

The process has been initiated by a group of experts and a number of preliminary studies in various sectors are currently being written up and will be published in 2000.

A brief survey carried out at the end of the conference showed that it was a great success, although there were certain criticisms of the size of the

working groups, because there were more participants than expected. The "outside" speakers – representatives of young persons and parents, and from the economic and political worlds – were particularly appreciated. The participants were convinced of the need to promote linguistic diversity, and of its importance.

The Conference proceedings will be available shortly. ■

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European Year of Languages (EYL) - 2001

On 19 January 1999, the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers declared 2001 European Year of Languages.

Aims and objectives

One of the main objectives of the European Year of Languages (EYL) will be to celebrate and enhance Europe's wide linguistic diversity as a source of mutual enrichment to be protected and encouraged. It will set out to increase people's awareness of the importance of learning more and a wider variety of languages throughout their lives, in a continent of ever-increasing interaction. The activities will emphasise the key role played by languages and intercultural skills in encouraging mutual understanding and a spirit of tolerance, as well as respect for identities and cultural diversity. It will also highlight the important contribution of language skills to active participation in the European democratic process and for employment and mobility in Europe.

The Year will help to promote European democratic citizenship by encouraging European citizens to develop plurilingualism, that is to achieve a degree of communicative ability in several languages, including those less widely used and taught.

For the Council of Europe, European Year of Languages 2001 will provide the opportunity to present and disseminate its work in the field of modern

languages to a wide audience, and in particular to launch the "Common European Framework of Reference", the "European Language Portfolio" and a document concerned with analysing and planning language policies in education. It will help to strengthen co-operation in the fields of language policies and teaching with other inter-governmental institutions, particularly the European Union and Unesco, and relevant non-governmental organisations. Finally, the Year will provide an opportunity to develop thinking and discussion about new directions for language policies and practice.

The organisation of EYL

The year will be marked by a series of local, regional, national and international events, including language festivals. The aim will be to increase citizens' awareness of the importance of plurilingualism, but also to achieve greater balance in the language sphere. Support and encouragement must be given to learning languages that are less widely spoken or less frequently taught. EYL will therefore help to publicise the measures proposed in Recommendation (98) 6 of the Committee of Ministers on modern languages (March 1998) and Recommendation 1383 of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly (September 1998).

The Council of Europe's Secretary General has invited the authorities of each member state to support EYL and appoint a national co-ordinator. The latter's role will be to liaise between the secretariat and the European co-ordination group on the one hand, and his or her country's national co-ordinating body, which will promote and organise national events and co-ordinate national, regional and local activities.

Co-ordination and partners

The European Year of Languages will be co-ordinated by the Modern Languages Division of the Council of Europe's Directorate General IV. To widen the scope of the Year, the Council has invited the European Union and Unesco to be associated with it as special partners. The European Commission has just adopted a proposal for a decision of the Parliament and the Council of Ministers confirming this involvement and Unesco has expressed its intention of actively participating.

The European Centre for Modern Languages will also contribute to the preparations for EYL. It is also planned to organise inter-sectoral activities within the Council of Europe and joint initiatives are under discussion. The

1. The term "plurilingualism" refers to the individual's language profile, the term "multilingualism" refers to society.

Parliamentary Assembly has also expressed its interest in the Year.

Preparations

The main features of EYL are set out in a draft guide, which will be revised in the light of consultations.

Several meetings have already been held, particularly one in July which brought together the Modern Languages

Project Group and representatives of international bodies and NGOs. A European Steering Group has been set up and held its first meeting in Strasbourg on 17 and 18 January 2000. It is responsible for the overall planning of the Year.

