

# The Council of Europe: a catalyst for innovation and systemic change in the field of language education

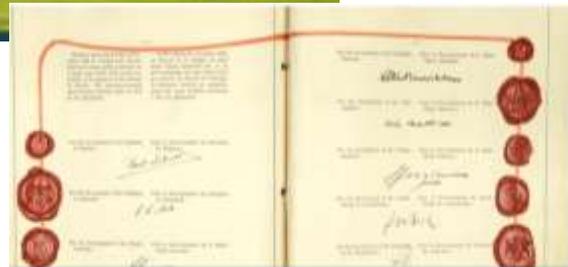
**Sarah Breslin**

**Executive Director, European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML)  
and Head of Language Policy, Council of Europe**

# Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law



REYKJAVÍK SUMMIT May 2023



*We, the Heads of State and Government, are committed to*

- *invest in a **DEMOCRATIC FUTURE***
- *ensure that everyone is able to play their role in democratic processes*
- *prioritise education about ... core democratic values, such as pluralism, inclusion, non-discrimination, transparency and accountability.*



# Preserving and strengthening democracy in European societies

The Department of Education



The answer to the question:  
**“What kind of education do we need?”**  
lies in the answer to another question:  
**“What kind of society do we want?”.**

Tironi, E. (2005). *El sueño chileno*. In S. Bergan. *Not by bread alone*. (2011).

## PROGRAMMES



Formal and non formal education



Higher and further education



Language policy and practice



Digital transformation



History Education and political studies



Knowledge Hub

(Council of Europe, n.d.)

# Language policy and practice: almost 70 years of evolutions

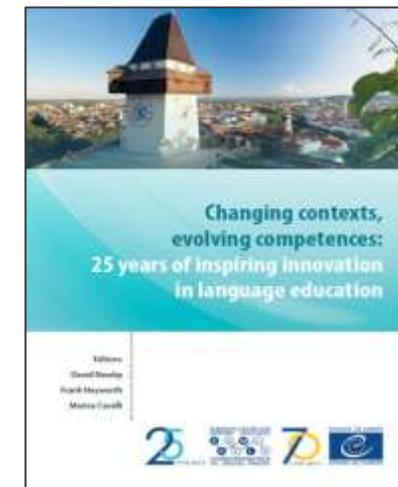
- 1954: European Cultural Convention
- 1969: Resolution (69)2: language learning for all
- 1970s and 1980s: from adult education into the school sector, training workshops
- 1990s: extensive enlargement of the CoE; development of the CEFR and the ELP
- 1994: establishment of the ECML
- 2001: publication of the CEFR and the ELP, European year of languages
- 2005/6: focus on inclusion and cohesion: developments began in the areas of language/s of schooling/support for adult migrants
- 2014: Recommendation CM/Rec (2014)5 on competences in the language of schooling for equity and quality in education and for educational success
- 2018: CEFR Companion Volume
- 2022: LASLLIAM Reference Guide – migrants with low levels of literacy
- 2022: Adoption of Recommendation R (2022)1 on the importance of plurilingual and intercultural education for democratic culture

# Language policy and practice: almost 70 years of constants

- Social justice and inclusion (support for the most vulnerable)
- Promotion and preservation of cultural and linguistic diversity
- Democratic citizenship
- Lifelong learning

## 3 defining principles (Little, 2019, p.20-21):

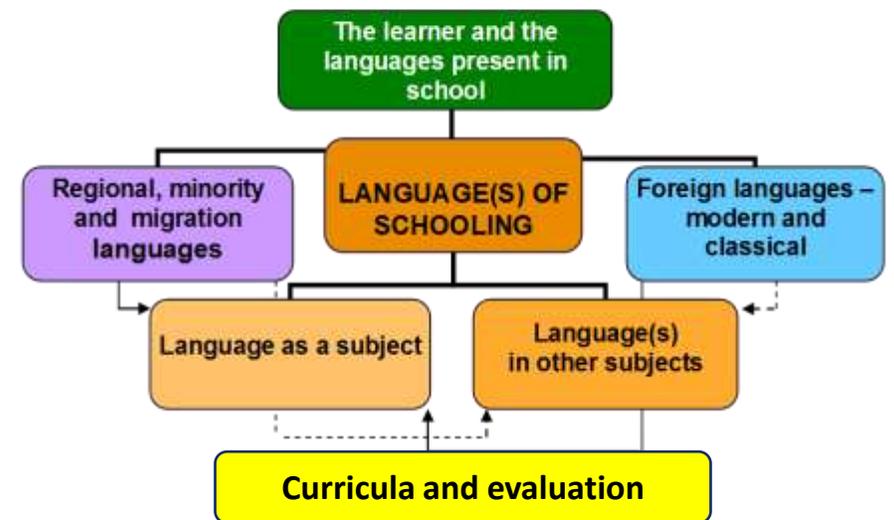
- The individual learner/citizen is an autonomous social agent with rights and responsibilities
- Communicative purpose is prior to linguistic content
- Language education should be plurilingual and intercultural



