



# 4<sup>TH</sup> EUROPEAN LANGUAGE PORTFOLIO SEMINAR

Holiday Inn, Topkapi, Istanbul 23 – 25 October 2003

Report by David Little, Seminar Co-ordinator



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## **European Language Portfolio**

**Council of Europe seminar sponsored by the  
Ministry of National Education, Turkey,  
the Turkish National Education Foundation  
and  
the Association of Turkish Private Schools**

**Holiday Inn, Topkapi, Istanbul  
23–25 October 2003**

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## **Thursday 23 October**

### **Official opening**

#### **Özcan Demirel**

On behalf of the organizing committee Özcan Demirel extended a warm welcome to Joseph Sheils, head of the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe, to Alý Sözen, Deputy Governor of Istanbul City, and to the participants in the seminar. He expressed the hope that the participants would feel at home during their stay in Istanbul. The seminar was being held in the European part of the city, but this evening dinner would be in Asia and tomorrow evening there would be a boat trip on the Bosphorus. In this way the organizers hoped to give the participants new intercultural experiences.

Professor Demirel explained that Turkey's Ministry of National Education is currently reforming foreign language curricula, introducing the European Language Portfolio and working towards improved standards in foreign language teaching. He expected the seminar to have a significant impact on the dissemination and implementation of the ELP in Turkey, encouraging the learning of more European languages, including Turkish as a foreign language.

Professor Demirel thanked the Under Secretary at the Ministry of National Education and the Turkish National Educational Foundation for funding the seminar and the Association of Private Schools for making it possible to hold the seminar at the Holiday Inn and for sponsoring Friday evening's boat trip. He also thanked the staff of the Directorate General of External Relations, in particular Tolga Yağızatlı, the Director General, and his colleagues Zühal Gökçesu and Emel Latifaoğlu, and Johanna Panthier of the Language Policy Division, Council of Europe, for her help in preparing the seminar. He concluded by expressing the hope that the seminar would stimulate thoughts and deeds that would be beneficial to all involved.

#### **Tolga Yağızatlı**

As Director General of External Relations at the Ministry of National Education and Turkey's representative on the Council of Europe's Steering Committee for Education, Tolga Yağızatlı also welcomed the participants to Istanbul. He thanked the Council of Europe for choosing Istanbul as the location for the seminar and all those whose efforts had made the seminar possible.

Mr Yağızatlı noted that Turkey attaches great importance to the fundamental principles of the Council of Europe and plays a full part in all Council of Europe projects, including its educational programmes. Stressing that language learning is a lifelong process, he argued that encouraging widespread language learning is one of the most important educational objectives in an age of increasing globalisation. In Turkey one foreign language is compulsory from the fourth grade of primary education, and a second foreign language is included among the elective courses from the same grade onwards. Foreign languages have also been introduced to pre-primary classes in those educational institutions that have the necessary infrastructure. After the European Year of Languages (2001), the Turkish authorities decided to pilot the ELP in a number of schools. Twenty schools in Ankara and Antalya provinces were selected to take part in the project, each school being represented by one teacher of English. Implementation started in September 2002, and from the beginning seminars have been or-

ganized for teachers on the Common European Framework and the ELP. At the same time the English curriculum for English-medium schools has been redesigned in accordance with the principles of the CEF. The Ministry plans to launch projects to develop an ELP for young learners, an ELP for adults, new foreign language curricula and textbooks, and the teaching of Turkish as a foreign language in other European countries. The Ministry is committed to quality in foreign language teaching and learning in the school system, and places special emphasis on teacher training and the use of information and communication technologies.

Mr Yağızatlı concluded by wishing the participants a fruitful meeting and an enjoyable stay in Istanbul.

### **Joseph Sheils**

On behalf of the Council of Europe Joseph Sheils welcomed the participants to the first Council of Europe seminar on languages to be held in Turkey. The timing of the seminar was highly appropriate in view of the fact that just a few months ago the first Turkish ELP had been validated, and he was particularly pleased that a large number of Turkish colleagues were able to attend part of the seminar. He extended his thanks to the Turkish authorities for their co-operation and to the organizers for preparing the seminar.

Mr Sheils then briefly recalled the history of the ELP, from the first conceptual work undertaken in the mid 1990s, through the pilot phase involving fifteen Council of Europe member states and three INGOs (1998–2000), to the establishment of the Validation Committee and the wider dissemination of the ELP undertaken in the European Year of Languages (2001). Last year's seminar in Luxembourg had welcomed the decision to make specific ELP components available for general use, and one of the tasks of the present seminar was to elicit feedback on work arising from this decision. Another task was to consider future directions for the ELP project at a European level.

Mr Sheils pointed out that the ELP fits comfortably with the Council of Europe's key educational concerns: diversity, interculturality and quality; and he reminded his audience that the ELP is designed to promote linguistic diversity, plurilingualism and linguistic tolerance. It values all language competences, including those acquired outside formal education, supports lifelong learning, and encourages teachers and learners to think plurilingually. Mr Sheils also reminded his audience that the ELP promotes intercultural learning and thus can help to facilitate North-South and Inter-Faith dialogue, which are among the Council of Europe's key concerns. But above all the ELP helps to underpin quality in language learning, partly through its use of the CEF's common reference levels and partly by encouraging reflective learning and the development of learner autonomy. In this way the ELP complements the educational work of the OECD and the EU, the latter of which has adopted the common reference levels for its Europass. Because of the growing international importance of benchmarks, assessment and self-assessment, the Council of Europe needs translations of the self-assessment grid into the languages of all its member states.

Mr Sheils concluded by emphasizing the importance of the ELP as a means of creating stronger links between education and the wider world, of establishing links between different educational sectors, and of linking the learning of different languages.

