



« *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the development of language policies: challenges and responsibilities* »

Intergovernmental Language Policy Forum

Strasbourg, 6-8 February 2007

REPORT

Language Policy Division – www.coe.int/lang
Division des Politiques linguistiques – www.coe.int/lang/fr

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Report
by
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I. The Forum's concerns and consequences

In assessing the lessons that can be learned from the Forum, and the principal directions in which its conclusions seem to point, the reasons and the objectives that led the Council of Europe's Language Policy Division to organise this event must be borne in mind.

The Forum was held in honour of Professor John Trim, one of the leading figures behind the CEFR. He played a significant role in the event's success both through his contributions to the proceedings and through the fact that he was constantly present to remind participants of the Council of Europe's values and the reasoning followed in developing the CEFR. Like the document's other authors, Daniel Coste, Brian North and Joseph Sheils, he was able to refer back to the key ideas underlying the project, its aims and the background to it.

However, the aim of the Forum was not to add another event to the series of seminars, colloquies and conferences on the theme of the Common European Framework and the potential it offers for a new approach to language assessment, learning and teaching.

The objective was to offer the member states a forum for discussion and debate on a number of policy issues raised by the very speedy adoption of the CEFR in Europe and the increasingly widespread use of its scales of proficiency levels.

This is because the clear success of the CEFR has significantly changed the context in which language teaching and assessment of language learning outcomes now take place in Europe. It was accordingly important to take stock of this new situation and to identify the key concepts behind the resulting dynamic.

This dynamic naturally generates new, often disparate, needs: it was necessary to determine priorities among the requirements voiced, to consider the most effective means of meeting them, to link the questions raised to the broader issues at stake and indeed to consider them in the light of the Council of Europe's founding principles and values.

These various challenges entail many kinds of responsibilities for the Council of Europe's Language Policy Division. **Exercising these responsibilities in turn raises many questions regarding the future use of the language policy instruments.** The time had come to hold a forum at which the ideas being debated within certain Council of Europe bodies and a number of expert groups could be pooled and discussed.

From these three standpoints the Forum was an unquestionable success.

This report accordingly attempts to sum up the wealth of its proceedings in three ways:

- first, setting out the lessons to be learned from the Forum regarding the importance of the role played by the CEFR in the definition of language education policies, and determining conditions of **implementation consistent with the key values of the Council of Europe** and in keeping with this instrument's purpose through **real consideration of the context in which it is utilised;**
- second, analysing the needs brought to light by experience of use of the CEFR in the fields of assessment, teacher training and curriculum and teaching materials development, as discussed during the Forum or the run-up to it;
- third, elaborating the possible main lines of the follow-up action that must necessarily be given to this event: the roles to be assigned to the member states and the Council of Europe, **sharing of responsibilities concerning use of the CEFR between states, regions and non-governmental or professional organisations**, the means of action to be used by each player, etc.

Lastly, the report will discuss the outlook regarding the Council of Europe's specific activities in the context of the dynamic initiated or triggered by this Forum, and the needs expressed will be analysed in the light of the criteria sketched out during the proceedings.

II. The Forum's main lessons

II.1. The Forum confirmed the consistently established findings regarding the major role played by the CEFR in:

- the shaping of member states' language policies,
- the action of institutions and organisations involved in teaching, assessment or teacher training,
- and European-level initiatives in the modern languages sphere, as illustrated by the presentation on the European Commission's future European Indicator of Language Competence.

Prior to the Forum the Language Policy Division had conducted two surveys on use of the CEFR at national level, targeting the various players concerned and the member states' education ministries. The most recent, carried out in 2006, scored a good response rate (30 member states). The replies bear out the importance attached to the instrument:

- The CEFR is currently available in 36 different languages.
- It is referred to in a very large number of official documents issued by the member states.
- 90% of the respondent ministries regard the CEFR as "very" or "fairly" useful for curriculum development, 87% for planning and development of exams, tests or certifications, and 78% for planning and development of teachers' initial and further training.

"In general, the CEFR seems to have a major impact on language education. It is used - often as the exclusive neutral reference - in all educational sectors. Its value as a reference tool to coordinate the objectives of education at all levels is widely appreciated."¹

The results of this survey were substantiated by reactions to the holding of this Forum. The considerable support given to the event by France and the Netherlands, the very high level of participation by representatives of Council of Europe member states, non-governmental organisations and professional organisations and the presence of delegations from Canada, China, the United States and Japan, not forgetting the participation of the Australian representative of an international association of language teachers, show the huge level of interest in the issues raised by the CEFR, both in Europe and beyond Europe's borders.

From the very start of the proceedings, the opening statements by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, the Minister of National Education and Vocational Training of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and the representatives of France's Minister of National Education and the European Commission highlighted the political dimension of the Forum's subject-matter.

They provided an opportunity to reiterate the values common to the member states of the Council of Europe, as reasserted in the Action Plan adopted at the most recent Summit of Heads of State and Government, held in Warsaw: promoting linguistic and cultural diversity, fostering plurilingualism, developing democratic citizenship and intercultural dialogue, transparency and mutual recognition of qualifications to help make people mobile and facilitate access to employment.

This was followed by presentations of projects making use of the CEFR in some very different educational and socio-linguistic contexts, all backed by firm political resolve at the very highest level. **From the outset, these examples made it possible to rule out the idea that the issues surrounding use of the CEFR are primarily technical in nature; they showed convincingly**

¹ Waldemar Martyniuk and José Noijons, "Executive summary of results of a survey on the use of the CEFR at national level in Council of Europe member states", page 7

that the Council of Europe's language policy instruments are levers that can and must be utilised to serve carefully considered, committed policy objectives.

The breadth and the diversity of the case studies presented confirmed two intuitive conclusions: firstly, that the innovations permitted by the CEFR's methods and tools vary greatly depending on the situation, the field of action and the objectives being pursued in a given context and, secondly, that the intrinsic value of each successful project in fact lies in the adaptation of the CEFR for use in a specific educational, socio-linguistic and policy context.

A good number of case studies were presented, and details can be found on the Council of Europe web-site (www.coe.int/lang). A few examples can be cited as an illustration of their diversity:

- The Luxembourg authorities have developed a language education action plan on the basis of the self-evaluation exercise conducted, with the assistance of Council of Europe experts, as part of the Language Policy Profile development process; the objective is to use the possibilities offered by the CEFR's definition of plurilingual competence to overcome the difficulties encountered with the Grand Duchy's language education policy. The opening statement by the minister showed that, here, social cohesion was just as important an aim as the preservation of a very high general level of language proficiency.
- The presentation of the plan for a renewal of language education by the Director of European and International Relations and Co-operation of the French ministry in turn showed that the proactive use being made of the CEFR reflects a desire to improve the effectiveness of language education, to promote plurilingualism and language diversity among learners and to remove inhibitions that might hamper personal implication in the learning process.
- The distinctive feature of the case study on use of the CEFR in the Netherlands was the emphasis laid, firstly, on implementation of the CEFR as a teaching tool and, secondly, on comparability of the results attained by different schools, made possible by a global reform of language testing and examinations.
- Other case studies demonstrated certain effects of the tool's use on the players themselves. For example, in Catalonia the decision to rethink language examinations in order to give them a more international base led to some very fruitful international co-operation and made it possible to correct certain misunderstandings concerning the CEFR levels. To sum up the progress made by this region of Spain, the initial question "Is my B1 equivalent to your B1?" was replaced by "This is my B1. What's your B1 like?".

