

The European Centre for Modern Languages, Graz

It was on the initiative of Austria and the Netherlands, with special support from France, that in 1994 eight states founded the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) in the framework of a Partial Agreement of the Council of Europe as "a forum in which educational policy makers can meet up with specialists in language teaching methodology to discuss and seek solutions to the specific tasks and challenges that face them in the coming years and which will play a decisive role in the process of European integration".

By the end of 1998 a total of 25 states have become members of the ECML. Other states have declared their interest in joining.

Following an initial trial period (1995-1998) the continuation of the activities of the Centre was confirmed by Resolution (98) 11 of the Committee of Ministers. The Centre is now a permanent institution of the Council of Europe. The aim of the Graz Centre is to offer, generally through workshops and conferences, a platform and a meeting place for officials responsible for the implementation of language policy, specialists in didactics, teacher trainers, textbook authors and other multipliers in the area of modern languages. It also organises and supports research and development networks gathering experts from different member countries around key topics working towards concrete results.

The Centre undertakes to promote the dissemination of good practice in language teaching and learning, and to contribute to the respect and reinforcement of linguistic diversity in a multilingual, multicultural, democratic and tolerant Europe.

It concentrates on the investigation and implementation of innovative approaches and developments in language

education. In doing so the ECML works in close complementarity with the Modern Languages Project of the CDCC, the latter focussing on the development of language policies whereas the ECML directs its attention to the implementation aspect. Two co-organised workshops in 1998 and subsequent research and development projects leading into 1999 on the Common European Framework of Reference are but one example of successful co-operation; another is the planned synergy between the ECML's 3rd Colloquy (December 1998) and the conference "Linguistic Diversity for Democratic Citizenship" in May 1999 in Innsbruck organised by the Modern Languages Section.

At the same time the Centre is strengthening its links to national, bilateral and multilateral partners (DGXXII of the European Commission, FIPLV, Linguapax, EQUALS, ICC, to name but a few).

Over 60 workshops have been held up to date, mainly in Graz, (9 in 1995, 21 in 1996, 22 in 1997, 15 in 1998) bringing together almost 2000 experts from the member states and from countries all over Europe. These workshops focussed on the most pertinent aspects of reflection in the area of the teaching and learning of languages i.e. intercultural competences, bilingual education, teacher training, the use of modern information and communication technologies, autonomous learning, and many others.

Three colloquies have provided vital occasions for discussion and exchange of ideas on the promotion of modern languages education and the ECML's role in this process. The latest in this series was held in Graz in December 1998; its main objective was the discussion and initiation of concrete research and development projects answering

the challenge of plurilingual and pluricultural communication.

A large number of dissemination workshops in member or partner states have offered the opportunity to respond, in a more targeted way, to specific needs of member states.

A number of research and development networks have been active over the past years and some of their concrete results are forthcoming in the near future in form of publications.

Over 30 workshop reports on topical issues as set out in the ECML's priority areas of activity and the proceedings of the colloquies held in 1995 and 1997 are available.

These numbers only partly reflect the richness and diversity of the work initiated and carried forward during the years of the trial period; a number of results still await evaluation and editing with a view to their wider dissemination.

One of the priorities for 1999 is precisely that the evaluation of the experiences and the results of the first three years of activity and their presentation in various formats (publications, ECML-website, etc), while improving the organisational, dissemination and support structures.

At the same time the ECML is preparing its first medium-term programme which will span the years 1999-2002 and will pursue two main aims.

- a research and development focus on innovative approaches to the organisation and set-up of language education adapted to the needs of a multilingual and multicultural Europe;
- a focus on on-going concerns of the member States in the area of the teaching and learning of modern languages.