## **Introduction to the seminar – David Little**

Last year in Luxembourg we began by noting a number of problems that had arisen. Increasing variety of design threatened to smother the European identity of the ELP; newcomers must design their ELP from the bottom up – the Council of Europe can give them only limited help; copyright difficulties may arise when ELP models are published commercially; the process of validating new ELPs is difficult and time-consuming, both for developers and for the Validation Committee; it is difficult to communicate developments to all member states; and it is sometimes difficult to obtain copies of validated ELPs. We also noted three challenges, summed up in three questions: How can we encourage further development, so that the ELP continues to make a difference? How can we learn from one another, so that the ELP becomes an agent of European exchange? How can we ensure that ELP achievements are freely available across Europe?

The Luxembourg seminar explored possible responses to these problems and challenges. In particular it discussed three proposals: that the Council of Europe website should make as much material as possible available to ELP developers in downloadable form, either as content (text only) or as templates (text plus graphic design); that we should benefit from one another's ELP experience by exchanging pages and support materials, perhaps via national/regional/sectoral websites; and that the European character of the ELP should be strengthened by making the "common core" more concrete. The seminar expressed support for the development of validated ELP content and templates, in particular self-assessment checklists, pages on intercultural experience and learning how to learn, a language passport summary for adults, and language passports for primary and lower secondary learners. In a day-long workshop conducted by Günther Schneider and Peter Lenz participants also explored in some detail how to write language proficiency descriptors.

After the Luxembourg seminar the Council of Europe commissioned the following work: the establishment of a database of language proficiency descriptors (Günther Schneider and Peter Lenz); the design of a language passport summary for adults (Rolf Schärer, Gareth Hughes, Dick Meijer, Joe Sheils, Johanna Panthier); the design of language passports for primary (Francis Debyser) and lower secondary learners (Radka Perclová); and sample language biography pages on intercultural experience and learning how to learn (David Little and Barbara Lazenby Simpson). Also, since the Luxembourg seminar the ELP Validation Committee had agreed that the *Principles and Guidelines* should be elaborated and interpreted in the light of experience since 2000 and that the application form for ELP validation and the guidelines for submission of ELPs for validation should be revised. This work is due to be completed by September 2004.

The Istanbul seminar would begin with an exchange of information and experience in the form of a report from Rolf Schärer and an exhibition of ELPs and ELP-related projects. It would go on to consider the draft language passport summary for adults, the unresolved issue of language passports for primary and lower secondary learners, the sample language biography pages on intercultural experience and learning how to learn, and the database of descriptors. In addition there would be more work on the elaboration of descriptors based on a presentation of the Dutch approach by Dick Meijer. Finally, the seminar would hear about the ELP in Turkey, would consider reporting issues and future prospects, and would conclude with an open forum.

### **Taking stock: interim report, October 2003 – Rolf Schärer**

At a European level the ELP project is like a bustling construction site. We have foundations and in many places building is taking place: patterns of practice and impact are emerging. Results need to be made known, but to do so is not straightforward. By October 2003, 48 ELPs had been validated and nine were awaiting validation. In addition some twelve non-validated ELPs were in use and thirteen new models were in preparation. Of the validated ELPs, 11 were for learners between 6 and 10, 12 for learners between 11 and 15, 10 for learners of 16 and over, 5 for VOLL, 4 for university learners, and 6 for adults. Since the beginning of the pilot projects (1998–2000) around 700,000 ELPs have been distributed. From a political point of view progress is slow, but from the perspective of individual projects and ministries it is very rapid. It is thus not unrealistic to aim to have 900,000 ELPs in circulation by the end of this academic year and 1,000,000 next year. However, projects have reported that a total of 300,000 ELPs have been distributed in the current year, which makes one wonder what has happened to the 400,000 ELPs distributed in previous years.

Where ELPs are used in controlled projects the feedback is very positive, sometimes from parents as well as learners. However, little is known about the impact of the ELP beyond limited educational contexts, and doubts have been expressed about the face validity and acceptance of the ELP in the world of work. Reactions from the increasing numbers of teachers experimenting with the ELP are predominantly positive, but still many teachers across Europe have little or no knowledge of the ELP, though it is beginning to appear in teacher training programmes. In more and more countries the ELP is supported by formal recommendations, yet much of the development and implementation is conducted on a regional or institutional level. A prime example of the use of the ELP as a strategic tool is provided by Thüringen in Germany, where it underpins an extensive process of curriculum reform.

Increasingly the ELP is used as an umbrella for different kinds of language learning activity, including bilingual classes, tandem learning, school years abroad, study weeks, and preparation for in-house diplomas and external exams. The ELP is also used as an instrument of quality development, focussing on such issues as whole-school language policy, promoting plurilingual and intercultural competence, supporting co-operation among language teachers, defining and communicating desirable outcomes, and reviewing diplomas.

Although employers are slowly beginning to show an interest in the ELP, it is perceived largely as an educational tool. Its reporting function is hardly known, and its potential benefits to the world of work need to be made more transparent and marketed.

The future of the ELP depends partly on making results to date as widely known as possible. This involves collecting and analysing quantitative and qualitative information and using it to establish the ELP's relevance to society. The ELP is an exciting project and there is evidence that it "works". There is no doubt that we have good foundations, but we need to build further.

### **Introduction to the ELP for Turkish participants – Rolf Schärer**

While national representatives set up an exhibition of ELPs and ELP-related projects, Rolf Schärer provided an introduction to the ELP for the Turkish language teachers who were able to attend the seminar on the first morning. He explained the three-part

structure of the ELP, the principles on which it is based, and the functions that it fulfils in relation to the Council of Europe's cultural, educational and language policies. He summarized the history of the ELP over the past six years, gave an overview of the ELP models validated to date, and explained the relation between the ELP and the six common reference levels of the Common European Framework.