These few examples, among all those given at the Forum, illustrate one of the event's main inputs to the ongoing debate on language education in Europe, which can be summarised as follows: the discussions during the Forum, and even on its sidelines, a number of the statements made during the plenary sessions and the wide range of implementation examples described during the group work made it possible, in a very mutually-enhancing manner, to **clarify the status and the purpose of the CEFR - as a descriptive rather than a standard-setting document it allows all users to analyse their own situation and to make the choices which they deem most appropriate to their circumstances, while adhering to certain key values.**

There is therefore no need for consternation about some of the tool's limitations, as pointed out from time to time by some technically-minded commentators; quite the contrary, it is necessary to grasp and to foster awareness of all the possibilities it offers for developing plurilingualism and intercultural understanding in Europe.

The vast majority of the case studies presented at the Forum, whether concerned with national, regional or local situations, focused on showing that use of the CEFR in each of the fields

concerned did indeed bring to light additional problems, needs or expectations. For instance, its implementation in a teacher training context in Poland had inter alia shown the need for texts accessible by all concerned and for clarification of certain concepts, in particular plurilingualism.

The speakers were also keen to underline the importance of keeping the CEFR intact, in all its diversity; it should unquestionably be added to and other accompanying tools should be developed, but under no circumstances should it be watered down or depleted.

II. 2. The Forum revealed a virtual consensus regarding the needs that must necessarily be satisfied at the local, regional or European level.

The working groups' discussions of the needs highlighted by experience of implementation of the CEFR were preceded by a presentation of some of the results of the survey conducted in 2006 by the Language Policy Division (see above).

From the initial preparatory work on the questionnaires for this survey it was deemed essential that, when discussing needs, a distinction should be drawn between language competence assessment issues, on one hand, and other aspects linked to teaching, training and teaching materials, on the other hand. This distinction was only partly borne out by the responses to the survey itself and the outcome of the group work at the Forum. Indeed, disregarding the participants' own specific interest in one or another of these fields, which justified their separate treatment, there is a striking similarity in the results of the different groups' work.

A more precise list of the needs expressed by the member states or the Forum participants will be set out below but **it is clear that in these two spheres the Forum's results very closely converge and must be taken very seriously.**

There is a common demand for:

- distribution of guides, training kits, material illustrating levels of language proficiency in the form of sample performances by different target groups, and good practice examples;
- formulation of additional competence descriptors, inter alia to take into account the language use situations encountered in EMILE/CLIL projects;
- development of areas of the CEFR (in particular Chapter 8 "Linguistic diversification and the curriculum"), acknowledged to be of interest but in which the existing tools do not yet lend themselves to direct use;
- provision of expert assistance and creation of discussion forums on subjects linked to use of the CEFR.

The discussions showed that the emergence of these needs is linked to the expectations vested in the CEFR and to its very speedy adoption within education systems. A number of understandable obstacles have been identified, the greatest of which seems to be the difficulty inherent in making the CEFR's content accessible by all language teachers and a significant number of decision-makers, as its complexity and diversity may hamper its more widespread dissemination.

However, beyond this consensus regarding the needs, a slight divergence is perceptible in the proposals put forward in these different fields in response to the question: How and by whom should the answers to these needs be sought? This is quite understandable. The possibilities opened up by the CEFR for transparent assessment, allowing comparability between different languages and different countries, were very quickly realised. This led to quality requirements, which in turn fuelled a Europe-wide debate, pursued inter alia through the development of a "Manual for relating language examinations to the CEFR" and the dissemination of samples of written and oral performances by non-natives in certain languages and of items and tasks for testing reading and listening comprehension skills, linked to the different levels. It is true that the situation undoubtedly differs depending on whether an

assessment is being organised by certification bodies or implemented within the education systems themselves, and the case studies showed that not all states have endowed themselves with the same tools.

Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that it is in this very field - doubtless due to the lead gained here on account of the heightened expectations and interests - that the needs for further development of some of the CEFR's assets, in particular its concept of plurilingualism, are most forcibly expressed: reflecting a learner's linguistic profile rather than a somewhat meaningless overall level of proficiency in a language; giving an insight into the complementarity of skills in several languages; assessing the degree of mastery of language-related activities such as mediation; and so on.

It was also on the basis of the experience acquired in this field that the implications of the second fundamental question posed during the Forum - Who is responsible for what? - could more easily be grasped.

II. 3. The Forum very quickly focused on the issue of responsibilities for appropriate use of the CEFR.

This is not a new issue and has already been discussed. The Steering Committee for Education, for example, gave its views on the subject at a meeting held on 19 October 2005, during which it clearly stated that it was not the role of the Council of Europe to verify and validate the quality of the link between language examinations and the CEFR's proficiency levels and that the member states were responsible for guaranteeing the quality and fairness of testing and assessment on the basis of the joint guidelines issued by the Council of Europe, UNESCO and the OECD.

Yet, the substance of the discussions and the participants' reactions show that a general consensus has not yet been reached on this matter, and expectations and needs are still regularly addressed by the Council of Europe. This is not in the least surprising, as the various problems linked to use of the CEFR have often been broached from the standpoint of the possible tensions between the local/regional/national level and the European level. Even the key question of the status of the CEFR - a standard-setting instrument or a tool that needs to be contextualised - may have indirectly helped to focus attention on the vertical relationship between the Council of Europe and each member state.

II. 3. 1. One of the objectives of the Forum was to heighten awareness of the importance of another relationship, here horizontal, between the various member states and between institutions.

More often than not, when local needs linked to implementation of the CEFR are expressed there is an underlying expectation that a solution should be found by the Council itself or that some measures should be taken by this intergovernmental organisation. The dynamic given to the Forum's proceedings was designed gradually to change attitudes, consisting in asking, firstly, which own means and resources a state could rely on and, secondly, whether networks and forms of co-operation between states and institutions could help to overcome the difficulties encountered. This hoped-for change of approach is also based on the idea that, **rather than vis-à-vis the Council of Europe, it is towards one's own learners and one's European partners that one has a responsibility for making coherent, realistic use of the CEFR.**

From this standpoint, significant advances could be noted in the course of the Forum, since the participants increasingly began to speak in terms of "sharing", "co-responsibility" or "horizontal co-operation".

The contributions to the Forum showed that there is a continuum in the sharing of responsibilities and that, depending on the circumstances and the needs, different, possibly mixed, solutions could be found.

Nonetheless, **on considering the list of needs voiced**, it is fairly easy to see that for **many of the solutions exist, at least in part, at the local, regional or national level**: informing education policy decision-makers, teachers and those in charge of assessment of the CEFR's diversity, its pedagogic potential and the instrument's natural limits, notably in order to facilitate its appropriation; contextualising use of parts of the CEFR in given educational/learning situations and considering the specific choices to be made; in the teacher training field attaching importance to developing learner autonomy, intercultural education and plurilingualism; developing supplementary tools specific to the main language or languages spoken in the country or region (such as reference level descriptions or sample performances in the language(s), illustrating the levels of the CEFR proficiency scales), etc.