More information is available on the ECML website:

<http://culture.coe.fr/ecml>

* *Principality of Andorra (7 February 1996), Austria (8 April 1994), Bulgaria (21 August 1995), Croatia (23 February 1995), Cyprus (15 February 1996), Czech Republic (28 April 1995), Estonia (24 March 1995), Finland (1st January 1997), the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (2 December 1996), France (8 April 1994), Greece (8 April 1994), Hungary (2 August 1995), Iceland (1 January 1998), Latvia (25 June 1996), Liechtenstein (8 April 1994), Luxembourg (17 March 1995), Malta (8 April 1994), Netherlands (8 April 1994), Norway (1 August 1994), Poland (19 March 1996), Romania (25 June 1996), Slovak Republic (1 September 1995), Slovenia (8 April 1994), Sweden (1 January 1999), Switzerland (8 April 1994).*

Contact:

Michel LEFRANC

e-mail: michel.lefranc@coe.int

Josef HUBER

Tel.: +43 316 323 554 (Graz)

e-mail: josef.huber@coe.int

Newsletter education

No. 7. – August 1999



Editorial

As this edition of the Education Newsletter appears, the Council of Europe is celebrating fifty years of existence. The achievements of the organisation are wide-ranging, and over the coming weeks and months considerable attention will be given to its role in protecting human rights, sustaining the rule of law and promoting democracy, as well as to the importance of being the first European organisation to bring in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989. Often, the Council of Europe has been responsible for important work which doesn't make the headlines, but which nevertheless makes a deep and lasting impact. This is particularly true in the field of education. Enormous progress has been made in European educational co-operation during the past 50 years, and it is opportune to think both of the breadth of experience acquired over the last half century, and of how this can best be used to meet future challenges – particularly in view of the current dramatic situation in South Eastern Europe.

Educational cooperation has taken many forms, and involved many different partners – ministries of education, inter-governmental organisations, representatives of civil society and many others. The meetings of our own Education and Higher Education Committees, bringing together both academic and governmental representatives of 47 states as well other governmental and non governmental organisations, are themselves the source of long-standing and important European educational networks, providing opportunities for new ideas to be explored, approaches to common problems to be analysed, and new projects and partnerships to be forged. One of the most obvious and important signs of cultural difference is language, and it is particularly appropriate that the Council of Europe has been able to play a strong role in promoting the dissemination of good practice in language teaching and learning. This has been facilitated in recent years by the establishment of a European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz, and the importance of the work undertaken at this centre is examined in an article on p 5.

The pace of societal change continues to increase, carrying immense implications for education policy. New needs, both for individuals and societies, are emerging, and education structures will have to adapt to meet them. Many of these new challenges are being addressed through the CC-HER project on "Lifelong learning for equity and social cohesion" which is outlined on p 6.

The Education Department has a major role to play in providing technical assistance and expertise in very specific

circumstances. Our work in Bosnia and Herzegovina since the end of the war in 1996 was outlined in the previous edition, and recent events in South-Eastern Europe demonstrate that many countries are certain to require considerable support for a number of years – particularly in democratising educational culture, teaching and understanding sensitive periods of history, and in ensuring that adequate and appropriate educational opportunities are provided for refugees and returnees whose world has quite literally been blown apart through conflict.

The post-conflict educational challenges in South Eastern Europe will be on a scale which far exceed anything which Europe has faced in the past fifty years. How are security and common European democratic values respecting human rights and cultural difference to be assured where they have been so recently and totally violated? It is imperative to think differently about the kind of attention which should be given to South Eastern Europe, and the development of a regional education policy, affirming the common European identity of all cultures and peoples, is now underway at the Council of Europe. This policy will, in practice, be implemented in a variety of local contexts, and will aim to assist a process of democratic stability through education which gradually but profoundly permeates society.

The countries of South Eastern Europe should continue to play a major role in all forms of European educational cooperation. Many such educational activities may now seem commonplace and banal, but they are in fact major achievements. European student and academic exchange programmes, whether at regional level or throughout the continent, are increasingly taken for granted, yet without the Council of Europe, it is far from certain that such programmes would have developed as they have. Their benefits are impossible to quantify, as they not only have direct impact on personal and professional development, but also bring indirect advantages to all of our societies, especially in terms of increasing knowledge and cultural awareness. Bringing people together was the inspirational reason for creating the Council of Europe 50 years ago. The horrifying events which we have all witnessed over the last few months illustrate that it remains the main reason why the organisation is still urgently required.

Gabriele Mazza
(Tel. +33 (0)3 88 41 26 29)