### **Exhibition of ELPs and ELP-related projects**

The exhibition of ELPs and ELP-related projects comprised contributions from the following: ALTE/EAQUALS, Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Georgia, Germany (Thüringen), Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy (Lombardy), Serbia and Montenegro, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom.

Due to a misunderstanding most of the exhibits were removed on the first morning. It was thus impossible to use the exhibition for its intended purpose, as a practical point of reference throughout the seminar.

### **Passport summary for adults; work in progress on passports for young learners – Gareth Hughes**

Gareth Hughes began by asking: Why do we need a passport summary? He suggested the following answers: to provide a brief overview to support job applications; to promote the recognition and acceptance of the ELP in the workplace; to strengthen the European character of the ELP; and as a stand-alone document used in combination with a curriculum vitae or letter of application. He then summarized the main features of the draft passport summary that was to be the focus of discussion: standard information about the owner, including his/her first language(s); the logo of the Council of Europe; an overview of the owner's proficiency in second/foreign language(s) in terms of the common reference levels and skills of the CEF; a summary of the evidence that can be produced to support the owner's claimed language proficiency; date and signature; brief information about the ELP and the Council of Europe. He explained that the group responsible for designing the passport summary proposed that as far as possible it should be in the language of the addressee. It was intended that a digital version would be available from the Council of Europe in as many languages as possible and that it would always be delivered with the self-assessment grid. It was not yet clear what form the downloadable document would take. A Word file would be easy to implement but would carry with it the problem that it could be edited; for example, it would be possible to delete the Council of Europe logo. An on-line form capable of generating a tailored report with no empty boxes, on the other hand, would be technically sophisticated and would thus cost more to implement and maintain. Also, some people have inhibitions about giving personal data on-line.

Gareth Hughes then turned to the issue of optional language passport templates for young learners. He proposed three arguments in favour of developing such templates: (i) it is motivating for young learners to have a document that looks grown-up; (ii) passport templates could help to raise the European profile of the ELP; (iii) they would also provide an illustration for developers of what the passport section for young learners can look like. He suggested that it was important for the discussion groups to consider which age-groups need passport templates and how far the stan-

standard adult passport can be used by lower secondary learners. He then identified four key issues for the discussion groups to consider:

1. The self-assessment grid was developed with older learners in mind. It has been suggested that one or more versions of the self-assessment grid should be created for young learners. The Validation Committee, however, was considering the possibility of requiring the inclusion of the self-assessment grid in its canonical form in every language passport, regardless of the age of the target group, in order to signal the ELP's obligatory relation to the CEF.
2. Language passports for young learners should not seem to invite users to assess themselves across all six common reference levels. Although it might become a requirement that the full self-assessment grid is always included, adapted grids or descriptors should focus only on the levels that the school curriculum targets for the given age group, with perhaps one level above also included. The number of levels available for self-assessment in the passport section should be identical to the number in the biography section.
3. Language passports should allow for self-assessment of proficiency in the user's first language as well as in second and foreign languages. Since the self-assessment grid is not designed for self-assessment in the mother tongue, other means must be found for recording first language competence.
4. If developers of language passports for young learners wish to include assessment by teachers, space must be created for it: assessment by the teacher should not be seen simply as a confirmation or correction of the learner's self-assessment, and the two should be kept separate.

Finally, Gareth Hughes pointed out that in the rubrics of language passports for learners of all ages English and/or French must be used in addition to local languages. This requirement helps to promote the ELP's European dimension and to create a multilingual document. A text about the Council of Europe written for young learners will be made available in the near future.

### **Group work**

Following Gareth Hughes's presentation the participants divided into five groups to discuss the issues he had raised. There was one French-speaking group (chair Dan Nasta, rapporteur Barbara Glowacka), one German-speaking group (chair Gaby Kunsch, rapporteur Gunther Abuja), and three English-speaking groups (group 1, chair Ilknur Egel, rapporteur Ingela Nyman; group 2, chair Viljo Kohonen, rapporteur Gisela Conde; group 3, chair Chris van Woensel, rapporteur Maria Stoicheva).

Group discussion was shaped by the following questions:

1. Language Passport Summary
  - a) Who do you see this summary being used by? For what purposes do you see it being used?
  - b) Should this document be in the public domain as a downloadable file (outline form, self-assessment grid, instructions for use) from the Council of Europe? Why (not)? Should it be part of the 'common core' for ELP models for (young) adults?

- c) What improvements, if any, would you suggest to its content, design and instructions for use?

## 2. Passports for young learners

- a) For what purposes do young learners need a Language Passport? Define the purposes according to age group.
- b) In what ways can the Passport be made comprehensible and attractive to young learners, while remaining explicitly linked to the Common European Framework (through, for example, the inclusion of the self-assessment grid)?
- c) Should the Language Passports for primary and lower-secondary age learners be standardised documents (in the style of the standardised Language Passport for adults) or documents that, while conforming to the Principles and Guidelines and drawing on templates for common elements or common pages, remain distinctively national or regional documents? In the latter case, is the European dimension of the ELP sufficiently strong?
- d) What is the minimum obligatory content for a Language Passport for young learners? Define the contents according to age group. Here are some possible contents:
- an overview of one's language competence at a given point in time using descriptors relevant to one's age and the target levels in the appropriate school sector (self-assessment)
  - an overview of one's language competence in languages acquired outside of school (and in which one's level may be higher) using other descriptors relevant to one's age (self-assessment)
  - an overview of one's educational and linguistic experience
  - an overview of one's cultural and intercultural experience
  - teacher-assessment in the form of school grades (with information about the local school syllabus) or using the same overview grid/table as used for the self-assessment, or ...
  - an overview of certificates obtained (exams, school reports, documentation of exchange visits, projects, etc.)
  - a description of the local school system (syllabus, target levels, assessment procedures, etc.)