This last point naturally brings to mind the benefits to be derived from promoting **cooperation, taking various forms, between states, regions or organisations** in order to develop these tools (for example co-operation between countries or regions sharing the same language) or in order to take advantage of tools developed elsewhere (for example, for assessing proficiency in a foreign language or for teaching this language with the CEFR resources). Similarly, the desire, frequently reiterated in the course of the Forum, to be able to benefit from the assistance of other countries' or other sectors' experts could quite easily find the beginnings of an answer if networks were established among the parties concerned.

One very striking illustration was offered by the presentation of the work being carried out at the initiative of the CITO in the Netherlands, which, in co-operation with seven partner institutes in other countries, is building a bank of items for assessing proficiency in a foreign language (EBAFLS).

Another example lay in the proposal by the CIEP (Sèvres, France) to hold an inter-language seminar on calibration of samples of spoken performances.

The Forum's spotlighting of the need for the member states themselves to respond to many of the requirements linked to successful use of the CEFR in no way means that the Council of Europe's own responsibilities have been underestimated.

Many requests submitted to the Council of Europe are met already, or at least in part, by existing documents (the Guide for Users, the guide to "Language examining and test development", the case studies), distribution of which could usefully be reactivated, by certain workshops organised by the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) in Graz, by Lingua projects and by the new policy objectives espoused by the ECML in its recent call for project proposals, which can be seen to coincide very closely with the member states' expectations.

In the wake of the Forum it can be argued that the role of the Council of Europe has become more focused and, accordingly, remains as important as ever.

II. 3. 2. The Language Policy Division indisputably has an essential role to play in promoting coherent, realistic, responsible use of the CEFR. Its future part in this process might be summed up in three words: guidance, mobilisation and co-ordination.

a) The Forum was a perfect opportunity for the Language Policy Division to implement the first of these tenets, the need for **clear guidance**. A number of key points were underlined during the plenary sessions:

- the link between the CEFR and the values and modus operandi of the Council of Europe,
- the CEFR's place in future work on language education in Europe,

- the fact that the need for contextualisation is part and parcel of the CEFR approach,
- the genuine flexibility of the tools proposed by the CEFR,
- the diversity of this document, which is not solely confined to the scale of proficiency levels,
- the need to take the objective of plurilingual education and training fully into account,
- the benefits of planning the CEFR's use in combination with the Council of Europe's other language policy instruments and the recommendation that the approach underlying the CEFR be given concrete form through promotion of the European Language Portfolio.

These elements of guidance, instilled throughout the Forum, were all the more necessary in that there are consistent signs that the CEFR is susceptible to being misused in a number of ways: an imbalance in the implementation of the CEFR's various components, entailing a significant risk that their substance will be depleted; misunderstandings regarding the CEFR's status, which, where no contextualisation takes place, may result in a homogeneity contrary to this instrument's goals; shortcomings in the training process and in the explanations given to players and users, which may result in superficial use and even poor understanding of the tool, sometimes leading to its rejection.

The discussions during the Forum showed that these guidance efforts must be pursued, in particular to encourage adhesion to the Council of Europe's values in all uses of the CEFR, such as integration of migrants, and to pave the way for future developments in language education, as the Language Policy Division has done with its Languages of School Education project.

b) The latter initiative affords an illustration of how the Language Policy Division can play its **mobilising** role through initial and follow-up action likely to offer solutions to the deficiencies brought to light. In this project's specific case the aim is to encourage work making it possible to extend the CEFR concept to all the languages that contribute to individual plurilingualism, including a person's mother tongue and/or language(s) of schooling, and help ensure a successful outcome for all learners, not least migrant pupils for whom the language of schooling is rarely their mother tongue.

Only the Council of Europe can have this mobilising effect through its efforts to prompt people to do other necessary work in fields such as intercultural competence, the language-related activity of mediation or consideration of plurilingual profiles in competence assessments, as already mentioned.

Another example was cited during the Forum: the need to raise teaching material publishers' awareness of the issues surrounding use of the CEFR.

Lastly, the Council of Europe should also take action, inter alia, to combat the risk of an imbalance between languages in the supply of the tools necessary to proper use of the CEFR. This "watchdog" function could take the form of helping certain countries obtain the assistance of other countries with greater expertise in a given field.

c) In keeping with a longstanding tradition in the Council of Europe's activities in the modern languages field, one of the tasks of the Language Policy Division will consist in helping to **co-ordinate work**, sometimes at the member states' request. For instance, it can continue to provide the member states with experts which it has chosen for their fields of competence and potential to contribute in a given context. This catalyst function has already extensively proved its worth and is clearly indispensable in order to satisfy some of the requirements voiced at the Forum. An example that springs to mind is the formulation of additional competence descriptors to take account of certain situations or specific needs.

Another simple form of co-ordination, albeit very much in demand, consists in setting up a discussion forum on the CEFR and its uses on one of the Council of Europe web-sites.

d) **These guidance, mobilisation and co-ordination tasks are often complementary in nature.** It gradually became apparent during the Forum that there is already a good model for performance of these roles by the Council of Europe: the model developed in connection with the elaboration of the Language Education Policy Profiles, the effectiveness of which was acknowledged on several occasions during the proceedings. On the basis of a guide drawn up under the responsibility of the Language Policy Division,² the country, region or city concerned conducts a self-evaluation of its language education policy, with the assistance of experts chosen by the Council of Europe for their specific expertise in the fields ranked as a priority by the education authorities concerned. The outcome of combining the local players' findings with the foreign experts' analyses and recommendations is a joint document, the country (or region or city) profile.

The same model could therefore quite conceivably be applied to the drafting of guides concerning some of the problem areas identified during the Forum. Examples which spring to mind include developing curricula incorporating plurilingual education and training; reflecting the CEFR's pedagogic potential in teaching materials; taking plurilingual competence into account in the assessment of language skills; and finally the link between assessment and self-assessment.

Such guides could be tested on a large scale within networks of players particularly concerned about these issues, which might then constitute a pool of experts that could be drawn upon, on request, to assist member states or their education authorities in implementing the concepts in a manner adapted to their own specific context.

From the above brief description it can be seen that this process has already been used in part to draw up the "Manual for relating language examinations to the CEFR".

III. Follow-up action to the Forum

To be successful, this sharing of responsibilities between the member states, non-governmental organisations, professional organisations and the Council of Europe, as broached during the Forum, will no doubt necessitate a number of initiatives by the Steering Committee for Education.

III.1. Firstly, the discussions before and during the Forum clearly showed the need for coherency in this sharing of responsibilities. As the Steering Committee decided, verifying and validating links between language examinations and the proficiency levels of the CEFR is not a task that falls within the Council of Europe mandate. It follows that the role of the Validation Committee of the "European Language Portfolio" should be reviewed. Portfolio model developers have indeed been given a guide and clear instructions, and it has been plainly stated that the model must be adapted to the educational context. Despite all this, the Council of Europe supervises, through the Validation Committee, the quality of the documents drawn up at national level. It is true that some very useful work has been done to promote this new tool and explain the implementation and quality assurance approaches. However, the time has perhaps come to give the Validation Committee's work a much sharper focus on mechanisms aimed at deriving joint benefits from the progress made with certain models.

² J-C. Beacco and M. Byram, "Guide for the development of language education policies in Europe"

III. 2. Secondly, the desirable new balance between the member states' initiatives and the action taken by the Council of Europe will undoubtedly require a very proactive approach vis-à-vis the member states in order to clarify the aims and objectives of this sharing of responsibilities. This encouragement to assume their full role should nonetheless go hand in hand with a reminder of a number of principles discussed at length in the course of the Forum, which many of the participants consider that the Council of Europe cannot disregard.

