

Interview with Waldemar Martyniuk: “Whoever is not acquainted with foreign languages knows nothing of his own” (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 1749-1832)

Since October 2008, the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) in Graz has had a new Director, Waldemar Martyniuk, Assistant Professor in Linguistics at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland. Mr Martyniuk was interviewed for the Newsletter in March 2009.

Mr Martyniuk, you were already involved in the work of the Council of Europe and in the projects of the ECML before being appointed Director of the Graz Centre.

Yes, indeed. I was seconded to the Language Policy Division in 2005-2006 as project co-ordinator and I have been involved in the work of the ECML in nearly all the different functions - as an expert participating in seminars, as external adviser, project co-ordinator - and I was invited to be a member of the advisory board for the selection of projects for the current 3rd medium-term programme “Empowering language professionals” 2008-2011. And not forgetting also as a stakeholder, as a teacher trainer in Polish. So I can see the ECML through different glasses, slip into different roles and switch perspective. This helps enormously to meet the expectations of all our stakeholders.

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What, to your mind, is the most important mission of the Centre – both for the expert world and multipliers like teacher trainers, and for pupils, students and the broader public?

The most important mission is to raise awareness of the importance of developing our innate linguistic ability to the greatest possible extent. Once this skill is properly developed, starting with the language(s) of home, the language(s)

of our immediate environment, the language(s) of schooling, and the language(s) of the society we live in, it can be extended to other languages such as foreign languages, neighbouring languages, the language(s) of international communication. The Centre contributes to this aim by initiating and supporting networks – from learners to policy makers - by developing and promoting approaches, guidelines, frameworks, and tools. Our core target groups are certainly teachers and teacher trainers.



Which current projects are the most promising in contributing to social cohesion and intercultural dialogue as outlined in the "White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue" adopted by the Committee of Ministers in 2008?

In 2007, the results of the 2nd medium-term programme, "Languages for social cohesion", were presented. One of the most striking outcomes was the publication of a project called VALEUR – Valuing all languages in Europe, which showed that at least 440 languages are used in Europe on an everyday basis.

There are several projects in the current programme that address the need to support intercultural dialogue. One of them is the CARAP project, where the team members have developed a concept of how to integrate pluralistic approaches in the educational context and are now collecting descriptors and activities specifying plurilingual and pluricultural competences. The MARILLE project may also be mentioned here. It highlights the role of the majority language as a starting point for plurilingual education.

The Centre is located in the South-East of Austria, in Styria. Would you please explain the Centre's special relationship with Austria and its impact on your everyday work?

Yes, I find this location very proper and adequate in reference to the mission of



Waldemar Martyniuk, Director of the ECML

the ECML. This is a border region with a rich multilingual history. If you drive only half an hour eastwards you might speak Hungarian in the Spas of Szombathely or Slovenian when skiing in the mountains around Maribor, and after a two-hour ride to the south you might order an Italian espresso on a piazza in Udine.

150 different nationals live in the city of Graz itself, the second largest in Austria after Vienna, with 200 000 inhabitants.

The Centre itself is located on the "rive droite" of the river Mur close to the city centre classified world heritage by UNESCO. The Austrian authorities give both financial and logistic support to the Centre, enabling it to host international experts from all 34 member

states of the partial agreement. Vice versa, the Council of Europe, through its Graz Centre, being an important international institution in the city, participates in all local and regional public relations events connected with Europe: the first week in May, on the main square of Graz, "Europe in Graz", including the Centre's activities, is on show to the public. In September, around the European Day of Languages, international "European Language Portfolio" experts will meet in Graz at the invitation of the Austrian BMUKK – Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture – to discuss the future of the Portfolio.

Personally, Graz reminds me to a certain extent of my hometown Krakow. Both cities have preserved their medieval character, cities with an impressive castle hill, a lively main square and a picturesque river. Recently I also discovered some culinary words in Polish derived from Austrian German, like *Morela* in Polish, and *Marille* in Austrian German (*Aprikose* in German German, *apricot* in English). This way, I continue my own studies in how to teach Polish as a foreign language.

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Education Newsletter



Editorial

A diamond is a mysterious thing. When first found, its splendour may not be apparent; only the experienced eye can detect its potential and see what it might become with patience and skill. Yet once cut it is beautiful and radiant, symbolising purity and eternity. A diamond also traditionally represents an anniversary of sixty years.

For sixty years the Council of Europe has promoted and defended human rights, democracy and the rule of law, and this remains its priority objective. But these rights and values do not exist in a vacuum and the recognition of their fundamental importance and meaning should not be taken for granted. They are goals that have to be understood and achieved by every new generation if Europe is to remain united. Such unity depends to a large extent on the ability of our societies to engage in intercultural dialogue and acknowledge the intrinsic value of education as a human right and a powerful contribution to social cohesion and inclusion.

Accordingly, the aim of the Education Directorate for the years to come is to develop this vision of the unifying role of education. The coherence of the Council of Europe's work in the educational field and the continuity of its effort have meant that it has not had to recreate itself in order to respond to the various post-war situations that have arisen. It is this philosophical consistency that has enabled the Organisation to respond to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the threat of terrorism. The cement that binds its actions is the strong belief that citizens and groups have duties and responsibilities to one another, that there is a moral dimension to environmental issues and economic crises, and that the key to a peaceful future lies in every individual's access to quality education that enables and stimulates personal development, identity building, critical thinking and the discovery of other values and attitudes, whether born in faith or in culture.