Do the proposed models meet your expectations?

- e) How, if at all, should the Language Passports for young learners take account of mother-tongue competence, where the mother tongue is not a language of instruction in the school?
- f) The Validation Committee proposes that in order to respect the importance and value of self-assessment it should be kept separate in the ELP from teacher assessment. (If teacher assessment is used to accredit or underwrite self-assessment, self-assessment will be seen as insignificant.) Should teacher assessment therefore be included in the Language Passport? And if so, how?

## **Friday 24 October**

### **Feedback on Thursday afternoon's group work**

The reports on Thursday afternoon's group work may be summarized as follows:

In general the language passport summary for adults was welcomed, though concerns were expressed on three points:

- the need to ensure that the design of the summary cannot be tampered with, whether it is implemented as a downloadable document or on-line;
- data protection issues in the event of an on-line implementation;
- the danger that the passport summary will be used without reference to the ELP.

With regard to content and design, the working groups made the following suggestions:

- move the logo to the bottom of the page;
- improve on "Family and given name(s)";
- perhaps remove "date of birth";
- replace "Mother tongue" by "First language(s)";
- change "Qualifications" to "Language qualifications";
- replace "Experience" by "Linguistic and cultural experience";
- add CEF levels to certificates where possible;
- in the event of an on-line implementation, display self-assessment levels graphically;
- add intercultural experience;
- beside "Date" add "Signature".

As in Luxembourg, the working groups favoured assistance in the design of language passports for young learners but were opposed to standardization. They felt that it must always be possible to accommodate particular national and regional dimensions. Two groups felt that the self-assessment grid should not be included in language passports for young learners since it was too difficult for them to understand – interest was again expressed in the development of a version for young learners. On the other hand, one group suggested that the self-assessment grid could be used to assess first language proficiency. All groups emphasized the importance of age-appropriate design and content. None was in favour of providing for teacher assessment, though one group pointed out that the development of self-assessment skills requires teacher support.

### **The Dutch approach to interpreting descriptors and developing checklists – Dick Meijer**

At first the Dutch ELP project tried to develop seven different ELPs, though three years of piloting showed that it was not necessary to have so many models. To date the Dutch have five validated ELPs, for learners of 9 years and over (primary), learners of 12 years and over (lower secondary), learners of 15 years and over (upper secondary), vocational education, and migrants.

Three conclusions were drawn from the pilot phase: in implementing the ELP it is not enough to focus on its reporting function; teachers must be fully involved in ELP projects; and the ELP should be firmly embedded in the curriculum. The pilot phase also showed that learners found it difficult to understand the "can do" descriptors: they did not always recognize the communicative situations that lie behind the descriptors, and

if they were not used to going abroad, they found it difficult to imagine foreign language situations they might have to deal with.

The need to overcome this problem led the Dutch project to develop the practice of interpreting descriptors by giving examples of relevant situations and adding further explanation. For example, A1 SPOKEN INTERACTION includes the following descriptor: “Can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics”. The Dutch checklist offers this example of a situation: “During an exchange programme you have accommodated a foreigner in your house. He asks you questions about the music you like”, and this further explanation: “Familiar topics: sport, weather, public transport, food, animals, school. You should be able to say what music you like, for example, or of which groups you are a fan. Or you should be able to say what the weather is like”.

The Dutch project has also developed learning activities that are explicitly linked to the checklists. For example, for the sub-activity “information exchange”, A1 SPOKEN INTERACTION includes the following descriptor: “Can ask and answer questions about themselves and other people, where they live, people they know, things they have”. This provides the basis for a learning activity that requires the learner to describe his/her place of residence. The communicative situation the activity is designed to address is summarized thus: “As part of an exchange project you provide your new room-mate with information on what he/she can expect in his/her new residence”; and the task is defined as follows: “Make a video report on your place of residence. Film the nicest, most important and most boring spots and tell about them. Make a map and mark on it the places you filmed.” A second example is provided by the B1 SPOKEN PRODUCTION descriptor “Can relate the plot of a book or film and describe his/her reactions”. The situation attached to this descriptor is: “At a final exam you can give a description of the content and/or story line of a film or book. You can also give your own opinion”; and the further explanation is: “Maybe you make a grammatical mistake here and there, but despite this you have only a few problems when it comes to saying something about a film or book. Because you knew you would have to perform this task, you were able to do some preparatory work”.

The Dutch project is currently developing an ELP web site. This will provide efficient learning activities for learners and detailed language profiles to guide textbook authors and other materials developers. It will also support the implementation of the ELP in schools and promote a clearer articulation between secondary and vocational education.

### **Group work and poster feedback**

The five working groups were given three tasks: to discuss the pros and cons of the Dutch approach to descriptors; to consider whether the examples provided by Dick Meijer were appropriate to their situation; and to develop examples designed to help learners in their situation to understand the descriptors.

The posters drawn up by the working groups noted that the Dutch approach helps to give learners access to the Common European Framework; that it supports learners, especially in independent learning contexts; that it helps teachers and ELP developers; that it bridges the gap between descriptors and assessment; and that it is very appropriate for certain target groups/national contexts. The posters also noted, however, that the Dutch approach may make the ELP too prescriptive; that not all descriptors

require explanation; that it is sometimes difficult to draw a clear line between “situation” and “explanation”; that it can make the descriptors look like a teaching manual; that it is not suitable for all age groups; and that it does not include criteria for success.

### **Establishing a bank of language proficiency descriptors for European Language Portfolios – Günther Schneider**

The function of the bank of descriptors is to make validated ELP content freely available and thus speed up the development of new ELPs and simplify the validation process. The bank contains (i) descriptors that can be clearly related to a specific CEF descriptor and (ii) descriptors that introduce new dimensions that can be linked to a category and level of the CEF.