The question what form this encouragement might take was not discussed at the Forum. It may be that the Forum's findings and conclusions constitute a sufficient foundation for issuing recommendations from the Committee of Ministers to the member states.

It is possible to identify four complementary directions in which the member states should work to establish conditions conducive to coherent, appropriate use of the CEFR.

III. 2. 1. First and foremost, through such use of the CEFR the aim is to seek to **respond to the needs observed and the effective possibilities offered by the education systems or the learning arrangements concerned** without placing the education system in the false situation of having to "apply" the CEFR as an inflexible, binding standard-setting instrument.

Realistic, coherent use of the CEFR naturally entails that the tool should be fully adapted to the context based on knowledge of the actual learning and teaching situations concerned.

The example of the levels of language proficiency was frequently cited. Choosing a level on the scale at which to set learners' skills development objectives at a given point in their learning process cannot be done in a despotic or arbitrary manner or by referring to a level dictated by the CEFR. This choice of a target level entails a precise prior diagnosis of learners' real skills in the relevant context and of the real possibilities afforded by the arrangements made.

It is of course possible to conceive that these levels might be used as levers to enhance the effectiveness of the existing arrangements. However, even in that case it is only realistic and logical to take into consideration the differences that will inevitably emerge between productive and receptive language activities. The proficiency levels to be aimed for should accordingly differ for, spoken and written, comprehension and expression.

III. 2. 2. Then, to achieve coherent implementation of the CEFR, it is necessary to do everything possible to ensure that **all the players concerned understand the full possibilities offered by this tool**, distinguishing between the individual responsibilities of these education system players.

- **Those in charge of determining language education policy and of organising this branch of education** must be capable of verifying that the language proficiency levels are set in a coherent manner. It falls to them to establish conditions conducive to more transparent, better quality evaluation of language skills and to foster mutual recognition of language qualifications by ensuring that learning results are reliably linked to the CEFR common reference levels.

- The quality of teaching and assessment also naturally depends on **syllabus and curriculum developers, teaching material authors, examiners, teachers and trainers**. In every member state each individual in this chain should be encouraged to make learners' needs the key criterion on which they base their decisions, with the aim of enhancing learners' skills through activities organised around communicative tasks, while taking account of the fact that different groups of learners may have specific needs. It is therefore essential to ensure that all these players in the teaching and assessment processes are perfectly informed so they can take advantage of the CEFR and determine where they stand in relation to this document's contents in full knowledge thereof.

III. 2. 3 The action required, as it transpired from the Forum, does not solely concern the mere question whether language examinations and the proficiency levels are validly linked. The

Framework is not confined to the scale of reference levels and their descriptors. Appropriate, coherent use of the CEFR therefore cannot solely consist in applying these levels in order to either set objectives or evaluate learners' skills.

Consideration of learners' needs should naturally lead to the concept of plurilingualism, which, indeed, gradually emerged as a key focus of the Forum's proceedings.

Plurilingualism must become the goal of language teaching and learning. It may also govern the very design of the assessment process. The objective is then no longer simply to develop and assess competence in a given language but rather to **build plurilingual profiles** that truly reflect the complementarity of learners' skills in all the languages with which they are familiar and the necessarily imbalanced, changing nature of these skills. From this standpoint, **it can be considered that, in the long run, coherent use of the proficiency scales should aim primarily to reflect this natural imbalance between the proficiency levels attained in the different language-related activities and no longer seek to determine an overall level of competence.**

III. 2. 4. Of course, the above considerations in no way detract from the need, forcefully reasserted during the three days of proceedings, to **pay particular care when using the proficiency levels for assessing language skills.**

If the framework's reference levels are referred to in its education system or by organisations subordinate to it in order to assess learners' skills, each member state must be aware of its responsibility for ensuring that all the conditions are met for proper reference to be made to the framework.

Everything must be done to guarantee that the good practices identified at the international level for developing fair, transparent, valid, reliable examinations are adhered to. National or local authorities must take action to ensure that the levels of competence certified by their language examinations and the CEFR reference levels are linked in a transparent, reliable manner. The measures implemented may vary considerably, although the idea of establishing a national agency was cited on several occasions during the Forum.

Preserving the proficiency scales' value as an international standard is a must, and is the responsibility of each individual user. Those taking the floor during the Forum frequently referred to the benefits to be derived from applying a quality assurance approach to their use, an area where integration of various networks, with their differing expertise, can play a very positive role.

III. 3 The member states and the participants were asked to pinpoint, and discuss, those needs which they rank as priorities. **Precise information will have to be given on the fields in which the Language Policy Division intends to propose solutions, in keeping with the principles set out above.**

Some of the needs expressed obviously concern matters to be dealt with on a **local level and/or through international co-operation:**

- teacher training to allow better use of the CEFR (for example, through the supply of training kits or the publication of case studies);
- distribution of documents making the CEFR more accessible for all teachers, while avoiding any depletion of its substance;
- distribution of material illustrating the proficiency levels' implications in different contexts, for different age groups and for different languages;

- continuing or intensifying the holding of national or international seminars in order to link examples of written and spoken performances to the CEFR scales of competence and to allow calibration of performances in different languages;
- development of curricula taking account of the CEFR and of teaching materials illustrating the link with the framework;
- formulation of additional competence descriptors for specific groups (for example, children from an immigrant background), for language skills or activities not described in great depth in the CEFR (intercultural competence, mediation, etc.) or for intermediate levels between the six already existing;
- development of calibrated assessment tools based on the CEFR levels (items, tasks, tests, and so on), even though the demand does not seem to be for finished, ready-made tests, but rather for components for use in test development;
- establishing a quality requirement for assessments claiming to refer to the CEFR involving verification of the link with the relevant proficiency level(s), identification of good, or less good, practices, or the formation of teams of experts available to assist those responsible for assessments.

Other needs fall, at least in part, within the **Council of Europe's sphere of responsibility and competence:**

- setting up a discussion forum;
- further development of certain parts of the CEFR, notably those concerning the links between the curriculum and diversification of languages learned, the relation between results of assessments and of self-assessments, a suitable approach for assessing plurilingual competence and, lastly, consideration of cultural factors' influence on results;
- preparation of an equivalent of the CEFR for languages of school education.

IV. Conclusion

This Forum had extremely wide-ranging objectives, and its subject-matter was very broad. It must moreover be acknowledged that the large number of papers and case studies presented had one regrettable consequence, which was that the desirable balance between these presentations and the discussions within the working groups could not be struck, no doubt to the detriment of the comments, observations and questions the presentations would inevitably have raised.

It can nonetheless be said that this shortcoming was to a large extent offset by the possibility the participants were given of acquainting themselves with the extremely wide range of uses of the CEFR, fully realising what was at stake and thus participating in the gradual decision-making process.

The Forum proceedings followed a well-identified course:

We began by pooling and comparing the needs emerging from use of the CEFR in the member states and the various non-governmental and professional organisations.

We then went on to review the solutions proposed by the European institutions: the European Commission, the Council of Europe Language Policy Division and the European Centre for Modern Languages. Some developments plainly meet identified needs. Other needs were raised repeatedly and should form a basis for discussion and action in the coming months and years, while sharing the roles among the various bodies concerned.

