



COUNCIL OF EUROPE
COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

**Recommendation Rec(2005)3
of the Committee of Ministers to member states
on teaching neighbouring languages in border regions
and explanatory memorandum**

*(adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 2 February 2005
at the 913th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

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The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15.b of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Having regard to the Declaration of the Heads of State and Government of the member states of the Council of Europe signed in Vienna on 9 October 1993, in particular to its statement that: “The creation of a tolerant and prosperous Europe does not depend only on cooperation between states [but] also requires transfrontier cooperation between local and regional authorities, without prejudice to the constitution and territorial integrity of each state”;

Having regard to the Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on Transfrontier Cooperation in Europe on the occasion of the 40th Anniversary of the Council of Europe, adopted on 6 October 1989;

Having regard to the European Cultural Convention, signed on 19 December 1954;

Having regard to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Cooperation between Territorial Communities or Authorities, signed on 21 May 1980, its Additional Protocol signed on 9 November 1995 and its Protocol No. 2 signed on 5 May 1998;

Having regard to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages signed on 5 November 1992 and in particular to Article 14 thereof;

Bearing in mind Recommendation No. R (98) 6 of the Committee of Ministers concerning modern languages, adopted on 17 March 1998;

Having regard to Resolution 165 (1985) of the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe on cooperation between European frontier regions, which calls in particular for the drawing up of a model agreement for transfrontier cooperation in the field of culture;

Having regard to Resolution 259 (1994) of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe on regional and local authorities and transfrontier or transnational school cooperation;

Considering that good neighbourly relations are the basis for a more free and tolerant Europe, which is the key to consolidating democratic stability;

Having noted that in many border regions transfrontier cooperation of all kinds is hindered by linguistic and cultural differences;

Bearing in mind the benefits for member states of the Council of Europe's achievements in the field of language teaching;

Emphasising the political importance of developing strategies for diversifying and intensifying language learning in order to promote plurilingualism in a pan-European context, further developing links and exchanges, and exploiting new communication and information technologies;

Wishing to maintain and further develop the richness and diversity of European cultural life through greater mutual knowledge of national, regional or minority languages;

Aware of the wealth of experience of transfrontier educational cooperation in border regions and the valuable contribution they can make as examples of linguistic and cultural approaches to preparing the citizens of a united Europe,

Recommends that governments of member states:

a. when developing their language-education policies, apply the principles of plurilingual education, in particular by establishing conditions that enable teaching institutions in border regions at all levels to safeguard or, if need be, introduce the teaching and use of the languages of their neighbouring countries, together with the teaching of these countries' cultures, which are closely bound up with language teaching;

b. encourage different transfrontier cooperation players – such as local and regional authorities, transfrontier cooperation groups between local and regional authorities, chambers of commerce, trade unions, employers and other organisations and individuals concerned – to involve the educational and linguistic sectors in the transfrontier cooperation projects they are organising or preparing;

c. seek to establish language reciprocity in their cooperation with a neighbouring country, or countries, concerning the teaching of neighbouring languages in border regions, allowing room for their own national language and also, where applicable, other languages used in the border areas concerned, be they less widely spoken languages, regional or minority languages;

d. take all possible steps to apply the measures described in the Appendix to this Recommendation;

e. seek cooperation in this field with the relevant bodies of the European Union, in order to achieve maximum synergy.

Measures to be implemented concerning the teaching and promotion of neighbouring languages in border regions

The measures recommended are addressed to central authorities, where these are responsible for defining the legal framework for, and supervising the activities of, territorial communities or authorities. In some federal States these prerogatives lie with the federated entities, in which case the measures are addressed to them. The central authorities are invited to draw the measures to their attention.