# Plurilingual and intercultural education: the what

“Plurilingual and intercultural education” is a holistic concept that has an impact on all areas of education policy and practice. Setting out to foster the development of integrated linguistic repertoires in which languages interrelate and interact, it takes explicit account of and seeks to bring into interaction with one another:

- i. the languages and cultures that learners bring with them, including sign, minority and migrant languages and cultures;
- ii. the language/s of schooling, which vary in genre and terminology according to the different subjects taught and differ in significant ways from the language of informal everyday communication;
- iii. regional, minority and other languages and cultures that are part of the curriculum;
- iv. foreign languages (modern and classical);
- v. other languages and cultures that are not present in school and not part of the official curriculum. (Council of Europe, 2022, paragraph 3i.)



CEFR 1.3 defines plurilingualism as “*a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact*”

(Council of Europe, 2001)

# Plurilingual and intercultural education: the what and the why

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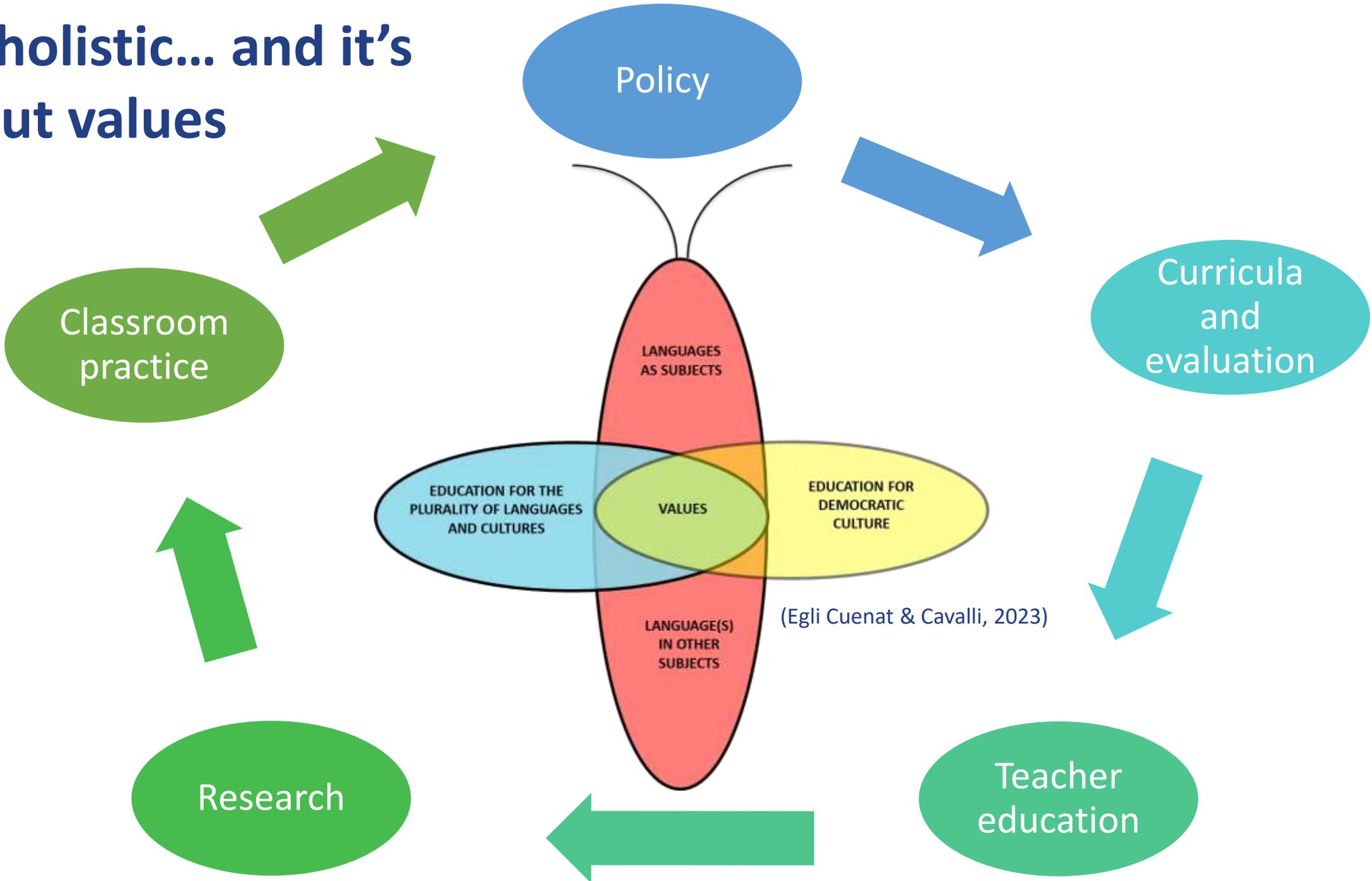
## PRINCIPLES