The second part of the proceedings was moreover chiefly concerned with the question exactly who is responsible for what. The three days of discussions made it possible to arrive at the beginnings of a reply, which is doubtless the Forum's most significant conclusion and the most weighty in terms of its implications: **it is primarily the member states themselves which should seek solutions to the needs identified in order to promote good practice in making use of the framework. Everyone's responsibility towards their partners is at least as great as their responsibility towards the Council of Europe, and better use must be made of the possibilities offered by a joint approach and by international co-operation. The Council of Europe's own responsibility is enhanced as regards its guidance, mobilisation and co-ordination roles, in short serving as a catalyst to promote the desirable developments in the fields of education and assessment. The Council must remain a facilitator and continue to serve as an intermediary between all its partners.**

This joint responsibility also concerns the necessary link between use of the CEFR for modern languages education and the Council of Europe's policy objectives, which formed a sort of thread running through our proceedings. The ways in which the CEFR is used have implications for social cohesion, access to employment, citizenship, mobility and mutual understanding in Europe. Adopting the CEFR as an instrument for analysing and improving learning, teaching and assessment arrangements also entails identifying means of avoiding a number of deficiencies referred to during the proceedings, which would distance us from our goals. **Ensuring consistency between the uses made of the CEFR and the policy objectives set in the key documents adopted by the political decision-makers involves guaranteeing that the instruments proposed by the CEFR are effectively harnessed to promoting plurilingual education, democratic citizenship, social cohesion and intercultural dialogue, which rules out any use of the CEFR for purposes of exclusion and segregation or even as a tool for simply developing an exclusive competence in any given language.**

Many of those taking the floor testified to the fact that this consistency is more achievable when the CEFR is used not as an isolated document, but as part of an overall approach incorporating other language policy instruments developed by the Council of Europe, whether the European Language Portfolio, the Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies or the Manual for relating Language Examinations to the CEFR. Such an approach will be all the easier when a larger number of countries and regions have prepared their own Language Education Policy Profiles and when languages of school education also benefit from tools similar to those existing in the modern languages sphere.

TEXTS OF SOME MAJOR PRESENTATIONS

The CEFR Common Reference Levels: validated reference points and local strategies

Brian NORTH

This paper briefly addresses the following questions:

What is the purpose of the CEFR? The CEFR is a concertina-like reference tool that provides categories and levels that educational professionals can expand or contract, elaborate or summarise, according to the needs of their context. The aim is for users to adopt activities, competences and proficiency stepping-stones that are appropriate to their local context, yet can be related to the greater scheme of things and thus communicated more easily to colleagues and stakeholders.

What are the Common Reference Levels and where do they come from? The CEFR levels are based on the Council's work on objectives and are the result of process of deliberate convergence from the mid 1970s. The Swiss research project (1993-7) that produced the illustrative descriptors is briefly outlined and the salient characteristics of levels themselves explained.

What claim to validity have the illustrative descriptors? The reason why these particular descriptors have greater validity than those that preceded them is pointed out. The question whether a common framework can have validity both as a generic reference point and as a specific application in a local context will be addressed, together with the issue of use for the language of schooling.

How can we ensure consistent interpretation of the levels? Finally the draft Manual, intended to assist examination providers in relating their examinations to the CEFR, is briefly presented.

The CEFR Common Reference Levels: validated reference points and local strategies

What is the Purpose of the CEFR?

The "*Common European Framework of Reference for languages: learning, teaching, assessment*:" CEFR (Council of Europe 2001) was developed between 1993 and 1996 by a Council of Europe international working party following the recommendation of an intergovernmental Symposium "*Transparency and Coherence in Language Learning in Europe*" held at Rüslikon, near Zurich in November 1991. The CEFR was written with three main aims:

- To establish a metalanguage common across educational sectors, national and linguistic boundaries that could be used to talk about objectives and language levels. It was hoped that this would make it easier for practitioners to tell each other and their clientele what they wished to help learners to achieve and how they attempted to do so.
- To encourage practitioners in the language field to reflect on their current practice, particularly in relation to learners' practical language learning needs, the setting of suitable objectives and the tracking of learner progress.
- To agree common reference points based on the work on objectives that had taken place in the Council of Europe's Modern Languages projects since the 1970s.

In time, the existence of such a common reference framework would, it was hoped, help to relate courses and examinations to each other and thus achieve the “transparency and coherence” that had been the subject of the Rüschnikon Symposium.

The approach taken was to provide a conceptual framework made up of:

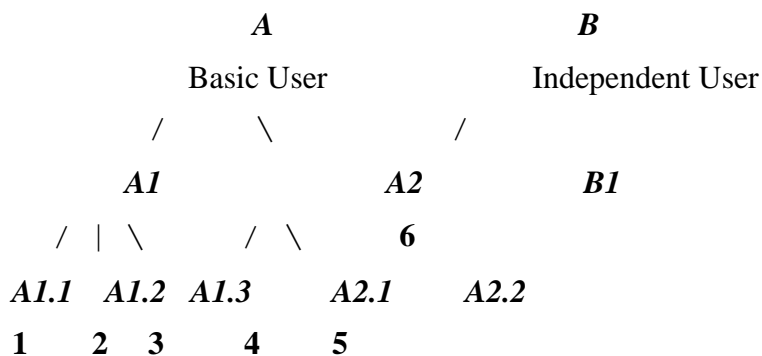
- A taxonomic *descriptive scheme*, summarised in Chapter 2 covering such issues as domains of language use, communicative language activities and strategies (in Chapter 4) plus the competences of the learner/user (In Chapter 5). The scheme can be seen as a further development of approach to objectives taken in Waystage, Threshold Level, Vantage Level and their equivalences for other languages.
- A set of *common reference levels*, defining proficiency in as many of these categories as possible at six levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2) in empirically developed scales of illustrative descriptors (North 2000, North and Schneider 1998). This work made available a *descriptor bank*, validated and calibrated like an item bank, building on research with descriptor scales and item-banking in Eurocentres and elsewhere.

The CEFR is not a harmonisation projects. The aim of the CEFR is to provide a mental framework that enables people to say where they were, not a specification telling them where they ought to be. Right at the very beginning of the CEFR, the authors emphasise:

“We have NOT set out to tell practitioners what to do or how to do it. We are raising questions not answering them. It is not the function of the CEF to lay down the objectives that users should pursue or the methods they should employ.” (Council of Europe 2001: xi Note to the User).

There is no need for there to be a conflict between on the one hand a common framework desirable to organise education and encourage productive networking, and on the other hand the local strategies and decisions necessary to facilitate successful learning in any given context. The aim of the CEFR is to facilitate reflection, communication and networking. The aim of any local strategy ought to be to meet needs in context. The key to linking the two into a coherent system is flexibility. The CEFR is a concertina-like reference tool that provides categories, levels and descriptors that educational professionals can merge or sub-divide, elaborate or summarise, adopt or adapt according to the needs of their context - whilst still relating to the common hierarchical structure.

The idea is for users to adopt activities, competences and proficiency stepping-stones that are appropriate to their local context, yet can be related to the greater scheme of things and thus communicated more easily to colleagues in other educational institutions and to other stakeholders like learners, parents and employers. For example in Finland, A1 is split into three levels to provide initial motivation. One might illustrate an approach like the Finnish one as a set of stepping stones towards independent language use, as shown in Figure 1.



