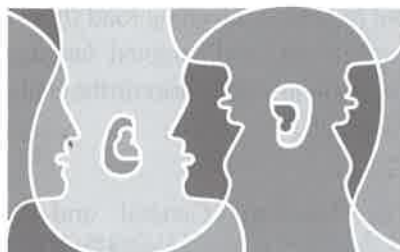


Languages open many doors

Thousands of doors to improved communication and mutual understanding have been opened, and will be opened, through activities intended to stimulate people to learn languages and, at the same time, to celebrate and promote linguistic diversity as an essential part of our common European heritage.



European Year of Languages 2001

“Languages open doors” and “Europe – a wealth of languages” are the slogans of the European Year of Languages (EYL), which was launched in Lund on 18-20 February and will be concluded in Brussels on 7-8 December.

The European Year of Languages is a Council of Europe initiative which reflects its pioneering efforts to promote and support language learning over three decades. The Year is being organised with the European Union and a number of joint activities are in progress. The common goal is summarised in the first two lines of the Council of Europe/European Union booklet *How you can learn languages*:

“Learning new languages takes time and effort. But everybody can do it and it’s well worth it”.

The message is: language learning not only improves career prospects but opens up cultural horizons; it increases possibilities for meeting new people and understanding different ways of thinking and acting.

Official launch of EYL in Lund

“The ability to communicate across linguistic and cultural boundaries is a fundamental skill for democratic citizenship in our multicultural societies”, Council of Europe Secretary-General Walter Schwimmer told the 400 participants from 45 countries attending the EYL launch in Lund.

The Secretary General outlined some of the actions currently being taken by the Organisation to safeguard and promote linguistic diversity. He stressed the increasing importance of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities: both legal instruments “supplement the language-related rights laid down in the European Convention on Human Rights and fundamental freedoms. The Charter has now been ratified by 14 member states and signed by 13 others (Russia and Armenia signed, and Spain, Slovenia, the UK and Austria ratified during the EYL).

Mr Schwimmer drew attention to a new Council of Europe initiative for the Year of Languages – the European Language Portfolio. This is a personal document in which people of all ages can show their competence in different languages and their main contacts with other cultures. It includes a Language Passport where skills can be recorded in an internationally transparent manner using a common European system of levels developed by the Council of Europe. The Portfolio is also designed to provide guidance and support for language learning throughout life (see <http://culture.coe.int/portfolio>). It is

linked to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* which has been published in 2001 (Cambridge University Press and Editions Didier) and whose basic aim is to provide common definitions and criteria for language learning, teaching and assessment.

EYL launch in 45 states

The European Year of Languages was launched in 45 European countries between January and April. In most cases the launch event was opened by the Minister of Education or other senior government representative and well-known personalities lent their support to the campaign. A message of support from the Secretary General was delivered at national launches which ranged from festivals and exhibitions to seminars or round tables on language policy. The EYL launch in most countries featured prominently in the national press and audiovisual media. A video kit on EYL produced by the Council of Europe was widely used.

Some examples of media impact:

While it is not possible to cite every country a few examples will suffice to give an idea of the media impact of these events. In Sweden the national launch, which coincided with the European launch, was covered by no fewer than forty-five newspaper

articles and featured in three television programmes. In Hungary the launch was accompanied by twenty hours of television and radio coverage over two days. In Portugal, the launch took place at the Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon with several ministers and personalities addressing a 550-strong audience and was widely covered by television, radio and press.

The EYL launch in Portoroz, Slovenia was covered in 17 articles in newspapers and magazines, 10 interviews and 3 programmes on national TV, and 5 broadcasts by different radio stations. In Austria, the launching ceremony was covered in a news item on the national broadcasting company (ORF), in 18 articles in the national press and in a half-hour broadcast on the national radio's "Morgenjournal". In Bulgaria a press conference held by the Minister of Education and Science was followed by a national conference which was covered in 9 articles in the national press (plus several others in regional papers), 7 radio programmes and 4 television broadcasts.

A number of launches were associated with international seminars on language policy issues, such as the Council of Europe presidency event in Latvia which dealt with the situation of small languages in 21st century Europe. In the Czech Republic an international seminar was organised to introduce the European Language Portfolio to a number of countries, with a follow-up seminar in the Russian Federation for the remaining countries.

Adult language-learners' week

One of the highlights of EYL in the first half of the year was the Adult Language-Learners' week from 5-11 May. Activities were held simultaneously in 45 countries to promote lifelong language learning. They ranged from language-tasting lessons

in the main squares or theatres of capital cities, to language fairs in Reykjavik, Skopje, Vilnius and elsewhere, a "language bus" tour throughout Ireland, a travelling road show in Austria and well-targeted language programmes on television in the United Kingdom.