Plurilingual and intercultural education:

- I. is essential to education for democratic culture;
- II. respects and values linguistic and cultural diversity;
- III. promotes language awareness and language sensitivity across the curriculum;
- IV. encourages critical reflection on cultural diversity;
- V. helps to foster critical digital literacy and digital citizenship;
- VI. encourages learner autonomy and values the learner’s voice;
- VII. supports the inclusion of disadvantaged and marginalized learners on an equal footing with other learners.

(Council of Europe, 2022, paragraph 4)

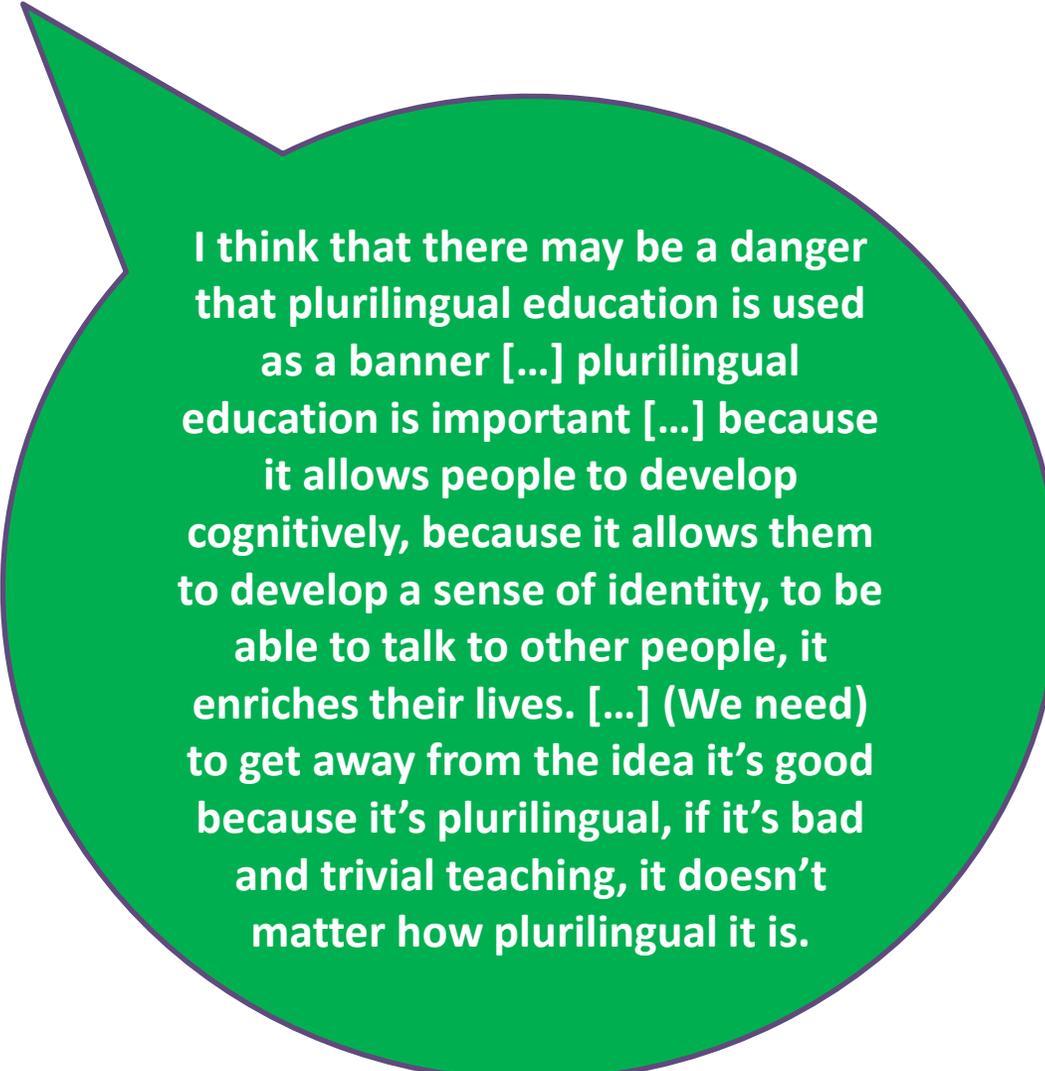
**It's holistic... and it's about values**