Whilst the concept of “level” is useful for curriculum organisation and for giving a quick answer to the question “What level am I?” the rich descriptive framework provided by the CEFR illustrative descriptors is intended to facilitate profiling not levelling. In addition to the three summary scales introduced in Chapter 3, the CEFR offers a total of 54 sub-scales for different communicative language activities and strategies and for different aspects of communicative language competence. It is not the intention that anyone should use these 54 sub-scales operationally. Rather, their purpose is to help the user to consider the coverage of the learning programme or examination with which they are concerned: what are the priority areas and what level of proficiency is appropriate in each area? In setting such priorities, it is sensible to exploit the profiling possibilities by considering the setting of higher target levels for certain skills (e.g. receptive skills) – encouraging “partial competences.”

What are the Common Reference Levels and where do they come from?

The CEFR levels (A1-C2) did not suddenly appear from nowhere. They have emerged in a gradual, collective process that started in 1913 with the Cambridge Proficiency exam (CPE) that defines a practical mastery of the language as a non-native speaker. This level has become C2. Just before the last war, Cambridge introduced the First Certificate (FCE) – still widely seen as the first level of proficiency of interest for office work, now associated with B2. In the 1970s the Council of Europe defined a lower level called “The Threshold Level” (now B1), originally to specify what kind of language an immigrant or visitor needed to operate effectively in society. Threshold was quickly followed by “Waystage” (now A2), a staging point half way to Threshold.

The first time all these concepts were described as a possible set of “Council of Europe levels” was in a presentation by David Wilkins (author of “The Functional Approach”) at the 1977 Ludwighaven Symposium (Trim 1978). This symposium had represented the first - unsuccessful - attempt to move towards a common European framework in the form of a unit-credit scheme linked to common levels.

In 1992 the Council of Europe’s “Common Framework Working Party” adopted the following six “Common Reference Levels” for the future CEFR:

▪ Breakthrough	(later A1),	
▪ Waystage	(later A2),	
▪ Threshold	(later B1),	
▪ Vantage	(later B2),	
▪ “Effective Operational Proficiency”	(later C1)	exemplified by the new DALF (Diplôme Approfondi de Langue Française) from the CIEP,
▪ “Mastery”	(later C2)	exemplified by the Cambridge CPE (Certificate of Proficiency in English).

These six levels corresponded both to the seven levels that have been suggested by Wilkins in 1977 (minus the top level) and to the five levels adopted by ALTE: the Association of Language Testers in Europe (founded by Cambridge in 1991) – with the addition of A1.

In 1993-6, two Swiss members of the Working Party then used both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to develop illustrative descriptors for these six levels (North 2000, North and Schneider 1998, Schneider and North 2000). In a series of 32 workshops, teachers were given descriptors to sort into categories. This tested not only the clarity of the descriptors, but also the feasibility of the categories proposed for the sub-scales. The clearest, most relevant descriptors

were then presented in descriptor-checklists that were used by some 300 teachers to assess learners in some 500 classes at the end of the school years 1994 and 1995. A statistical analysis of this data produced a scale on which each descriptor had a difficulty value (e.g. 176 or 053). The final step was to “cut” this continuous scale of descriptors to match the set of CEFR levels.

The Swiss research project actually identified 10 rather than 6 bands of proficiency. Between the criterion level for A2 and the criterion level for B1 there was found to be what came to be described as a “plus level.” The same was the case for between B1 and B2 (B1+) and between B2 and C1 (B2+). These “plus levels” were characterised by a stronger performance in relation to the same features found at the criterion level, plus hints of features that become salient at the next level. The “plus level” concept can be very useful in relation to school assessment because narrower levels allow learners to see more progress.

It is perhaps worth emphasising the salient features of the levels, as illustrated by the empirically calibrated descriptors:

Level A1 is the point at which the learner can:

- *interact in a simple way, ask and answer simple questions about themselves, where they live, people they know, and things they have, initiate and respond to simple statements in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics,*
rather than relying purely on a rehearsed repertoire of (tourist) phrases.

Level A2 reflects the Waystage specification with:

- the majority of descriptors stating social functions: *greet people, ask how they are and react to news; handle very short social exchanges; ask and answer questions about what they do at work and in free time; make and respond to invitations; discuss what to do, where to go and make arrangements to meet; make and accept offers,*
- plus descriptors on getting out and about: *make simple transactions in shops, post offices or banks; get simple information about travel; ask for and provide everyday goods and services.*

Level B1 reflects The Threshold Level, with two particular features:

- maintaining interaction and getting across what you want to: *give or seek personal views and opinions in an informal discussion with friends; express the main point he/she wants to make comprehensibly; keep going comprehensibly, even though pausing for grammatical and lexical planning and repair is very evident, especially in longer stretches of free production,*
- plus coping flexibly with problems in everyday life: *deal with most situations likely to arise when making travel arrangements through an agent or when actually travelling; enter unprepared into conversations on familiar topics; make a complaint.*

Level B2 reflects three new emphases:

- effective argument: *account for and sustain opinions in discussion by providing relevant explanations, arguments and comments; explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various option,*
- holding your own in social discourse: *interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without imposing strain on either party; adjust to the changes of direction, style and emphasis normally found in conversation,*
- plus a new degree of language awareness: *correct mistakes if they have led to misunderstandings; make a note of "favourite mistakes" and consciously monitor speech for them.*

Level C1 is characterised by access to a broad range of language that results in fluent, spontaneous communication:

- *express him/herself fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly; has a good command of a broad lexical repertoire allowing gaps to be readily overcome with circumlocutions; there is little obvious searching for expressions or avoidance strategies - only a conceptually difficult subject can hinder a natural, smooth flow of language,*
- *produce clear, smoothly-flowing, well-structured speech, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.*

Level C2 represents the degree of precision and ease with the language of highly successful learners:

- *convey finer shades of meaning precisely by using, with reasonable accuracy, a wide range of modification devices,*
- *and a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms with awareness of connotative level of meaning.*

The illustrative descriptor scales in the CEFR make up a “descriptor bank.” In addition, the ELP Validation Committee has encouraged ELP developers to elaborate, extend and paraphrase the original illustrative descriptors. Experience suggests that this can be done in many ways, for example:

- editing the generic descriptor lightly to better suit the domain in question (academic study; professional areas, primary/secondary school classroom tasks);
- unzipping the tightly packed descriptors more typical of the CEFR into a more general header descriptor plus several sub-descriptors, which then sometimes take on a more specific orientation to the domain in question;
- adding new descriptors that mirror the concrete formulation style of the illustrative descriptors and exploit elements that appear in other descriptors at the level concerned.

A bank of CEFR-based descriptors for different age groups and educational sectors that were developed in these ways for different ELPs is provided on the www.coe.int/portfolio website.

What claim to validity have the illustrative descriptors?

The illustrative descriptors address fundamental criticisms of previous descriptor scales in that they:

- cover a **communicative** descriptive scheme:
 - language activities and strategies (reception, interaction production)
 - language competences (linguistic, pragmatic, socio-linguistic)
- are each worded in positive terms, even for lower levels (Trim 1978)
- each present an independent, stand-alone criterion, defined independently from other descriptors (Skehan 1984: 217).