In establishing the bank, checklists from 10 ELPs were analysed, together with the checklists developed by the Bergen Can-do Project (supported by the European Centre for Modern Languages, Graz). The ELPs were selected according to four criteria: they were available when the analysis was undertaken; they were aimed at large rather than special target groups; they contained original checklists of stand-alone descriptors; the checklists contained a quantity of interesting and well-formed descriptors. Only a few descriptors were retained from ELPs for children. In future it would be advisable to establish a separate bank of descriptors for young learners in order to avoid the danger that simplified descriptors lacking modifiers will be used in an adult context.

The main task in selecting descriptors for inclusion in the bank was to confirm their relation to the CEF. Most descriptors included in the bank can be related to existing CEF descriptors, though the type and degree of this relationship varies: some descriptors are virtually identical with those in the CEF; some have a (partly) different wording but fully reproduce the content of the source descriptor; some have a different wording and reproduce the content of the CEF descriptor in part only, sometimes with new elements; some fully integrate the content of two or more descriptors; some integrate elements from two or more descriptors; and some interpret and illustrate a descriptor through (new) examples. A small number of descriptors could not be related to CEF descriptors, but it was felt that they were interesting and could be attributed to a category and level. Descriptors for telephoning were included in this way.

All selected descriptors were submitted to a quality check based on the properties of “good descriptors”. In particular, each descriptor must have to do with aspects of language proficiency and competence, must be likely to be interpreted in a non-ambiguous way, must be clear and simple (at least to some degree), must not combine too many different aspects of language proficiency/competence, and must not combine aspects of language proficiency/competence that belong to different levels. Although at this stage the bank contains some 600 descriptors, it should be noted that there are about 100 CEF descriptors for which there is not at least one descriptor in the bank.

The Council of Europe will shortly make the bank of descriptors available to all interested parties. In the development of new ELPs the use of descriptors from the bank is recommended but not compulsory. The local development of descriptors is still encouraged because this may help to embed the ELP in the local curriculum and/or serve important pedagogical purposes, for example in goal setting. In future each ELP should make clear which descriptors are clearly related to the CEF and which are not.

As it stands the bank is incomplete. Validated ELPs not yet considered need to be analysed using the procedures described above, and descriptors that emerge from future research projects should also be added. What is more, parallel banks should be set up for young learners and for specific learner groups, for example in particular vocational and professional fields.

### **Experience report 1: using the ELP to focus on learning how to learn – Gabriela Tänzer**

Thuringia's family of validated ELPs comprises three parts, for young learners up to 8 years, for learners from 10 to 16 years, and for learners of 15 years and over attending either a *Gymnasium* or a vocational school. A fourth part is under development. Because the new Thuringian curricula require the development of personal, social, technical and subject-related skills, the Thuringian ELP project group set out to develop ELP sections that focus on each of these skills. Their language biography contains two main parts: (i) my languages and (ii) my language learning ("What I can do", "What helps me to learn", "My aims – learning plans").

An ELP project involving 24 schools of all types and approximately 9,000 students was launched in Thuringia in February 2003 and will last for one and a half years. 10% of the students and their teachers are involved in regular surveys. In July 2004 the ELP will be launched throughout the Thuringian school system. Already it is clear that starting portfolio work is time-consuming for teachers, and although pupils are well motivated, problems sometimes arise because of the teachers' lack of experience. Feedback suggests that it is essential to set attainable targets; also that 6–8 weeks are needed to work on a particular language skill. The ELP has succeeded in bridging gaps in the educational system, especially the transition from primary to secondary school. Survey results show that the majority of pupils respond positively to the ELP.

### **Experience report 2: using the ELP to focus on intercultural issues – Gisella Langé**

The ELP has turned out to be an interesting European experience, not least because of the emphasis that it puts on pluriculturalism and plurilingualism. In Lombardy, ELP work with learners aged between 12 and 15 has focussed particularly on developing respect for cultural diversity and different ways of life. A key question for the Lombardy ELP project is: How can intercultural experiences be captured? Its answer is to do a lot of work on the language biography, then summarize that work in the language passport. The language biography is designed to stimulate the learners to think about cultural difference and to reflect on their own intercultural experience. Here is a typical reflective task: "Considering experiences you have had so far, or you have heard of, write what you would like to do in the future to improve your language learning and your knowledge of other people and countries". The intercultural dimension can also be addressed in the section of the language biography that focuses on "How I learn". For example, if the learner comes from another country, that provides a stimulus to reflect on different teaching styles. In the language passport, the activities of self-profiling and summarizing experience (exchanges, projects, study visits, meetings with foreigners, correspondence, etc.) prompt students to reflect on their linguistic and cultural identity. Feedback on the Lombardy ELP project has been very positive; learners put a high value on their ELP and take great pride in showing it off.

## **Introduction to ELP templates on (i) the intercultural dimension and (ii) learning how to learn – Barbara Lazenby Simpson**

The sample language biography pages (templates) on (i) the intercultural dimension and (ii) learning how to learn were collected with three goals in mind: to promote quality in ELP development, to encourage coherence across the international family of ELPs, and to facilitate the validation process. Both sets of templates are prefaced by a brief discussion of key issues in the *Principles and Guidelines* and the Common European Framework. In the case of the intercultural dimension, this discussion includes a summary of consultation with a group of experts on intercultural learning.

Although they are drawn from a number of validated ELPs, it is important to emphasize that the templates are not offered as examples of perfection; no doubt all of them can be improved in various ways. ELP developers are free to use them as they are, but they may do better to use them indirectly, as a source of ideas, insights and inspiration.