# Deconstructing the complex construct of plurilingual and intercultural education

- The first element is taking the learners and their languages into account, i.e. the plurilingualism present in the classroom;
- The second for me is to develop the plurilingual competences of each learner, to teach them to build bridges, to develop strategies that are not linked to any particular language, but which are based on different learning situations;
- The third element is actually to educate people about the value of diversity on all occasions and at all levels, with all that is understood by cultural mediation etc. which for me is fundamental in the current context;
- The fourth element is to develop skills in the languages for which one is responsible, an aspect which must not be forgotten.

Research participant 6, focused group conversation, December 2018 in Breslin, 2020, p.127-8



I think that there may be a danger that plurilingual education is used as a banner [...] plurilingual education is important [...] because it allows people to develop cognitively, because it allows them to develop a sense of identity, to be able to talk to other people, it enriches their lives. [...] (We need) to get away from the idea it's good because it's plurilingual, if it's bad and trivial teaching, it doesn't matter how plurilingual it is.

Research participant 1, focused group conversation, December 2018 in Breslin, 2020, p.127

## THE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

Decision-making body



(Council of Europe, n.d.)

- comprises the foreign ministers of all the member States, or their ambassadors
- adopts legal instruments (recommendations, conventions) and approves the Organisation's budget
- supervises the execution of the judgements delivered by the European Court of Human Rights
- meets annually at ministerial level and several times a month (ambassadors)

**Recommendation R (2022) 1 on the importance of plurilingual and intercultural education for democratic culture**

## The rationale: what's in a name?

It addresses two specific developments of concern to the Council of Europe:

- *“... a tendency on the part of public authorities and civil society to think that proficiency in one additional language is enough **as long as that language is English**”*
- *“... the populist notion that proficiency in minority or migrant languages, widespread in today’s increasingly diverse societies, **is harmful to societal cohesion**”*