A. Possible general measures and principles

i. Specify a government department or agency to act as the contact point for neighbouring countries' ministries on matters relating to educational cooperation and the teaching of neighbouring languages in border regions, if this does not already exist. Nominate or establish a national body, if this does not yet exist, or use the government department or agency, to collate and disseminate, at national level, knowledge concerning language teaching in border regions and encourage this body to cooperate with other European organisations having the same remit.

ii. Help to set up a European network of these national bodies to exchange information on organisational and educational matters, establish a data bank of examples of good practice, undertake joint projects and draw up a guide to the organisation of language teaching in border regions.

iii. Launch or continue dialogue with neighbouring countries to exchange information on their respective educational systems and policies and develop joint programmes or policies on teaching neighbouring languages and educational cooperation. Such programmes should enable educational institutions to develop long-term cross-border relationships, launch educational projects aimed at acquiring the necessary skills for living and working in border regions, increase the number of transfrontier exchanges and visits and develop special teaching materials.

iv. Encourage and support local and regional boards of education in their efforts to make contact with their transfrontier counterparts, exchange knowledge and experience, cooperate and overcome differences in administrative arrangements and the organisation of education.

v. If necessary, authorise the introduction of the teaching of the neighbouring language and that of subjects linked to the neighbouring country's history, geography and culture into the syllabuses and curricula of educational institutions in border regions and develop the appropriate teaching aids.

vi. Bearing in mind the opportunities offered by existing European programmes, strengthen or establish the legal conditions for educational mobility in border regions, including pupil and student exchanges and visits to neighbouring countries, keeping administrative procedures to a minimum, so as not to hinder or discourage this mobility.

vii. Remove legal and other obstacles that prevent teachers qualified in their own countries from practising their professions, wholly or in part, in partner schools on the other side of the frontier, while maintaining their employment rights and conditions.

viii. Make it possible for the relevant authorities and/or educational institutions to officially recognise parts of pupils' or students' education completed in partner schools or universities across the border.

ix. Encourage those involved in local and regional affairs to promote greater public awareness of the importance and value of familiarity with the language, culture and society of neighbouring regions.

B. Measures aimed at border regions

i. Draw the attention of relevant organisations and educational institutions to documentation on language teaching policies produced by the Council of Europe's Language Policy Division in Strasbourg and under the auspices of Project 1.1.4 (Neighbouring Language Teaching in Border Regions) of the Council's European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz.

ii. Encourage flexible and varied approaches to teaching the languages and cultures of neighbouring countries that fully exploit the neighbouring country's proximity and possibility of direct contact. The aim should be to maximise the availability of authentic and stimulating forms of learning, including autonomous learning (where pupils from two countries learn each others' languages in tandem), short and intensive courses; extended individual attendance at schools on the other side of the border; and bilingual education, with teachers from neighbouring countries providing proper language immersion. Direct contacts and exchanges with neighbouring countries should be supplemented and reinforced by the application of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) and resources.

iii. Encourage schools and colleges to establish long-term partnerships that enable them to benefit from the facilities, equipment and human resources of the partner establishments and improve their knowledge and appreciation of their local culture and differences, leading to closer understanding. Such partnerships could eventually lead to modified or new courses with qualifications recognised in both countries.

iv. Encourage recognition and use of the European Language Portfolio, while allowing for the specific needs of border regions, to ensure that assessment of language and cultural skills is consistent and transparent, thus encouraging citizen mobility.

B1. Measures aimed at higher education and universities

i. Encourage universities and research institutions to undertake more thorough investigations of the social, cultural, economic and political situations of border regions throughout Europe and to examine their possible impact on education and on the phenomena of bilingualism, biculturalism and transfrontier identity. Encourage these universities to establish an academic and scientific cooperation network.

ii. Support teacher training in border regions in particular, so that it can include the language and culture of neighbouring countries and international cross-border projects. Ideally, these parts of the syllabus should be undertaken in conjunction with training institutions in neighbouring regions, which should organise placements in each other's countries. These elements could also be included in in-service training for teaching staff.

