and Eastern Europe. It was at this point that the idea of a regional centre was born. Following a feasibility study in June 1992 the Austrian government, as part of its policy of outreach towards the new Council of Europe member states, went beyond previous proposals for a European modern languages centre and offered both to host and part finance the institution. The decision on the Centre's final structure and launch date emerged from

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informal talks held at the 1994 Conference of Ministers of Education in Madrid. The concrete support of France and the Netherlands ensured the viability of the 'Enlarged Partial Agreement'<sup>1</sup> needed to launch the Centre.

The formal act followed in the form of Committee of Ministers Resolution (94)10 of 8 April 1994. The Resolution set up the Enlarged Partial Agreement on the European Centre for Modern Languages for an initial trial period expiring on 31 December 1997. Austria, France, Greece, Liechtenstein, Malta, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Switzerland were the initial signatories who took the decisive step founding the ECML. The 'Austrian Association' (*Verein Europäisches Fremdsprachenzentrum in Österreich*) was established to manage the Centre's infrastructure and promote visibility at national, regional and local level.

Austria, which itself borders onto eight different countries, provided the perfect setting for a pan-European institution like the ECML and the city of Graz represented an inspired choice as seat of the Partial Agreement. The city, traditionally regarded as the gateway to South-eastern Europe, had as a result of the political upheavals now found itself at the very heart of the New Europe.



The city of Graz

<sup>1</sup> A Partial Agreement is defined by the Council of Europe glossary as: "a form of co-operation allowing to pursue certain activities not supported by all member states of the Council of Europe. Consequently, only interested member states participate in such an Agreement and bear the costs. (...)". It is "enlarged" insofar as new states, also non-member states of the Council, can join at any time.



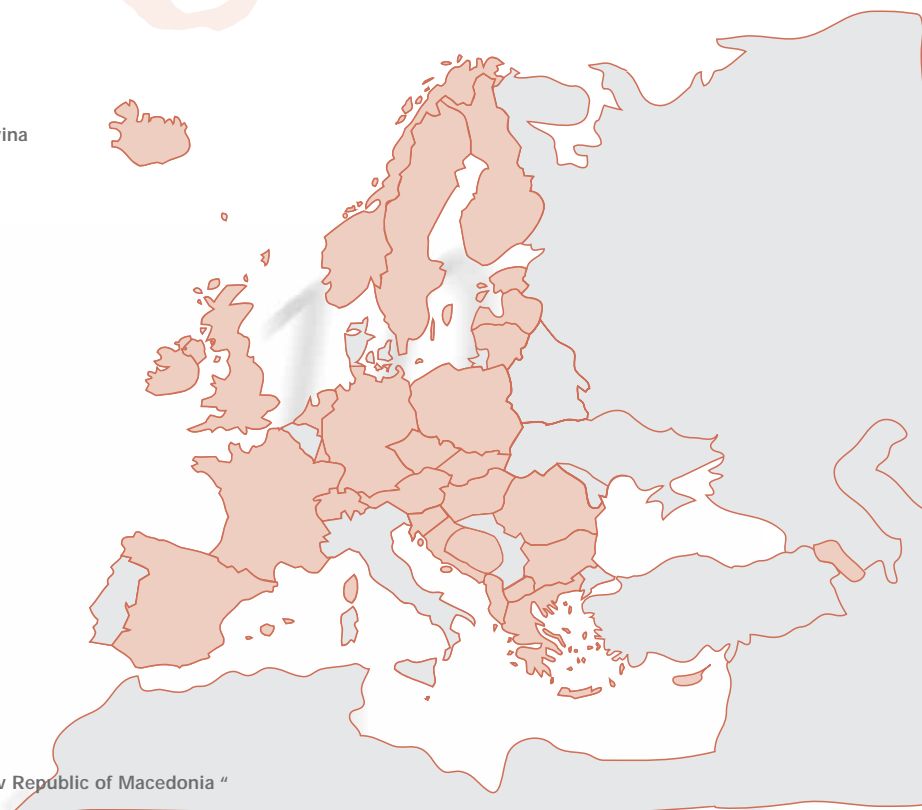
Dagmar Heindler recalls the early formative discussions between the City of Graz and the Province of Styria:

*The then Mayor of Graz, Alfred Stingl, was straight away fascinated by the idea of the work the Centre would be doing and that Graz would be considered for the seat of a Council of Europe institution. Without hesitation he pledged his support for the idea and led me by the hand through the city hall into the adjoining Landhaus, the provincial government building, to make initial contacts. These really took shape when Peter Bierbaumer from the University of Graz proposed the idea to Josef Krainer, the then Governor of the Province of Styria. Both the City and the Province agreed to back the initiative – and forged the strong bond of support between the City of Graz and the Province of Styria, which provides one of the cornerstones of the Centre and enables the ECML to flourish today...*

The inauguration of the ECML on Europe Day, 9 May 1995, represented the culmination of international negotiations and a lasting milestone in the development of modern language learning and teaching in Europe.

## Member states and their dates of accession

26.04.2001	Albania
07.02.1996	Andorra
25.06.2001	Armenia
08.04.1994	Austria
29.03.2001	Bosnia and Herzegovina
21.08.1995	Bulgaria
23.02.1995	Croatia
15.02.1996	Cyprus
28.04.1995	Czech Republic
24.03.1995	Estonia
01.01.1997	Finland
08.04.1994	France
30.06.1999	Germany
08.04.1994	Greece
02.08.1995	Hungary
01.01.1998	Iceland
26.09.2002	Ireland
25.06.1996	Latvia
08.04.1994	Liechtenstein
22.10.1999	Lithuania
17.03.1995	Luxembourg
08.04.1994	Malta
08.04.1994	Netherlands
01.08.1994	Norway
19.03.1996	Poland
25.06.1996	Romania
01.09.1995	Slovakia
08.04.1994	Slovenia
01.11.1999	Spain
01.01.1999	Sweden
08.04.1994	Switzerland
02.12.1996	"The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia "
01.04.2002	United Kingdom



# From theory to practice... the activities of the European Centre for Modern Languages

*The ECML seeks to position itself at the forefront of the change process, situated at the interface of policy decisions and their translation into everyday practice.*

*The Centre can touch upon the critical points of change, points where more concrete forms of support are undoubtedly required.*

*Josef Huber, ECML Head of Programmes 1998-2004*

With the Centre's mission defined by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe as:

- *support for the implementation of language education policies*
- *promotion of innovative approaches to the learning and teaching of languages*

there were many possible ways of going about doing this in practice - and widely differing expectations among national representatives!

Member states had demonstrated a clear willingness to invest in setting up and running an institution under the umbrella of the Council of Europe. This represented a commitment above and beyond what they were already contributing to the Organisation as a whole and a desire to develop additional capabilities and add value to the exemplary work already achieved in the field of languages. The ECML was conceived to answer a perceived need for more.

## The early years

*The undeniable success of the Council of Europe's European Centre for Modern Languages should not be taken for granted. The team that was set up in 1995 was charged with the difficult tasks of creating, ex nihilo, a new original structure and of initiating, in a short period of time, a programme of activities which would attract the best European experts as well as the most competent and the most enthusiastic national multipliers to Graz.*

*Claude Kieffer, Executive Director of the ECML 1995-1999*

***The annual programmes of the early years, a mixture of training seminars and awareness-raising workshops and colloquies, were mainly held at the Centre's charming Mozarthof premises in the university quarter of Graz. They focused upon areas such as bilingual education, learner autonomy, teacher education, ICT, intercultural awareness and early language learning.***

With an initial priority of supporting change in the new democracies through innovation in language teaching methodology and in order to promote future accessions, 10 'partner states' from Central and Eastern Europe were explicitly invited to take part in the workshops in Graz at the cost of the founder members. The rapid increase in the number of members of the Partial Agreement (from 9 to 24 between 1995 and 1998) reflected growing interest in the work of the Centre.



The Mozarthof

The early colloquies in particular played a key role in determining future orientations, establishing cooperation with cultural and linguistic institutions and laying the foundations for future collaboration with the European Commission, as well as serving to raise the profile of the Centre.