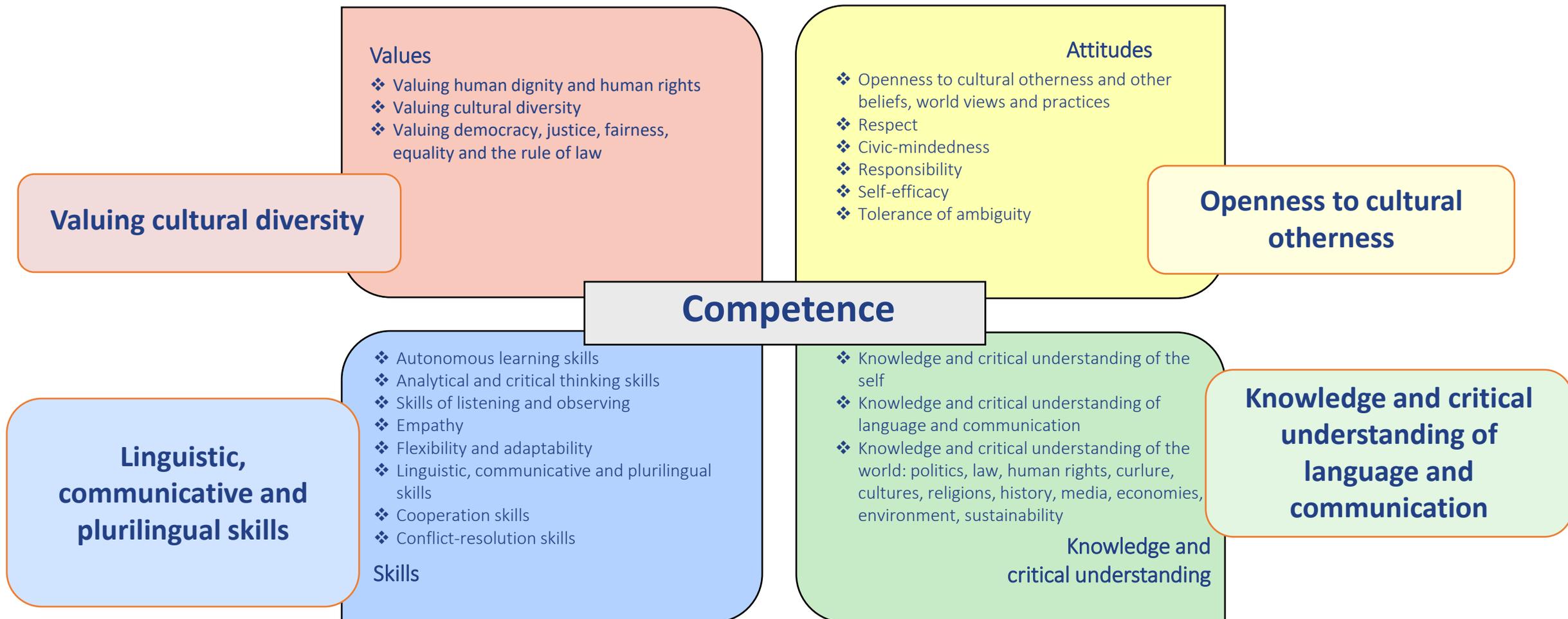
(Council of Europe, 2022)

Recommendation on the **importance of plurilingual and intercultural education ... for democratic culture**

Two specific concerns which relate to one **MAJOR** concern:

**“the backsliding of democracy”** (Pejčinović Burić, 2021)

# Reference framework of competences for democratic culture



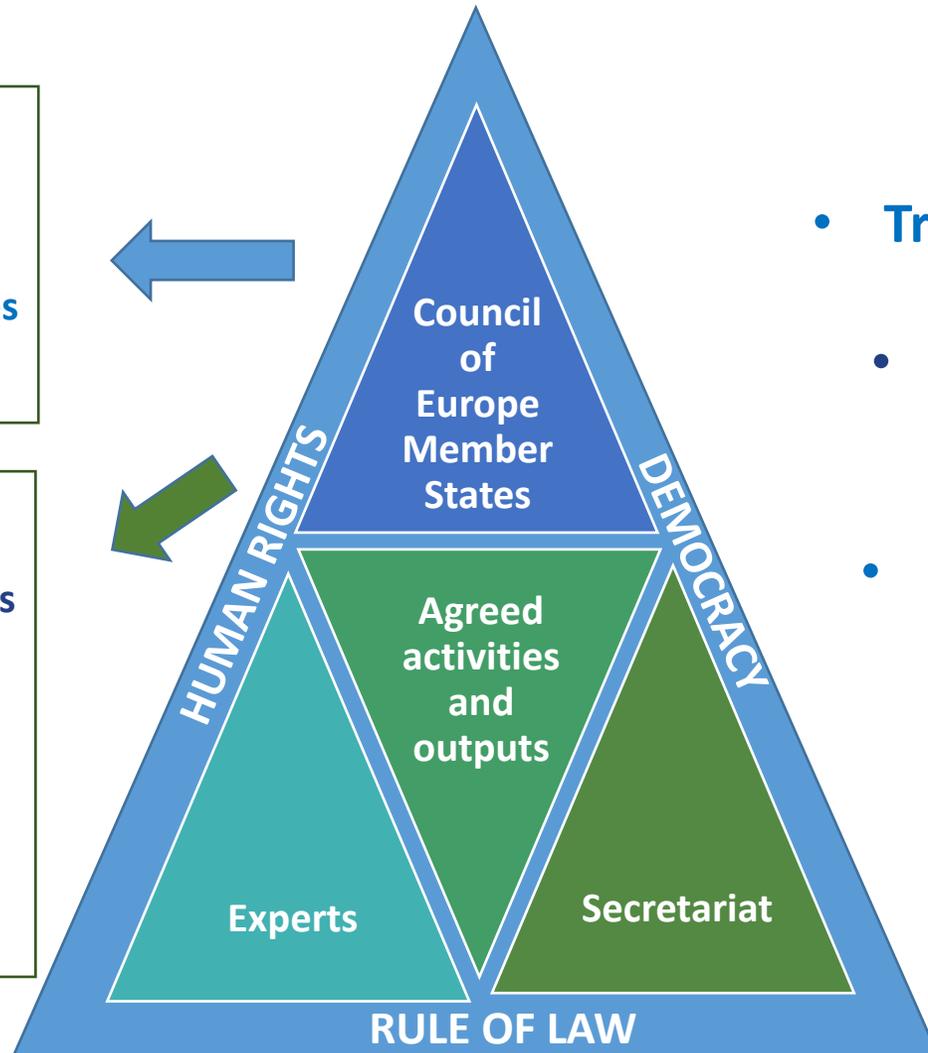
- **First holistic recommendation on language education**
- **Broad scope: all languages, all educational sectors, wide range of stakeholders**
- **Ambitious but realistic**
  - **Recognises contextual differences**
  - **Offers support for implementation through the Explanatory Memorandum**
  - **Encourages and values every small step taken**

**It is the overarching framework for all CoE activities in the field of language education 2024-2027**

# CoE language education programmes 2024-2027: key factors

Language policy  
programme –  
46 member States

ECML Core  
Programme:  
36 member States  
– additional  
financial  
commitment  
ECML-EC  
Cooperation  
Agreement: 38  
member States



- **Triangulation: Member States · Experts · Secretariat**
- **Transparency · Member State Engagement and Ownership**
- **Coherence – Complementarity – Differentiation**
  - **Visibility · Accessibility · Less is more!**
  - **Criticality**

# Language Policy 2024-2027



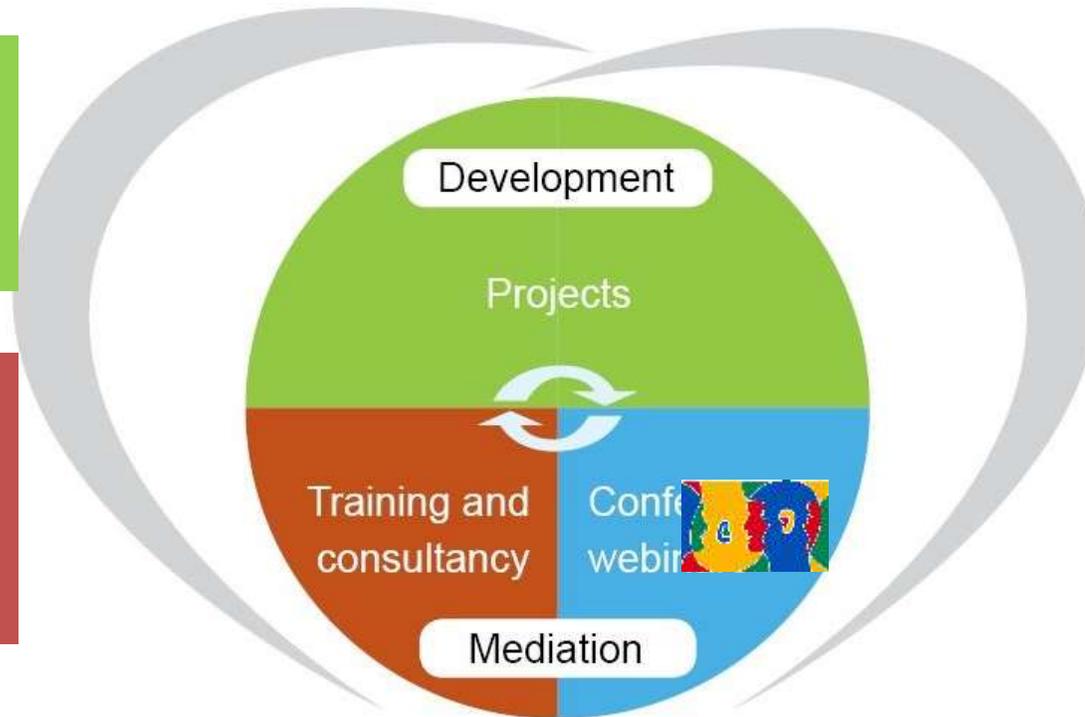
**Aim: to provide support, *primarily at the level of policy* for the implementation of *Recommendation(2022)1 on the importance of plurilingual and intercultural education for democratic culture* via:**