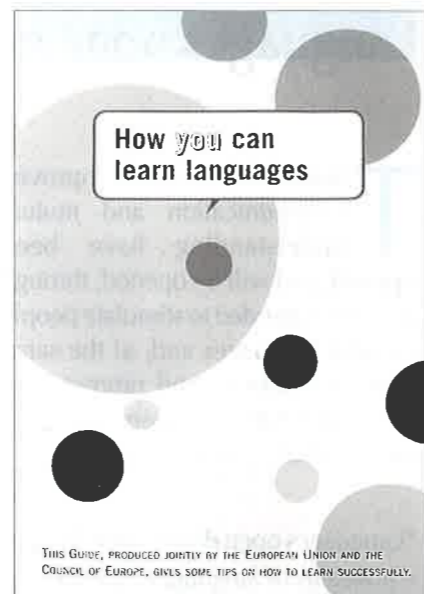
The Secretary General and the European Commissioner for Education and Culture strongly encouraged adults to take up the challenge of learning a new language. "Language learning is for everybody, whatever their age, background or job. Everyone can do it and everyone can benefit from the advantages it brings. Modern methods make learning enjoyable. It's never too late to start and we hope this week will inspire adults all over Europe to take the first step", they said.

Guide for Adult Learners

To mark this unique occasion, the Council of Europe and the European Union produced a guide with practical tips on how to study languages successfully. It is a short, attractive and practical guide on "How you can learn languages" and has been translated into the languages of many member states.

The new guide has been widely distributed and was freely available, for instance, on the Council of Europe's EYL stand at the European Parliament building in Strasbourg, which was visited by some 36,000 people on its "open day" last May.

"Learning a new language takes time and effort, but everybody can do it and it's well worth a try. Even if it's only a few words, you'll get a warmer welcome when you travel on holiday or business. And if you persevere, you'll find new doors opening all the time: you'll meet new people and new ways of thinking, perhaps improve your career prospects. And you'll get



"How you can learn languages" (cover of the brochure jointly produced for the "European Adult Language Learners' Week" by the Council of Europe and the European Union; April 2001)

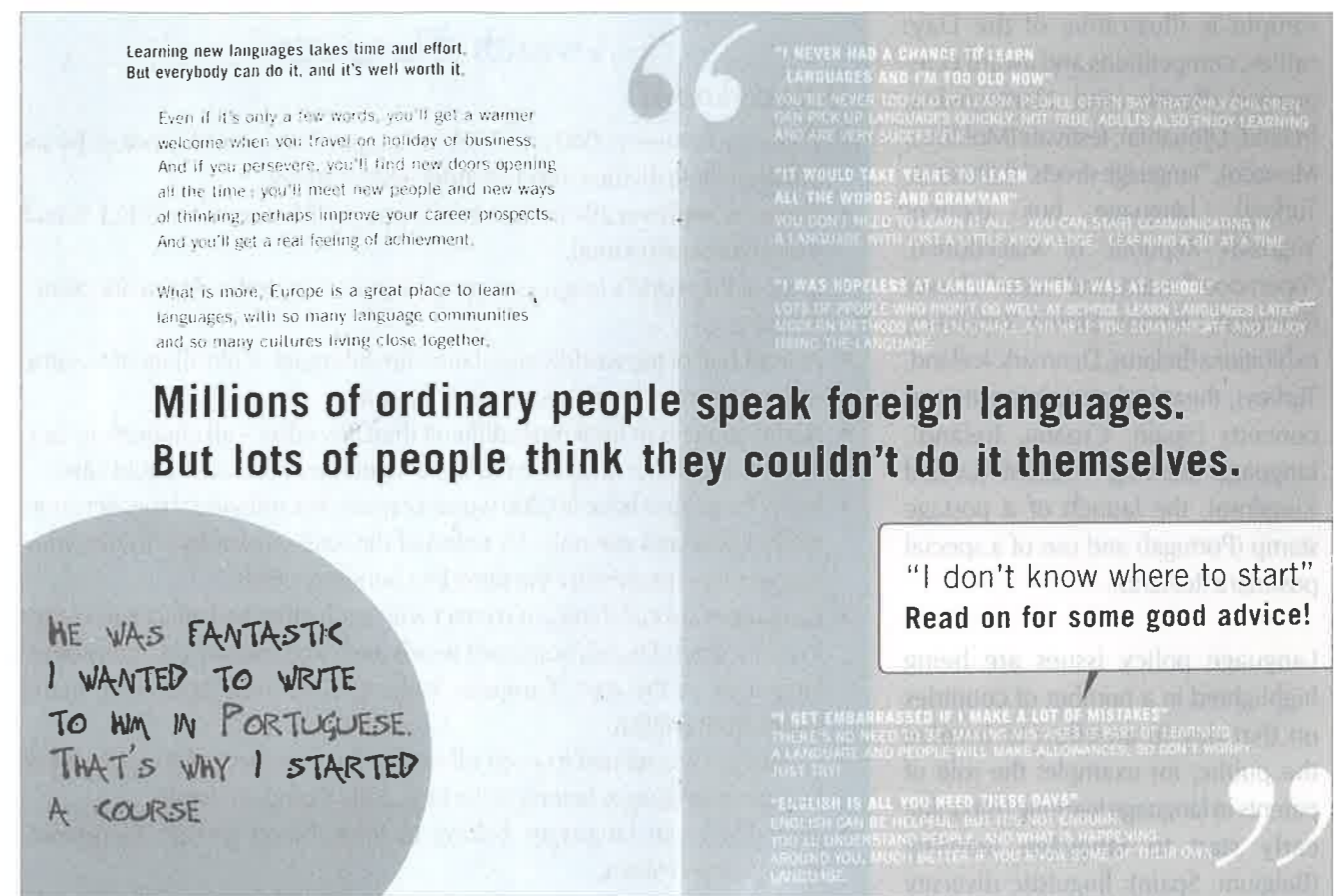
a real feeling of achievement". These are the guidebook's opening words.