B2. Measures aimed at secondary education

i. Encourage all sorts of joint projects between schools of all levels and types, where the neighbouring languages are the means of communication for exchanging information on other subjects, working in mixed pupil groups to create specific documents and end-products.

ii. Encourage secondary schools to introduce into existing or future partnerships cross-border careers guidance to inform pupils of and, if possible allow them to visit, educational establishments where they can continue their studies while qualifying for work in the other country.

B3. Measures aimed at primary and pre-school education

i. Create the conditions for the teaching of neighbouring languages from the very beginning of primary education to introduce children to other cultures and enable them to learn and use those languages in an everyday and real-life context.

ii. Encourage and support the learning of neighbouring languages from a very early age in a pre-school or voluntary sector context.

B4. Measures aimed at adult education

- i. Help adult education institutions to develop teaching methods adapted to their students' needs and capacities, such as courses focusing on partial skills like listening comprehension, or alternation of language, where the same speaker uses both languages.
- ii. Persuade local and regional institutions responsible for, or involved in, adult vocational training, such as chambers of commerce and industry and professional associations, to encourage managers and staff to attend classes in the language and culture of the neighbouring country to increase transfrontier occupational cooperation and the economic standing of border regions.
- iii. Encourage local and regional authorities to organise training for their staff working in areas where transfrontier cooperation is or will soon be necessary, so as to develop their language and intercultural skills, their knowledge of life and economic activity in the neighbouring country, their commitment to successful transfrontier cooperation and their colleagues' involvement in it. Take similar measures in respect of central and decentralised government administrative staff involved in transfrontier cooperation.

B5. Measures aimed at socio-cultural stakeholders active in border regions

- i. Encourage the relevant organisations to cooperate with their counterparts in neighbouring regions in studies on the state of the labour market and develop joint strategies and training programmes.
- ii. Enable neighbouring countries' media to broadcast or publish their products, including the press and radio and television programmes, on both sides of the border.
- iii. Promote cooperation between the media from both sides of the shared border, such as exchanges and training of journalists, publishing articles and broadcasting programmes in the neighbouring language.

iv. Encourage tourism organisations and similar bodies to disseminate information on cultural, sporting and other activities, including ones such as music and dance specifically aimed at young people, in the neighbouring region.

v. Promote transfrontier cooperation between youth, cultural and sports organisations and associations so as to implement joint activities drawing on the relevant knowledge, facilities and resources of these bodies.

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

Background to the Recommendation

In border regions all sorts of transfrontier co-operation are blossoming at a rate that even the most optimistic among us would never have dared imagine. For this co-operation to work and for people to be able to circulate freely, good communication is essential. As borders are generally also language and/or cultural boundaries, the need for a good command of the language and for knowledge of the culture and society of the neighbouring country evidently increases considerably in these regions.

At the same time another noticeable trend is to encourage people to learn English, which has become a *lingua franca* used by people all over the world to communicate. Interest in the language and culture of the neighbouring country therefore needs to be given a new boost.

Nature of the recommendations

The measures proposed in the Recommendation are almost all guiding principles, leaving considerable leeway to central, regional or local authorities and to teaching establishments. Education systems differ considerably from one member state to another, even if there are some similarities, so the possibility of adapting the proposed measures to the specific needs of each education system must be left open. For the same reason the measures proposed for educational establishments often relate to educational projects and do not require substantial changes in the education system or in school syllabuses. In this way the increasing independence of these establishments in almost all the Council of Europe's member states is preserved.

The main recommendations

The first recommendation (a) is an example of the guiding principles mentioned in the previous paragraph. It is in keeping with the Council of Europe's policy to promote plurilingualism on a wide scale (Committee of Ministers Recommendation (98)6 concerning modern languages, adopted on 17 March 1998).

The following recommendation (b) highlights the fact that language learning is an activity that concerns every aspect of transfrontier co-operation, not only

education. It also emphasises the notion of projects, well-defined activities that produce tangible results.