## Permanent status for the ECML

***The granting of a permanent status to the institution in July 1998 (Committee of Ministers' Resolution (98)11) represented the final confirmation that the Centre was successfully fulfilling its mandate.***

However, legitimate calls were emerging for greater presence within the signatory states, to increase the impact of ECML activities at member state level and respond to specific training needs within a given country or region of countries. It was time for the ECML to engage in more in-depth project work, to be able to develop and pilot innovative methods and materials. The tangible results achieved could be made available in the form of practical handbooks, guides and publications facilitating a much wider scale distribution, beyond groups who had been directly involved in the activities.



## The launch of a 4-year programme structure

*...Another priority, not to be underestimated, was the need to convince new countries to become member states. For each country this meant much diplomacy, patience and renewed initiatives in order to put the Centre high up on the agenda of national discussions on language education.*

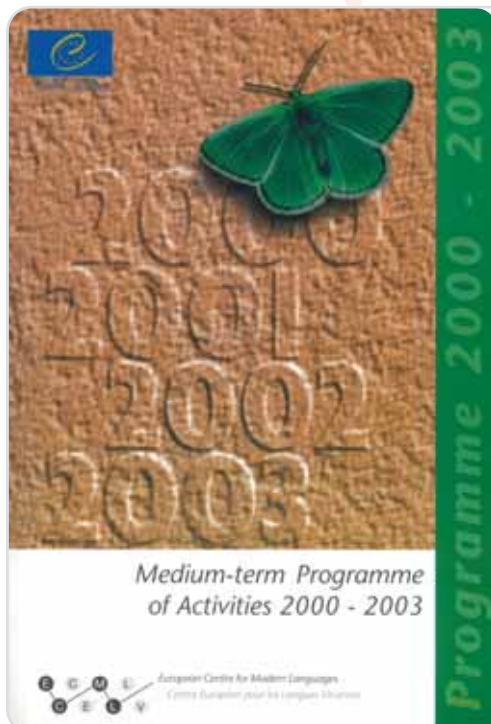
*Michel Lefranc, Executive Director of the ECML 1999-2002*

**In 2000 the Centre switched to a medium-term programming structure comprising international projects of research and development covering a four-year period.**

Through a call for proposals, internationally composed expert teams from the member states were invited to submit project proposals reflecting the priority areas identified by the Governing Board of the ECML.

The 25 projects selected for the final programme were expected to engage in a process of collaboration including preparatory work (ie surveys and elaboration of pilot structures and materials) followed by workshops with participants from all member states to present the key ideas and to set up networks for piloting, testing and further development work. Review and discussion of progress, making use of modern technology supplemented by further meetings of the networks, would help to finalise the results and prepare them for presentation and dissemination via a publication and in certain cases through a second international workshop aimed at multipliers.

The change in the centre's programme was also marked physically by the move to new, well-equipped, spacious premises situated right in the heart of Graz and their inauguration by the Secretary General, Walter Schwimmer, in October 2000. The new programme, the move and the launch of the European Year of Languages in 2001 all combined to provide fresh impetus for further accessions to the Partial Agreement, which by 2002 had reached 33 member states.





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The results of the first medium-term programme proved rich in their diversity and potential use to teachers, teacher trainers and other multipliers in member states. The Centre was able both to build upon the expertise gained in its early years and move into new areas such as the organisation and set-up of language education and quality assurance in language education. The impressive range of 30 products formed the core of the conference; "Challenges and opportunities in language education", organised in October 2003 to mark the end of the first and the start of the second multi-annual programme of the ECML. The publications retraced the work of the projects, highlighting practical experiences, their obstacles and successes, formulating principles of successful practice, elaborating new orientations, teaching materials, surveys, reflective essays, training guides and handbooks.

However, another important outcome lies in the process itself of the hands-on work carried out: further professional development of all those involved, exchange of experience, collaborative working on a truly international level, consensus building and the creation of formal and informal networks of multipliers in language education spanning the wider Europe of the member states of the ECML and beyond; a contribution not only to the profession of language educators but also to intercultural dialogue and understanding.