Language biography pages that focus on intercultural communication and intercultural learning should stimulate learners to reflect on intercultural experiences and encourage them to articulate the effect that such experiences have had on their lives and identities. Two points in particular should be considered when designing such pages. First, what range of intercultural experience is open to the learners for whom the ELP in question is intended? And second, where will they gain such experience, at home or abroad? It is important to bear in mind that there are cultural similarities as well as cultural differences and to find ways of taking them into account. It is also important to make it easy for learners to date their entries, for only thus can they capture and reflect on their development over time.

It is central to the ELP's pedagogical function that it should help learners to become more fully aware of their language learning process. Planning, monitoring and evaluation all play a key role here, but so too do language biography pages that focus on learning how to learn. Such pages encourage learners to analyse the demands made by different learning tasks, set their own learning targets, and explore their own learning style with a view to modifying it to meet particular learning needs. The templates are designed so as to emphasize the recursive nature of reflection and thus the importance of dating entries.

### **Group work and poster feedback**

The working groups formed sub-groups of 3–4 participants. Each sub-group selected a learning domain (primary, lower secondary, upper secondary, vocational, university/adult) and a theme (either the *intercultural dimension* or *learning how to learn languages*). Its task was then to design a language biography page in A3 poster format and on a second poster to indicate the learning context (domain/age of learners etc.), any particular issues that were taken into account in designing the page, and how the page might be adjusted to suit the needs of a different target group

Sub-groups working on the *intercultural dimension* were asked to take the following points into account:

- Does the page allow the learner to record where, when, with whom and in what context the experience(s) in question took place?

- How is the intensity of the experience recorded (frequency, duration, involvement of the learner etc.)?
- How does the learner record his/her response to the situation?
- How does the learner reflect on his/her response?

Sub-groups working on *learning how to learn languages* were asked to take the following points into account:

- Is the activity recursive, allowing the learner to return to the page and record developing awareness/experimentation with learning/responsibility for learning?
- Does the page support reflection?
- Is self-assessment included?
- Can the page be used to identify future learning targets?
- Can the learner specify his/her learning approaches/strategies?
- Is the learner encouraged to analyse learning/task demands?

## **Saturday 25 October**

### **The ELP in Turkey – Özcan Demirel**

Turkey is a founder member of the Council of Europe and has taken part in all the Council's initiatives from the very beginning. It enjoyed close relations with the Language Policy Division from the early 1970s on, when the Turkish Ministry of National Education reformed foreign language curricula and introduced new standards for the design of textbooks. Turkey also participated fully in the European Year of Languages (2001), when it began to engage with the Common European Framework and the ELP.

Turkey's population is currently estimated at 70.6 million, of whom about 45 million are under the age of twenty. At present approximately 16 million people are in formal education, with 11 million in primary, 2.5 million in secondary, and 1.8 million in higher education. The Turkish ELP project identified learners in secondary schools as the prime target group: they are not absolute beginners and have sufficient language awareness to understand and adapt to the philosophy of the ELP.

Secondary education in Turkey includes all general, vocational and technical education institutions that provide at least three years of education after primary school. The participation rate has just reached 57%, with 40% in general and 60% in technical education. The long-term objective is that 65% should receive vocational and technical education and 35% general secondary education.

Turkish is the official language of Turkey; it is taught in schools and used in oral and written communication all over the country. English, German and French are necessary for Turkey's economic, cultural and political relations with other countries. Most people would like to learn a foreign language, especially English. Plurilingualism seems not to be under consideration as a state policy at present, but the ELP is being used in an attempt to change beliefs and attitudes. Foreign languages are offered from the fourth grade of primary school on (98% of pupils take English), and a second foreign language is offered in the ninth grade (mostly German and French, though in some schools Japanese, Spanish, Italian and Russian are also offered).

The Turkish ELP project began by focussing on learners of English in private and public schools. One teacher of English from each of twenty schools in Ankara and

Antalya provinces was selected to participate in an in-service training programme under the auspices of the Board of Education in Ankara. The first seminar was held on 19–20 October 2001, when the ELP project was introduced in detail, ELP models from other European countries were examined, language descriptors in the ELP were analysed, and the implementation process was discussed. Arising from the seminar, a steering committee was established and given the task of designing an ELP for Turkish learners aged 15+. Prior to validation this ELP was published by the Ministry of National Education and distributed to piloting schools. In addition, a small group including experts from TÖMER Language Teaching Centre worked on another ELP for adults learning Turkish as a foreign language.

The implementation process started at the beginning of the school year 2002–03 and a feedback seminar was held in Ankara on 20–21 March 2003. Learning activities and test items are now being developed for each language descriptor in the ELP. In May 2003 the Turkish ELP for secondary learners was validated by the European Validation Committee in Strasbourg.

To date two master's theses and four doctoral dissertations have dealt with such ELP-related matters as learner autonomy, language descriptors, the learning process, self-assessment, skill-based testing, and teacher education. A survey of teachers and learners involved in the pilot scheme has elicited strongly positive responses. The teachers agreed that the ELP makes a positive contribution to the language teaching and learning process and motivated students more than expected; most of the students achieved some degree of learner autonomy.

For the future it will be necessary to develop a strategy for handling innovation in which teacher training will play a central role. It will also be necessary either to restate the present curricula in terms of the CEF's common reference levels or to develop new curricula.