- a compendium of key messages with updated and/or new policy guidelines linked to the Recommendation (e.g., constructive alignment/home languages/early years etc)
- a refresh/simplification of the former Language Education Policy Profiles
- new guidelines on the relationship between the RFCDC and quality language education linked to the CEFR/CEFR CV
- case-studies exemplifying good practice in support of Romani resulting from the Romani Plurilingual Policy Experimentation Project (RPPE)
- further promotion of existing resources to support the linguistic integration of migrants and refugees; examples of usage

# Plurilingual and intercultural education – from policy to implementation: the role of the ECML

An enlarged Partial Agreement  
of the Council of Europe with 35  
member states; founded in Graz,  
Austria in 1994

Key target groups  
decision-makers and language  
professionals (teachers, teacher  
educators, inspectors etc.)



Mission  
innovation in language learning  
and teaching; implementation  
of effective language education  
policies

4 year programmes  
of international projects and  
bilateral training and  
consultancy

# ECML stakeholder engagement



**ECML Governing Board**  
Appointed ministerial  
representatives from each member  
state

**ECML National  
Nominating Authorities**  
Agencies in each member state  
linked to ministries

**ECML National Contact  
Points**  
National networks  
in language education

**Austrian Association for  
the ECML (Verein EFSZ)**  
Representing  
Austrian authorities



EUROPEAN UNION

EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR  
MODERN LANGUAGES



CENTRE EUROPEEN POUR  
LES LANGUES VIVANTES

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

# *Languages at the heart of democracy*

## ECML programme 2024-2027

Launch of 8 new projects (focus of this meeting)



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3 Think tanks

- Motivation to learn languages (2024, EC co-funded)
- Valorising and assessing home languages (2026/7)
- Mediation in primary language learning (2026/7)

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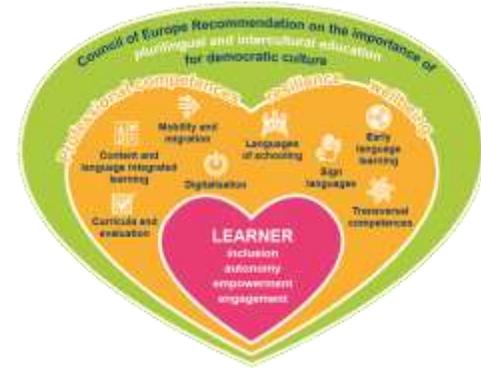
11 ongoing Training and consultancy offers (3 EC co-funded)

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Webinar on CM/Rec (2022)1 and its implications for wider society (Feb.2024)