A seminar for national co-ordinators was held in Prague from 9-11 March 2000, at the Czech authorities' invitation. It will be essential to produce an easily

translatable and usable logo and slogan, and various partners and other bodies have been asked for proposals. ■

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"The Tbilisi Initiative"

"The Tbilisi Initiative" is the name given to the activity devoted to the preparation and publication of a Caucasian history textbook. The recommendation for the preparation of this textbook came from the participants at the Regional Seminar on "The reform of history teaching in secondary schools" (Tbilisi, Georgia, September 1997) and was supported by the Ministers of Education of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and the Russian Federation. The aim of "The Tbilisi Initiative" is to try to put the region's history in a more positive light, emphasising the common features of this history: cultural, social, and economic history and not just political and military history. The textbook should be innovative, and help the pupils in each of the countries to see their neighbours in a new light, develop their critical thinking skills and awaken a desire to look for more information about their neighbours' history themselves as well as become responsible citizens of democratic States. Each country has appointed a team of authors, under the responsibility of the Ministries of Education. The team prepares their country's contribution to the textbook. This is the first time that a joint history textbook

of the four countries is being written by historians from the countries who are able to present their view of their national history.

At the Regional Seminar in Moscow (October 1999), the participants discussed the progress that they have made on the sections on national history of their country, looked at the next section which will be on different themes and discussed the Introduction to the textbook to be prepared by an independent historian. The Moscow Regional Seminar was allowed the representatives of each country to discuss, in plenary session and in small groups, the texts that they had prepared. The

teams of authors will now revise their texts in the light of the Regional Seminar and start work on the section on common themes such as religions, architecture, customs, etc. This section should include material such as photos, maps, illustrations, etc and not too much written text. The textbook will be published in 2001 or early 2002. ■

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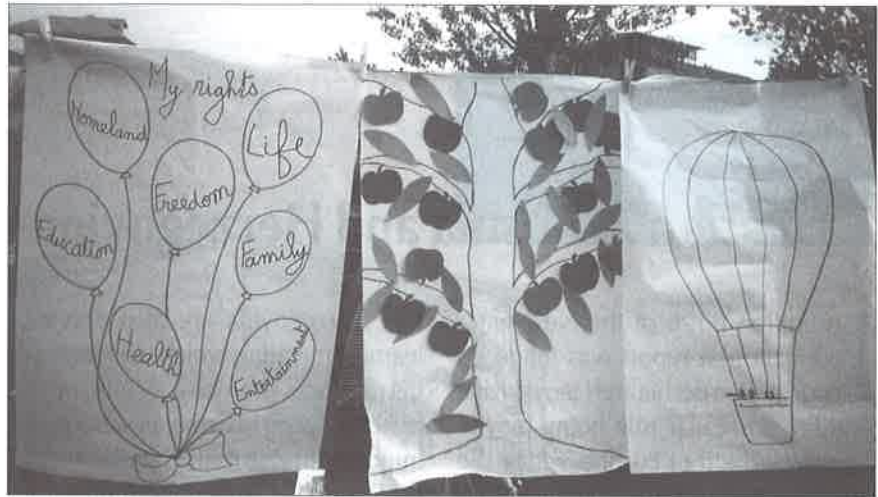
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2000



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"Refugee Camp, Tirana: first signs of a new start"

This double edition of the Education Newsletter is the first of a new millennium whose dawn has seen no let up to the now tragically familiar scenes of conflict around the continent brought about through a complex history of nationalism, inter-ethnic relations and post-communist transition. While people strive to realise their hopes and expectations for a democratic future based on human rights, social justice and prosperity through sustainable economic development, the potential for conflict as a result of inequality, social exclusion, intolerance and nationalism remains a constant threat. The immense scale of the challenges ahead could lead to the perception that organisations and people can do little to make a difference. Yet people around Europe can draw strength from the realisation that concerted action and solidarity can be the basis for future societal development. In parts of Europe which have recently suffered

the effects of war, the immediate objectives must be reconciliation, the establishment of the rule of law and the development of democratic institutions as a pre-requisite for economic development. These are common concerns, as we must all ensure that violence used as a means to gain and maintain power or to deal with conflict is consigned to the last millennium.

For this to be more than a utopian dream, far greater attention has to be given to education. Educational processes underpin all societal development, and it is therefore essential that educational rights are guaranteed to all citizens, that opportunities are made accessible to all, and that common core values are reflected throughout education systems. The languages, history and culture of others – and of the European culture common to all – must be taught and respected if peoples are to live together in peace.