The descriptors are relatively unique in that they were not just written by an expert or committee, but were developed scientifically:

- from a comprehensive documentation of existing expertise in the area, with documented references to descriptors shared with pre-existing scales,
- in relation to both *what* learners do (communicative activities and strategies) and *how well* they do it (aspects of communicative competence),

- with a qualitative methodology that checked that teachers could relate to the categories used and that each descriptor employed was an unambiguous, stand-alone criterion,
- employing a sophisticated statistical methodology that enabled the descriptors to be scaled on the same mathematical scale as learners, (for some of whom video samples were also available),
- as a result of the use of the descriptors in a real, end-of-year assessment by practising teachers,
- in four educational sectors,
- in a multi-lingual environment,
- in relation to three foreign languages (English, French, German).

As a result, replication of the rank ordering of the descriptors has been high – with correlations between 0.92 and 0.97 to the original ordering:

- ALTE: 0.97 in conjunction with ALTE Can Do statements (Jones 2002:176),
- DIALANG: 0.96 in relation to listening and reading descriptors; 0.92 for writing (Kaftandjieva and Takala 2002: 114-121), This data is significant as it was for Swedish learners of Finnish, a non-Indo-European language.

Two fundamental questions remain, however, regarding limits to the validity of the descriptors:

- a) whether a framework can have validity both as a generic reference point and also as a specific application in a local context;

whether a common framework developed for the teaching of foreign or second languages in mainstream education and the adult sector can be applied in primary school to the teaching of the language of schooling (the mother tongue of the indigenous population).

Generic validity and specific application: There are three sub-questions to this point:

- the practical application of theoretical concepts with generic validity;
- the common difficulty level of learning elements placed at different levels on a set of levels;
- the selection of a certain level to be a compulsory standard in a specific context.

Practical application of theoretical concepts: North (2000: 29) suggested that a framework scale ideally needs to be *context-free* in order to accommodate generalisable results from different specific contexts, yet at the same time the descriptors on the scale need to be *context-relevant*, relatable or translatable into each and every relevant context, and appropriate for the function they are used for in that context. In practical terms, this means that the descriptive scheme of the framework needs to:

- a) relate to the categorisation in theories of language competence, although the available theory and research is inadequate to provide a basis for it;
- b) be relevant to the contexts of the learning population concerned, though these cannot be predicted with any certainty;
- c) remain user-friendly and accessible to practitioners.

The CEFR illustrative descriptors attempt to do this; but it is a tall order. It would perhaps be fairer to say that the illustrative descriptors taken together with their further elaboration and amendment to specific contexts in the ELP descriptor bank discussed above meet this aim.

Common difficulty level: With regard to this issue, Spolsky considered:

“A functional set of goals exists in a social context.... Where this is consistent and common as in the Foreign Service, or in the Council of Europe notion of the Threshold Level for tourists and occasional visitors, it is not unreasonable to develop a scale that proceeds through the skills. ...If it cannot be based on a single social goal, a single set of guidelines, a single scale could only be justified if there were evidence of an empirically provable necessary learning order, and we have clearly had difficulty in showing this to be so even for structural items.” (Spolsky 1986: 154; 1989: 65)

A common, empirically proven *learning order* can probably never be demonstrated; second language acquisition research shows no signs of confirming such an order, despite what for a time appeared promising signs (e.g. Meisel et al 1981; Pienemann 1985). However, in the case of the bank of CEFR illustrative descriptors, an empirically proven interpretation of *difficulty* (i.e. the “Level” of a descriptor) can be claimed to be common across foreign languages, language regions, educational sectors (secondary, tertiary, and adult) and the learner/teacher divide. The “DIF” (differential item functioning) of the CEFR illustrative descriptors was extremely limited where it did occur it could easily be explained by not-necessarily-desirable curriculum practice (North 2000: 255-260).

Selection of a certain level to be a compulsory local standard: Educational standards must always take account of the needs and abilities of the learners in the context concerned. Unfortunately, educational standards often give the impression that they have been “plucked out of the air on the basis of intuition, which is frequently shown on closer examination to be wrongly conceived” (Clark 1987: 44). Norms of performance need to be definitions of performance that can realistically be expected, rather than relating standards to “some neat and tidy intuitive ideal” (Clark 1987: 46). This posits an empirical basis to the definition of standards.

The CEFR descriptors were in fact produced empirically in classroom contexts, relating learner achievement in the context (Switzerland) to the levels on the scale, as mentioned above. The European Language Portfolio (ELP) – with CEFR descriptors in adapted and elaborated forms appropriate to the educational context concerned as described above - provides an ideal exploratory tool to discover what level would be a realistic standard for any specific context. Yet unfortunately, in many contexts a CEFR level (e.g. “B1”) continues to be “plucked out of the air” without an assessment of the realism of the objective or a consideration of the investment that would be necessary to achieve it.

That is not a limitation in the validity of the CEFR as such, but rather an unfortunately naïve use of it.

Language of schooling: As regards the second question, there is currently a lot of interest in the language of schooling. There are clearly areas of convergence between frameworks for the two purposes – for example the categories of the descriptive scheme itself would continue to be relevant. However, there will also be points where a framework to describe emerging competence in the language of schooling will put a different emphasis. For example, the CEFR illustrative descriptors define behavioural outcomes (results of learning), whereas a framework for the language of schooling may be more interested in describing emerging abilities and competences and in relating their development to the kind of educational scaffolding that encourages that development. Secondly, foreign language learners transfer to the foreign language competences they have already acquired in relation to the mother tongue and language of schooling. A framework for the latter would need to situate the development of language competences within the overall cognitive and social development of the children concerned.

Many CEFR illustrative descriptors may thus prove unsuitable as they assume the cognitive and social competences of young adults at age 16 and above (e.g. the many descriptors at B2 emphasising the ability to develop and justify arguments).

These and other points of convergence and divergence are being considered by a new Working Party for a framework for the language of schooling that is expected to report in 2009.

How can we ensure consistent interpretation of the levels?

North and Schneider (1998:243) emphasised that the production of a scale was only the first step in the implementation of a common framework, and that ensuring a common interpretation through standardised performance samples and monitoring data from tests was necessary.

The process of standardising the interpretation of the levels has been supported by the development of the draft manual “*Relating Language Examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR)*” (Council of Europe 2003; Figueras et al 2005). The Manual proposes methodologies for relating the results from local assessments to the CEFR that do necessarily involve complex statistics or large-scale projects. Procedures are presented in three sets:

- **Specification** of the coverage of the examination in relation to the CEFR descriptor framework (categories described at different levels) in addition to a general description of the examination concerned.
- **Standardisation** of the interpretation of the levels through training with examples of performances calibrated with common criteria (CEFR Table 3) followed by benchmarking local performance samples to the framework levels. DVDs of performances illustrating the CEFR levels are available for the two official languages of the Council of Europe (English and French) and are almost completed for German and Italian.
- **Empirical Validation** of the results reported by tests through an independent corroboration of the linking claimed on the basis of specification and standardisation. To achieve this, one demonstrates a high correlation to an external criterion, which can be either a test already calibrated to the CEFR or judgements (by teachers or learners) with CEFR descriptors.

This scheme was adopted (a) because these categories are a good way of grouping linking methodologies found in the literature, (b) because they reflect the classic three stages of quality management (design, implementation, evaluation) and (c) because such broad concepts could thus be applied equally to formal, high-stakes assessment situations (examinations) and to lower-stakes school and teacher assessments.