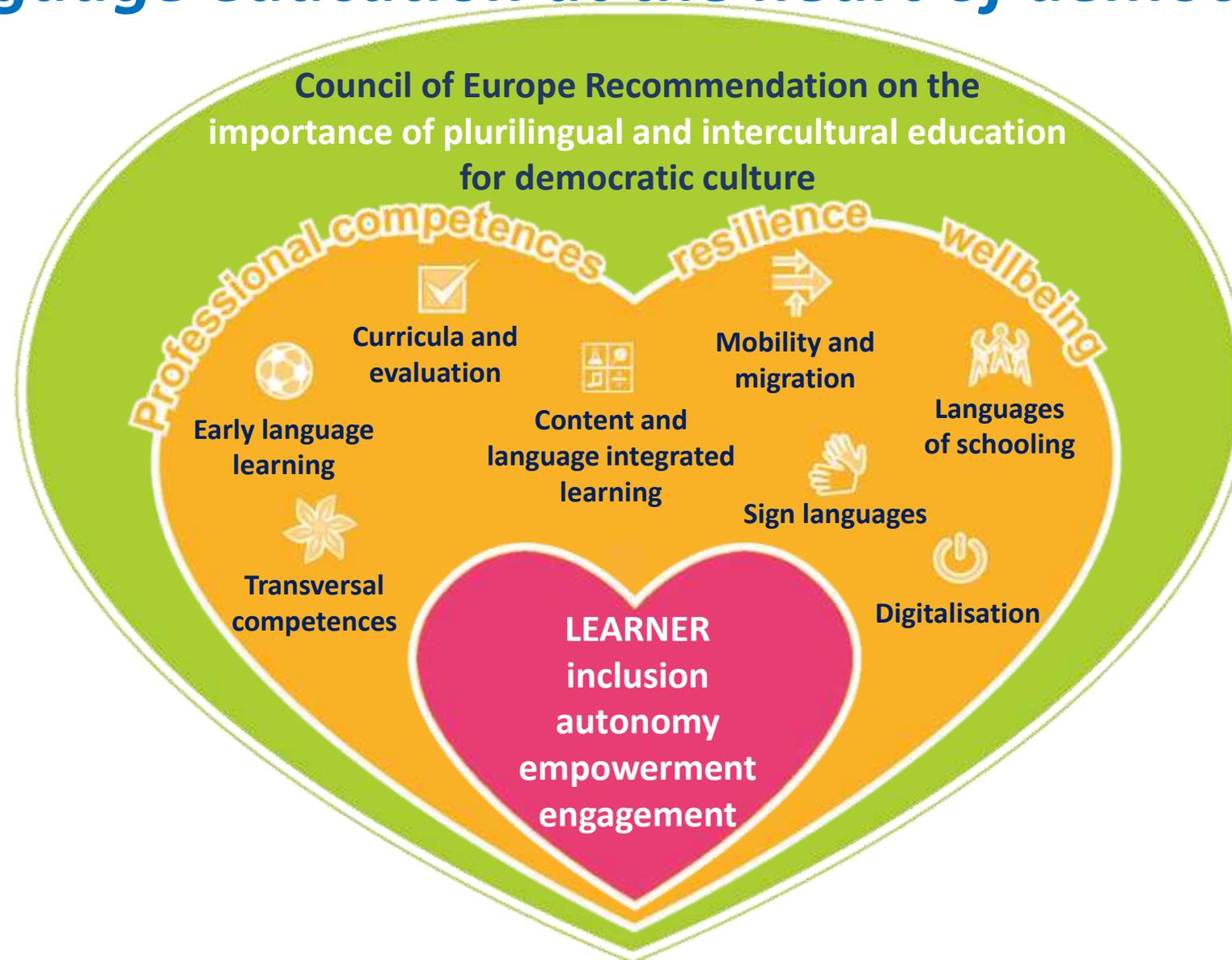
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Summer Academy for language teacher educators (June 2024, EC co-funded)



# ECML 2024-2027:

## *Language education at the heart of democracy*



Word cloud of "Thank You" in various languages and scripts:

- danke
- 謝謝
- ngiyabonga
- teşekkür ederim
- спасибо
- Баярлалаа
- rahmat
- merci
- maaf
- taafetai lava
- vinaka
- spas
- weialin
- tack
- misaotra
- matondo
- paldies
- grazzi
- mahalo
- tapadh leat
- хвала
- asante
- manana
- obrigada
- murakoze
- tenki
- gracias
- moichakkeram
- djere dieuf
- lau
- mamnun
- chnorakaloutioun
- gratias ago
- gracies
- sulpay
- go raibh maith agat
- dziękuje
- sobodi
- dėkuji
- sagolun
- sukriya
- kop khun krap
- taiku
- arigatō
- takk
- dakujem
- trugarez
- obrigado
- mesii
- didi madioba
- kam sah hamnida
- najis tuke
- raimat
- terima kasih
- tanemirt
- rahmet
- grazie
- diolch
- dhanyavadagal
- shukriya
- merce
- merci
- ευχαριστώ
- xiexie
- 감사합니다