The reciprocity mentioned in recommendation (c) is essential if worthwhile, lasting projects are to be implemented; activities that concern just one region or language are more likely to fail. Reciprocity also expresses mutual respect, even if the neighbouring languages have very different statuses, for example when languages spoken by relatively few people border on languages which are much more widely spoken. Reciprocity does not mean that the measures taken on both sides of the border must be identical. On the contrary, they will be more effective if they are tailored to the specificities of each language.

The last recommendation (e) in this section concerns co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Union, which may seem obvious but nevertheless deserves full attention. The language policies of these two European institutions have a lot in common, which in principle makes for more efficient co-operation than two parallel policies. Certain projects, such as the organisation of the European Year of Languages in 2001, have shown the added value to be gained through such co-operation.

For the European Union learning the language of the neighbouring country and educational co-operation in border regions are priorities. It has developed programmes which could, in principle, facilitate the measures mentioned in the appendix to the Recommendation, such as Lingua (language promotion), Comenius (co-operation between teaching establishments), Erasmus (co-operation between universities and student and teacher mobility) and Grundwig (projects for adults and in the vocational training context). Through these programmes it is possible to carry out concrete projects. There is also the Interreg programme, which proposes joint funding for training projects in border regions.

The opinion of the Committee of Education of the Council of Europe on this Recommendation was asked and received.

General measures and principles

A European network of national information centres (A ii) should help to improve the quality of the teaching of neighbouring languages. At the same time it will facilitate contacts between the different member states and the development of joint projects. In some federal States where these prerogatives lie with the federated entities, regional agencies could carry out the functions

of a national information centre. Experience has shown that a European approach makes it possible, in border regions with a difficult past, to overcome certain sensitivities and set up sound educational co-operation projects.

The mobility of pupils, students and teachers (A vi, A vii and A viii) is a great opportunity for teaching and learning the neighbour's language. This mobility is often relatively easy to organise and has some very positive effects. Direct contact with native speakers considerably increases the motivation to learn the other language. Furthermore, direct communication calls for a more practical approach to teaching, to prepare people to communicate rather than focusing on grammar and words out of context. The presence of teachers from the neighbouring country is important for the quality of language teaching (in addition, of course, to the skills of the country's own language teachers) and it also contributes the presence of another culture and another pedagogical approach.

Language teaching in general and the teaching of neighbouring countries' languages in particular have not waited for these recommendations in order to develop. The Council of Europe's Language Policy Division and its European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz have developed considerable know-how from which these recommendations cannot be dissociated (B i). The Language Policy Division has produced numerous interesting documents, including:

- a **common European framework of reference for languages (CEFR)** which makes it possible to develop curricula with well-defined objectives for the various stages of the learning process, while at the same time facilitating comparisons between different countries' diplomas. The six levels of competence proposed are valid for all languages. The document has already been translated into more than twenty languages and is widely used in the member states;

- a **European language portfolio (ELP)** - see also B iv): models have been (or are being) developed for the different education sectors in most of the member states. The ELP belongs to the learner, who uses it to keep track of his or her language proficiency and cultural experiences. It comprises three parts: i. the *Language Passport*, which gives an overview of the learner's skills in different languages, described in terms of the levels of competence defined in the CEFR; a *language biography*, in which the learner analyses in depth his or her learning of each language, still in terms of the levels of competence defined in the CEFR – this also enables the learner to plan the next learning stages and

subsequently to measure the progress made; a *File* of the learner's personal work showing the levels of proficiency achieved, together with any diplomas or certificates;

- a **Guide for the development of language education policies**, providing an analysis tool that serves as a reference document for the analysis, development or reorganisation of language teaching in the member states. This *Guide* comes with a set of twenty-odd studies delving deeper into the themes addressed in it, such as the place of English, linguistic diversity or the intercultural dimension.

The Graz Centre has several interesting documents concerning neighbouring language learning which were produced under the Cicero project, co-financed by the European Union. The project brought together a large number of specialists on languages in border regions. In close collaboration with the partner establishments, the project co-ordinator, the Language Academy in Maastricht, organised a series of seminars and colloquies on the subject in various border regions.