### **The ELP: strategic objectives 2004–07 – Joseph Sheils**

For the phase of the ELP project due to begin in 2004 it is possible to identify seven strategic objectives:

1. We must consolidate current initiatives to improve quality control in ELP development and make the validation process more efficient. This will entail (i) making the *Principles and Guidelines* more transparent and revising the application form for validation and the submission guidelines; (ii) continuing to develop validated content; (iii) working towards a more recognizable European dimension through the use of standard terminology, the official languages of the Council of Europe, the ELP logo, and a standard text on the Council of Europe; and (iv) revising the guide for ELP developers.
2. We must develop further the common core of the ELP. This will entail (i) supporting self-assessment by continuing work on a bank of quality descriptors for use in checklists; (ii) devising a self-profiling tool that ELP owners can use to capture their intercultural experiences and competences; (iii) developing a "junior" self-assessment grid; (iv) finding a way of taking fuller account of mother tongue proficiencies; and (v) encouraging the development of whole-school policies for ELP use.
3. We must seek to extend the reach of the ELP to all 45 member states of the Council of Europe. In doing so (i) we must aim to avoid unnecessary proliferation of

ELP models within educational sectors and zones; (ii) we must aim for coherence and continuity from one stage of learning to the next; and (iii) we must consider the development of electronic ELPs, especially for older learners.

4. We must promote and disseminate good practice. This will entail (i) developing teacher training resources – e.g., updating the general guide for teachers and teacher trainers, creating a teacher training kit (this is the task of one of the projects in the new medium-term programme of the European Centre for Modern Languages, Graz), and commissioning teacher’s guides to the CEF and to CEF-related testing and self-assessment; (ii) recording and exchanging good classroom practice via case studies and interaction networks; (iii) promoting the use of the ELP by all language teachers in the same institution.
5. We must use the ELP to promote coherence, transparency and mobility. This will entail (i) relating examinations to the CEF’s common reference levels; (ii) translating the self-assessment grid into *all* languages; and (iii) linking the ELP to life-long learning initiatives such as the European Union’s Europass.
6. We must update European and national information and co-ordination systems. This will entail (i) renewing the European Validation Committee from 2005 onwards; (ii) increasing the ELP’s European and national visibility; and (iii) promoting more efficient national and local ELP co-ordination.
7. We must monitor the spread and use of the ELP. This will entail (i) collecting and analysing the statutory reports that ELP developers are required to submit three years after validation; (ii) gathering ELP implementation reports; (iii) encouraging the empirical evaluation of ELP projects; (iv) monitoring the use of the ELP at key interfaces; and (v) promoting the inclusion of the ELP in national language education policies.

### **A manual for relating language examinations to the Common European Framework – Johanna Panthier**

For just over a year a team of five experts, in close co-operation with a group of consultants, has been working on a *Manual for relating language examinations to the CEF*. The English version of the first draft has just been published and the French version is in preparation. The purpose of the manual is to guide the process of linking examinations to the common reference levels of the CEF. This is not an easy task, but the guide is intended for specialists. In due course the Council of Europe plans to issue a complementary teacher’s guide to assessment and self-assessment. Meanwhile the manual is to be piloted as extensively as possible. A questionnaire will be used to elicit feedback on the manual as a document; all stages of the linking process elaborated in the manual will be tested and evaluated; and case studies will be compiled documenting the linking of particular language exams to the CEF. Videos illustrating oral production at all six common reference levels will be made available with the Manual, as well as CD-ROMs with items for testing receptive skills and tasks for written production tests. Participants in this seminar were requested to make those responsible for language tests in their own countries aware of the manual and the piloting process.

## **Reporting on the ELP project at European level – Rolf Schärer**

The 2003 report on the ELP project at European level must be submitted by 15 November, while a draft report for the current phase of the project (2001–04) is due in March 2004. To whom should the reports be addressed? We need political support, but we also need to persuade practitioners. In other words, we need to adopt both a top-down and a bottom-up approach. The priorities for the future have already been laid out by Joseph Sheils. We must recognize that the CEF and the ELP are tools; and like other tools, they are useful if they have a purpose. What role can the ELP play in supporting the solution of wider issues in language education? We need to report on ELP implementation in quantitative terms – these data should require only fairly minor updating before next March; but we also need to present qualitative information – in this seminar a number of presentations have identified how the ELP can be used to support innovation of various kinds. Of course, not everything that has been done can be included in the report. It is, however, important to insist on one thing: ELP development takes time, and policy makers as well as practitioners must be patient. A big issue that all of us have to address is this: How do we get that message across so that we get the necessary support for the next stage?

## **Open forum – chaired by David Little**

The open forum gave participants an opportunity to return to issues that had been discussed in the course of the seminar.

*Passport summary for adults* – Francis Goullier (France) drew attention to an unresolved tension between the passport summary as something required by employers and something that should exist in its own right: some participants had expressed the fear that the introduction of the passport summary might herald the disappearance of the passport itself. Rolf Schärer emphasized the importance of persuading employers to accept the ELP: the passport summary is one possible means of achieving that aim. We must take some risks in moving forward, and to date employers have tended to be critical of the ELP scheme as a whole. Joe Sheils recalled that the European Union is moving towards a standard format for *curricula vitae* in which the passport summary could play an important role. Gareth Hughes noted that the standard adult passport serves an altogether broader role than the passport summary, combining as it does the reporting and pedagogical functions that are fundamental to the ELP.

*Passports for young learners* – Cecilia Nihlén (Sweden) asked how far work had progressed on the development of a self-assessment grid and a bank of descriptors for young learners. David Little explained that the preliminary drafts of language passports for young learners had raised fundamental questions that the Validation Committee was due to discuss in November. He hoped that a strategy would be put in place to respond to two complementary needs: the development of (i) a self-assessment grid and descriptors and (ii) optional passport templates for young learners. More materials should be available at the 2004 ELP seminar. In response to a question from Barbara Glowacka (Poland), David Little suggested that recently validated ELP models for primary learners seemed to indicate that in some educational systems more than one model is needed at primary level. Frank Gatt (Malta) raised the question of teacher assessment.