If you decide to learn a language, the guidebook suggests you first ask yourself which is the method that suits you best:

- quickly and intensively, or over a long period of time?
- with friends in a group, or on your own?
- with a private teacher, distance learning or self-study books and teaching aids?
- in your country of residence, or abroad (there are so many intensive courses for foreigners in most countries)?

And here are some of the guidebook's helpful tips for learners:

- don't try to learn everything at once, set yourself realistic targets and go at your own pace;
- be open to new ways of learning (new methods and new technology);
- use every opportunity that comes along to communicate in the target language;
- don't be afraid to make mistakes: what matters is getting your message across;



"How you can learn languages" Brochure, jointly produced by the European Union and the Council of Europe (April 2001)

- reading and listening are very important: the more you listen the better you'll speak, the more you read the better you'll write;
- read and listen to texts where the language is used naturally: newspapers, radio, TV;
- remember you don't have to understand every word to get the gist (you need to know just the most common words to communicate in a foreign language);
- practise speaking as much as you can - talk to friends, fellow-students, foreigners you meet, etc;
- try to find opportunities to express simple ideas in writing - sending e-mails, postcards or letters to friends, etc;
- most learners never achieve a perfect accent in a foreign language: it doesn't matter as long as people understand.

The text of the Guide in a number of languages can be found on the web sites <http://culture.coe.int/AEL2001EYL> and www.eurolang2001.org

European Day of Languages

A particular day is being dedicated to languages throughout all Europe for

the first time ever - on 26 September. Most countries are holding activities on that day to focus the attention of the general public once again on the aims of the Year. The following small

Opening screen of the Council of Europe EYL website (links to the EYL event database, the "European Language Portfolio" and other related sites)



sample is illustrative of the Day: rallies, competitions and award ceremonies (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ireland, Lithuania), festivals (Moldova, Monaco), "language streets" (Lithuania, Turkey), language bus (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), "open-door" events and "taster" classes (Portugal, Ukraine, Slovak Republic), exhibitions (Belarus, Denmark, Iceland, Turkey), theatrical performances and concerts (Spain, Croatia, Ireland), language learning webcast (United Kingdom), the launch of a postage stamp (Portugal) and use of a special postmark (Iceland).

Language policy issues are being highlighted in a number of countries on that day in an effort to involve the public, for example: the role of parents in language learning (Albania); early start to language learning (Belgium, Spain); linguistic diversity and plurilingualism (France, Moldova). Particular attention is being paid to media coverage in all countries (Monaco has a "Day of foreign press").

On the 26 September the Committee on Culture, Science and Education of the Parliamentary Assembly hosted a presentation by the world-renowned expert Professor David Crystal on the challenge to linguistic diversity in Europe.

The Modern Languages Division launched a game on its website <http://culture.coe.int/AE/2001EYL> designed to draw attention to linguistic diversity linked to the EYL poster containing greetings in the official languages of the 45 states participating in the EYL.