*With the dissemination of the work of the Centre becoming more and more effective, its results have made a significant impact upon initial and in-service training programmes of language teachers as well as in actual practice in the classroom.*

*Gábor Boldizsár, Chair of the ECML Governing Board*

## “Languages for social cohesion: language education in a multilingual and multicultural Europe”

***The Centre’s current programme (2004-2007) has sought to build upon the groundwork of the first programme and to develop underlying concepts, examining how best to equip people with the communicative and intercultural competences necessary to participate fully in our modern, compound societies as both individuals and citizens.***

It looks at how an integrated approach to language learning and teaching, based on a new educational role for language teachers, can assist in developing the communicative potential of individuals living in these societies.

The projects and activities in the ECML’s second programme contribute significantly to the dissemination and implementation of the political concepts promoted by the Council of Europe, notably democratic citizenship, social cohesion, mutual understanding and respect. Several projects also support wide and effective use of the instruments for enhancing the quality of language education developed by the Language Policy Division, in particular the European Language Portfolio.

The move towards an overall concept of language education, integrating the teaching and learning of **all** languages in order to make use of potential synergies, represents a major shift of paradigm; it promotes true plurilingualism through a positive attitude to the diversity of languages, competences and speakers.



## Current challenges

*The ECML, with its innovative programmes and highly effective international networking and dissemination structure, has established itself as a unique centre of excellence which offers a model for the Council of Europe's post-Summit initiatives to promote quality teacher education in other domains.*

*Joseph Sheils, Head of the Department of Language Education and Policy*

***The main challenge for the Centre after 10 years of existence and halfway into its second multi-annual programme, is to capitalise on the achievements, ensure synergies and, where appropriate, open up new avenues.***

It is important over the remaining two years of the current programme, to orient the presentation of project results to meet the different expectations of the target groups of teachers, teacher trainers and decision-makers. The Centre must clearly point out in its project results the particular interest for each of them.

The capacities developed inside the Secretariat and the skill-base in practical implementation formed within ECML expert networks, must be exploited through fresh initiatives for applying this know-how and further nourished by attracting and training a new generation of multipliers. Given its relatively small size and resources, choices must be made regarding the type of work an institution like the ECML can best do and the topics it is most suited to deal with.

The offer to support national training and awareness raising events in member states in promoting the results achieved by the Centre already represents one important step in this direction. This has proved to be a valuable means of raising the profile of the ECML at national level.

A considerable responsibility nevertheless lies with the support structures in the member states to make optimal use of a facility like the ECML, and of the platform and services it offers.

Networking and dissemination must go beyond what the central institution, equipped with its present resources, can provide, in order to ensure that results really do feed into policy-making within national education systems and can stimulate the change process.

It is nearly impossible to accurately measure the impact the work of an institution like the ECML is having on national language education systems. However, clear indicators of effectiveness are the dissemination and subsequent uptake of the products through the documentation and resource centre, the ECML multiplier base, the network of national contact points and through the web site. Systematic gathering of quantitative and qualitative feedback on this area and on other factors the Centre can directly influence can further assist in identifying priorities and in improving the ECML's service function.



## Influencing the future

*The first 10 years of the European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz have constituted a success story with great potential for future development...*

*As far as politics is concerned, we can only create the framework conditions. The actual responsibility for success lies in the hands of all those who in their day-to-day work give this framework form and substance.*

*Siegfried Nagl, Mayor of Graz*

*...Meanwhile we are many steps further; the then “East” has acceded to the EU. Yet, creating democratic awareness in cultural cooperation and empowering citizens remains as much a challenge as it was ten years ago.*

*Gottfried Wagner, Chair of the Austrian Association 1994-1999*

### **What are likely to be the key issues to deal with in the coming years?**

Language education, its purpose, orientation and methodology, is not an area where the main focus shifts from one year to the next.

Language learning for intercultural communication and understanding, for a successful and fulfilled life in a multicultural and multilingual society is not an issue which can be dealt with once and then ticked off as completed. Making it actually happen in practice is an ongoing process.