*Descriptors* – Noting that Günther Schneider had proposed the establishment of a bank of descriptors for young learners, Johanna Panthier wondered whether there are

already enough descriptors to make a start. Günther Schneider thought that there are. He also pointed out that in Switzerland Peter Lenz is working on a project to calibrate descriptors for young learners; results are expected in a few months. So far calibration is proceeding satisfactorily: a good correspondence is being established between adult descriptors and those for young people. However, the development of a bank of descriptors for young learners is not one of the intended outcomes of this project.

Recalling that some of the discussion groups were against including the self-assessment grid in ELPs for young learners, Johanna Panthier explained that the Validation Committee was inclined to insist on its inclusion not for purposes of self-assessment but in order to show teachers and parents how the ELP in question fits into the larger European picture. Francis Goullier argued that a proliferation of self-assessment grids could result in the loss of the transparency and coherence that the common reference levels were designed to achieve. Viljo Kohonen (Finland) suggested that the best course of action would be not to exclude the self-assessment grid from language passports for young learners but rather to supplement it with a simplified version covering levels A1, A2 and B1.

Zsuzsa Darabos argued that we need to gather a great deal of information in order to gain a general overview; there is always a danger that when the outcomes of group discussion are synthesized individual preoccupations and important nuances are lost. David Little agreed that it was well worth considering eliciting individual feedback from participants, though there are inevitable limits on what can be included in seminar reports.

In response to a question about developing a bank of indicators for intercultural competence, David Little noted that this issue is to be addressed by one of the projects in the new medium-term programme of the European Centre for Modern Languages, Graz. Joseph Sheils drew attention to the proposal to develop some kind of “map” as a way of enabling ELP users to profile their intercultural experiences and competence. This is a difficult issue, however, and will take time to solve.

*Intercultural dimension and learning how to learn* – Hans Ulrich Bosshard (Switzerland) wondered whether it might be possible to make more rapid progress by coordinating projects with overlapping interests in language awareness and the intercultural dimension. He was supported by Barbara Glowacka. Joseph Sheils agreed that this was worth exploring, though there are always limits to the amount of coordination that is possible. In general we need to set a target for the next two years and bring together groups of experts in different fields – mother tongue, the intercultural dimension, and so on. Gunther Abuya (Austria) reported that the German-speaking working group would like discussion of ongoing research to be included in the next ELP seminar.

*Future directions for the ELP project* – Viljo Kohonen argued that the long-term success of the ELP depends on a degree of educational change that will not take place unless teachers are given the necessary support at all levels. Ellie Liemberg (The Netherlands) drew attention to those educational contexts in which the ELP plays an important role in assessment. This is a dimension of ELP implementation that needs further elaboration, perhaps in the form of new assessment practices that may replace examinations in the long run. This might be something for inclusion in the next ELP seminar.

Francis Goullier recalled that the initial ELP project had two objectives to which

equal importance was attached: to improve language teaching and to promote plurilingualism. The second aspect was not discussed at this seminar. This is a serious omission because improving language teaching will not automatically bring about plurilingualism. David Little agreed and suggested that plurilingualism should figure prominently in the next ELP seminar programme

Gisela Langé (Italy) argued that networking between schools using the ELP in different countries would help to promote plurilingualism and pluriculturalism. She wondered whether the Council of Europe could arrange study visits to analyse what is really working in different schools. Joseph Sheils agreed that study visits of this kind would be a positive development, but he was not sure how a system of networking could be put in place. Rolf Schärer pointed out that a whole-school policy on the ELP is an obvious way of promoting plurilingualism. At the same time, the diversification of language curricula is a political issue on which there will never be a single view.

### **The 2004 ELP seminar**

Ana Madroñero announced that next year's ELP seminar will be held in Spain.

### **Co-ordinator's summing up – David Little**

Reviewing the work of the past two and a half days, David Little noted that participants had welcomed the draft passport summary for adults, though not without expressing some reservations, and that they remained interested in the development of optional language passport templates, a self-assessment grid and descriptors for young learners.

When we met in Luxembourg in 2003 there was nothing on which ELP developers could freely draw in order to assemble goal-setting and self-assessment checklists; one year later we have a bank of descriptors with more than 600 items. An alternative perspective on descriptors had been provided by the presentation of the Dutch approach and its exploration in the working groups.

Experience reports from Thuringia and Lombardy showed how the ELP could support intercultural learning and learning how to learn. In Luxembourg we agreed that a collection should be made of sample language biography pages on these two dimensions; one year later we have made a beginning.

Clearly further work is needed on descriptors and language passport templates for young learners. New work is required on first language(s) as the soil in which plurilingualism grows, and we need to cater for ELP owners who are not being educated through their first language(s). Also, the new manual for linking language examinations to the CEF needs to be complemented by a guide for teachers and teacher trainers on assessment and self-assessment in relation to the CEF and the ELP.

When we meet in Spain next year we can expect to have an expanded version of the *Principles and Guidelines* and new procedures for submitting ELPs for validation; an enlarged bank of descriptors; passport templates for young learners; some clarification of the role of first language(s) in the ELP; and some progress towards an assessment guide for teachers and teacher trainers.

### **Official closing**

Joseph Sheils thanked Özcan Demirel and his team for organizing the seminar; David Little for co-ordinating the seminar programme; Rolf Schärer and Gareth Hughes for their contribution to the planning of the seminar; Rolf Schärer, Gareth Hughes, Dick Meijer, Günther Schneider, Gabriele Tänzer, Gisella Langé, Barbara Lazenby Simpson and Özcan Demirel for their contributions to the programme; Johanna Panthier of the Language Policy Division for all her work in support of the ELP; the Spanish authorities for offering to host the 2004 seminar; and the interpreters for facilitating communication.

Özcan Demirel thanked the participants for coming to Istanbul and all involved in the running of the seminar for their efforts.

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