The results of the project include:

- a linguistic/social analysis tool for use in border regions,
- quality criteria for educational projects focusing on neighbouring languages,
- the first teaching manual on neighbouring languages in border regions.

The most important documents have been published on a CD-Rom and are also available for consultation on the Internet: www.cicero-net.nl

In all activities to improve the learning of neighbouring languages, careful attention must be paid to quality. This is why scientific backing is necessary (B 1 i) to guarantee the aptness of the action taken, in conjunction with the network of national information centres mentioned under A ii.

At the end of the day, teaching is a job for teachers. This is why it is essential to include the neighbouring language and culture, and cross-border co-operation, in initial and in-service teacher training (B 1 ii). This applies to primary as well as secondary school teachers.

Among the measures proposed, those intended to promote learning from a very early age (B 3 i and ii) are always controversial. Some educators believe it is

important to master one's own language fully before learning another. But the experience of children of mixed marriages and numerous projects in various places, including Canada, have shown that young children learn a second and even a third language with the greatest of ease. Other experts argue that English should be the first language they learn. The importance of English is often presented as conclusive proof of this theory. However, young children are open to languages and eager to learn; we should take advantage of this receptiveness and perhaps leave English for later, for the teen years, when young people have more reasons to want to learn English than other languages (for their leisure activities, travel, etc). In border regions the neighbouring language is often the foreign language young children have most contact with.

Adult education (B 4 i and ii) often has a very specific purpose as adults often have a special reason for wanting to learn the neighbouring country's language (work, family relations, etc). Teaching may therefore be geared to these specific needs, through "conversation classes", for example.

The role of local and regional authorities' staff (B 4 iii) should not be underestimated. Many of the measures proposed in these recommendations require their active participation and support. It is therefore essential that they develop their language and intercultural skills. Experience shows that local and regional authority staff do not always take a great interest in transfrontier co-operation, and this can hinder the implementation of the measures proposed. More than just improving their proficiency, therefore, it is a matter of working on their awareness and encouraging a sort of empathy with their neighbours.

Glossary

Bilingualism: competences in two languages (cf "plurilingualism"). Bilingual options have been extremely successful in recent years, especially with English. These options, also called "immersion" or CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), are based on the principle that the modern language can be used as a language of communication in other classes, such as geography or mathematics. In this manner pupils or students learn two subjects at once; rather than a subject of study, with lessons in grammar and so on, the foreign language is used as a means of communication.

Intensive courses: neighbouring language teaching can be organised in different ways. For example, instead of two hours a week over several years, a more intensive approach, such as two periods of two months during which students have three full afternoons of language lessons per week.

Long stay: sending pupils to schools in the neighbouring country for long stays is a more recent development. It involves sending pupils to spend a period of time (two months, for example) in a school in the neighbouring country with which their own school has a partnership agreement. The pupils are thus “immersed” in the other language and if they live with local families the immersion is even fuller, giving them a taste of the everyday life and culture of the other country.

Multilingualism: presence of several languages in a given place, regardless of who speaks them. Not to be confused with *plurilingualism*, which is a personal competence of people able to speak more than one language, *multilingualism* is when more than one language is spoken in a given geographical area.

Partial skills: this is an approach that has existed for a long time in connection with language courses for special purposes. The students are often adults who need to learn or improve their knowledge of a language in a short time for professional purposes. In such cases, the adults concerned do not need to learn the language fully. Often they simply need it for “conversation” or oral communication, or for more specific skills, such as negotiation. In other cases they may just need to be able to read and understand printed texts. In other fields of learning partial skills do not yet play an important role.

Plurilingualism: a naturally unbalanced and ever-developing plural competence, where skills in different languages are complementary and interactive and, together, help the individual perform language tasks.

Tandem is a learning process where a German, say, who wants to learn Polish, communicates regularly with a Pole who wants to learn German. Instead of just exchanging news, however, each teaches the other his or her language. This method is already very successful among adults and is gaining ground in secondary education.