More and more, schools have become places for real linguistic encounter between many children with different mother tongues and there are increasing international contacts between schools. Concepts and practical experiences for further improvement of language learning must therefore be presented and evaluated at European level with a view to making them easily transferable.



Adequately managing and providing for the diversity of languages spoken by individuals in any given society or its subgroup, whether in the school or at the workplace, may well be one of the aspects which will move into the foreground.

Although different priorities will impose themselves at different times, adapting curricula, reviewing methodology and assessment, ensuring quality, reviewing practice to increase efficiency and motivation, exploring new media and technical support are aspects which will always require attention.



Major Council of Europe cooperation initiatives, such as the European Year of Languages 2001 and the European Day of Languages, have undoubtedly served to promote plurilingualism and encourage life-long learning, whether for mobility, professional needs or just pleasure. A glance at the number and diversity of events on the EDL website is sufficient to demonstrate the enthusiasm and dedication which exists in language education at all levels. It is clearly important to capitalise upon the impetus that has been built up and to effectively coordinate the Centre's activities not only within Council of Europe, but vis-à-vis other key actors in the international context of language education such as the European Commission.

It is the task of the Centre to avoid carrying out its own work in isolation, by taking account of major developments in language education within member states and at international level, and ensuring that these are recognised, reflected and promoted within its programmes.



The past 10 years have seen the ECML consolidate its position as being able not only to react to international priorities, but also to highlight, examine and influence key issues in language education. The next 10 years should further establish the ECML at the forefront of language education practice in Europe as a recognised platform and resource base for actively assisting in the process of improving international communication at all levels of society across the continent.

# Key facts and figures

## The ECML....

### **Member States**

... was established as a Partial Agreement of the Council of Europe by Committee of Ministers Resolution (94)10 on 8 April 1994 with 8 founding member states

... has 33 member states (September 2005)

### **Permanent institution of the Council of Europe**

... became a permanent institution of the Council of Europe on 2 July 1998 through Committee of Ministers Resolution (98)11

### **Activities**

... has, since its inauguration on 9 May 1995, organised

- 121 international workshops
- 95 expert meetings
- 37 network meetings
- 27 regional workshops
- 6 conferences/colloquies

### **Participants**

... has welcomed 5550 participants to these events

... with 565 experts coordinating the international and regional workshops

### **Publications**

... has produced 40 publications

... 30 of which were developed within the framework of the first medium-term programme 2000-2003

... released its first publication in 1996

### **Projects**

... has organised 47 projects on different aspects of language education within the framework of two programmes since the start of its first 4-year medium-term programme in 2000

### **Personnel**

... has increased its staff from 5 employees in 1995 to 11 in 2005  
... has welcomed 49 trainees and 9 fellows who have assisted in its work

### **Annual Days**

... has, together with the Language Policy Division, coordinated the European Day of Languages on 26 September each year since its launch in 2001.



## A word of thanks ...

***The ECML represents a complex mechanism with a complex structure. Its success relies heavily upon the efforts of multipliers at many levels.***

The Governing Board representatives, National Nominating Authorities and National Contact Points carry out an enormous task at strategic and operational level within their respective states, enabling the Centre to function effectively over such a wide geographic area.

The project coordinators, their teams and consultants work tirelessly to ensure that their projects achieve successful results and feed into the wider process of reflection on language education within the international context.

The participants working within the ECML's projects and activities ultimately carry the banner for guaranteeing that the Centre's work is piloted, disseminated to their peers and implemented in practice.

The ECML is fortunate to enjoy excellent relations with all these levels – sometimes we feel we are at the head of a great family! We would like to extend our thanks to ALL for their dedication.

Finally, few people really see what goes on behind the scenes in a place like the ECML. So I would like to take this occasion to salute the tremendous work of all my staff - and of all those who worked here before me - in creating and maintaining the unique way in which the Centre operates and the very special atmosphere which it generates.

***Adrian Butler, Executive Director of the ECML***

# 100 years





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