Information about the many events organised in the forty five participating countries throughout the Year, including those specifically planned for the Day, can be found in the data base on the Council of Europe website <http://culture.coe.int/AEL2001EYL>.

A wealth of languages

Did you know?

- There are between 6000 and 7000 languages in the world – spoken by six billion people divided into 189 independent states.
- There are well over 200 indigenous languages in Europe – roughly 3 % and 4 % of the world's total.
- Most of the world's languages are spoken in Asia, India, Africa and South America.
- At least half of the world's population are bilingual or plurilingual to some degree, i.e. they speak two or more languages.
- No language is in itself more difficult than any other – all children, in fact, learn their mother tongue in the same natural way and with equal ease.
- Many languages have 50,000 words or more, but individual speakers normally know and use only a fraction of the total vocabulary: in everyday conversation people use the same few hundred words.
- Languages are constantly in contact with each other and affect each other in many ways: English borrowed words and expressions from many other languages in the past, European languages are now borrowing many words from English.
- Languages are related to each other like the members of a family. Most European languages belong to the large Indo-European family.
- Most European languages belong to three broad groups: Germanic, Romance and Slavic.
- The Germanic family of languages includes Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, Icelandic, German, Dutch, English and Yiddish, among others. The Romance languages include Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Romanian, among others. The Slavic languages include Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, Polish, Czech, Slovak, Slovenian, Serbian, Croatian, Macedonian, Bulgarian and others.
- Most European languages use the Latin alphabet. Some Slavonic languages use the Cyrillic alphabet. Greek, Armenian, Georgian and Yiddish have their own alphabet.
- The mother tongues spoken by most people in Europe are Russian, German, English, French and Italian, in that order.
- The non-European languages most widely used on the European territory are Arabic, Chinese and Hindi, each with its own writing system.

The above is an extract from "The celebration of linguistic diversity", a text produced by the Council of Europe which also includes a number of informative and entertaining websites. This text is available in a number of languages on the Council of Europe EYL website <http://culture.coe.int/AEL2001EYL>.

European Year of Languages information:

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Directorate of School
Out-of-School and Higher Education
F-67075 Strasbourg

European Commission

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Language Policy Unit (C5)
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Newsletter education

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Contents

	Page
Editorial	1
Final conference for the project "Learning and teaching about the history of Europe in the 20th century"	2
Launching of an International Association for European Studies	4
History teaching in secondary schools: teacher training and history textbooks	4
Special edition on the European Year of Languages 2001 (pull-out section)	5
Higher education in Serbia: Forward to Europe or back to the past?	9
Books in brief	10
Calendar of events	11 and 12



COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Editorial

This edition of the *Education Newsletter* focusses on some of the core work of the Council of Europe, and illustrates clearly the continuing need for our value-based approach to education development.

History teaching continues to present particular challenges and, at the dawn of a new century, this is a particularly appropriate time to look at what messages about the complex history of the last century we wish to convey, and how they are to be transmitted. The project on "learning and teaching about the history of Europe of the 20th century" doesn't provide all the answers but, as the article on the final conference on page 2 illustrates, it does point to certain directions which could be usefully followed.

Our special pull-out section focusses on the European Year of Languages (EYL), an initiative of the Council of Europe organised jointly with the European Union (page 5). The wealth of experience that has been acquired over three decades of work on promoting linguistic diversity is drawn together in this celebration of European plurilingualism, with our common linguistic heritage of 225 indigenous languages. The main goal of the EYL is to promote and help overcome barriers to language learning. Europe needs plurilingual citizens, and learning new languages cannot be the privilege of a few. The EYL provides material showing the advantages of language learning, and illustrating how languages can be learned at all stages of life. The clear message is that

our education systems need to adapt and do more to develop this vital resource – and many tools are available to help them.

At the Council of Europe, an organisation now with 43 member states, it is self-evident that languages are a source of wealth, yet events in former Yugoslavia – and especially recent events in "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" – remind us that language can also be a primary source of conflict. Helping find appropriate solutions to complex issues of language rights and language policy is central to our mission in Strasbourg, and it is vital that we encourage language learning as a source of mutual enrichment. Making the right decisions in this policy area now in the countries of former Yugoslavia and elsewhere will be a determining factor for stability and peace in the future. The article on higher education in Serbia (page 9) illustrates that we are currently at a crossroads: our support is needed to help Serbia and neighbouring states move forward in the right direction. Modest investment into our work in education regeneration now could save enormous resources – and lives – in the future.

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