The Manual has been piloted in some 20 case studies throughout Europe. Feedback considered at the start of the revision process (November 2006) indicates that the structure (specification, standardisation, validation) works well. The Manual appears to be a good way to critically review and evaluate the content and the statistical characteristics of an exam – and many stressed that the process is as important as the outcome. The Manual was felt to be a very effective way to mediate the CEFR, though several users reported on the difficulty of following the suggested procedures without a full set of calibrated performance samples and test items. In this respect the need for cross-language benchmarking during development was also stressed. Various suggestions have also been made to make the Manual more user-friendly and straightforward.

The definitive version of the Manual is expected to be available in January 2008. The documentation to the existing DVDs, plus writing performance samples are available on the website www.coe.int/portfolio. Sample reading and listening items that are considered by the institutes they originate from to represent the CEFR levels have also been provided, and it is

hoped that the actual case studies will produce a broader range of performance samples and test items that are calibrated to the levels.

The existence of sets of performance samples calibrated to the CEFR levels will also offer at least the possibility of further enriching the bank of illustrative descriptors. Techniques exist to identify salient features that appear to distinguish between levels; these techniques could be employed to double-check the content of the current descriptors and to elaborate areas that are currently under-defined (e.g. socio-linguistic competence; Level C2).

Conclusion

Provided the descriptors in a common framework have a theoretically motivated development and provided that the framework presents a flexible structure, there is no need for a conflict between the desire to have a central framework to provide transparency and coherence and the need to have local strategies that provide learning goals specific to particular contexts. The main danger with regard to all common frameworks is a simplistic interpretation of them. The key to success is for users to appreciate that a common framework is a descriptive metasystem that is intended as a reference point, not as a tool to be implemented without further elaboration and adaptation to local circumstances.

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Impact of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and the Council of Europe's work on the new European educational area

Francis Goullier

This presentation deals with some of the implications of the success of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. It has been noted a number of times during our discussions that the Framework's subtitle is a threefold one: learning, teaching, assessment. Consideration of the Framework's impact on language policies and language teaching practices in Europe must therefore take into account all the aspects covered by this text: curricula, syllabi, teacher training, teaching materials and assessment.

The purpose of this presentation is not to provide another overview of the implementation of the CEFR in member states, however. Rather, it will look at the effects of the Framework's introduction on the emergence of a new European educational area and on the relationships that exist, or ought to exist, between the various players within that area.

I shall start by reviewing the first day of this Forum. Our discussions on the effective calibration of language proficiency examinations and certification to the reference levels set out in the Common European Framework of Reference illustrate the way in which many of those concerned perceive the nature of the relationship between the member states and the Council of Europe. The debate that has been initiated concerns the respective responsibility of each state and of the Council: should the quality of such examinations and certification be assured by the Council of Europe inspecting the documents produced with reference to the Framework, and should the Council even introduce a form of quality control? Or, on the contrary, is this a sphere in which each state enjoys complete sovereignty – with the responsibilities that entails – including over institutions and bodies which adopt these proficiency levels and which operate at the national level or represent a country or region internationally?

It has been stated by the Steering Committee for Education of the Council of Europe that it is not the Council of Europe's mission to validate linking claims to the reference levels. I am bringing it up again merely to illustrate what, to my mind, still characterises our thinking about the relationship between the member states and the Council of Europe. Although the term is not appropriate in this connection, we are dealing with an approach influenced by the concept of *subsidiarity*, which also governs relationships between the European Union and its member states.

As I shall argue in my presentation, however, it is clear that in practice, particularly in the modern languages field, this vertical relationship between states and the Council has been superseded by a relationship of an entirely different kind, encompassing the Council of Europe and all its member states: a relationship characterised by *shared responsibility*. It does not replace the vertical state-Council relationship with horizontal relationships between countries, but introduces a multi-faceted, mutually supportive environment that enriches the state-Council relationship by adding a third dimension consisting of the various relationships between member states.

The fact is that the rapid emergence of a European educational area for languages is “dealing a new hand” to the different players in this area.

The first, and simplest, illustration relates to the future of our languages. If we subscribe to the principle – set forth and upheld by the Council of Europe – of the overriding need for linguistic and cultural diversity, all the member states have a responsibility to promote one another's languages. Indeed, this is what Article 2 of the European Cultural Convention

advocates. The European Year of Languages, the Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe and the European Language Portfolio – in short, the Council of Europe in all its expressions – reaffirm the need to promote all languages without exception, naturally including European languages. Subscribing to the Council of Europe’s strategy for promoting diversity means engaging in dialogue, not so much with the Council itself as with other European states and regions. Agreements concluded between countries or regions on a given minority language or teaching of the partner’s language are to be welcomed. Consideration must also be given to languages not covered by such agreements, including national languages, if only by reiterating the relevant principles.

Consensus on the emergence of a European educational area for the teaching of modern languages

A European educational area has been talked about for a long time, sometimes with a question mark over it. It is clear that this educational area is taking shape rapidly and convincingly, particularly in the modern languages field.

One of the driving forces behind this development is the very evident synergy between the Council of Europe and the European Commission. The two bodies’ work in the language field is generally regarded as being complementary, reflecting their respective roles and priorities. Without going back to the European Year of Languages, the initiatives taken are clearly helping to generate awareness of the need and scope for collaborative work in Europe with a view to achieving goals such as improving language proficiency, developing transparent language qualifications and protecting diversity. Languages are naturally part of the wider “Education and Training 2010” work programme, but have also given rise to specific initiatives. Commissioner Jan Figel’s December 2005 communication on multilingualism sends a strong political signal. The European Commission’s 2004-2006 Action Plan for Linguistic Diversity was equally significant. It pointed out, *inter alia*, that the Commission cannot bear sole responsibility for taking action in this area and that member states must take up the issues raised and help to achieve the goals set. It is worth noting that in September 2006 each EU member state was asked to submit a national report on its contribution to the Action Plan.

We are all aware that the issue of languages within education systems can no longer be treated just like any other issue. For obvious reasons, the very essence of this kind of learning means that the European educational area is rapidly becoming the natural arena for thinking out and effecting the necessary adjustments.

Another recent illustration of this approach is afforded by the conclusions of the Council of the European Union, published in the Official Journal of the European Union of 25 July 2006, concerning the European Indicator of Language Competence. The idea is to develop an instrument for measuring and comparing the actual language proficiency of young Europeans at the end of their compulsory schooling.

In these conclusions, the Council of the European Union affirms that foreign language skills, as well as helping to foster mutual understanding between peoples, are a prerequisite for a mobile workforce and thus contribute to the competitiveness of the European Union economy. In the same text, it also affirms that periodic monitoring of performance through the use of indicators and benchmarks is an essential part of the Lisbon process, allowing good practice to be identified with a view to providing strategic guidance and steering for both short- and long-term measures of the “Education and Training 2010” work programme. Naturally, as these conclusions point out, the indicator of language competence should be linked to the levels of the Common European Framework.

This example, among others, shows that a dual process is at work:

- on the one hand, the sovereignty of each member state is respected (the Council of the European Union stresses that “the development of the Indicator should fully respect the responsibility of Member states for the organisation of their education systems (...)”);
- on the other hand, however, the very idea of a European indicator makes states responsible to one another for achieving objectives set at the European level, necessitating more intensive dialogue on the methods used to achieve them.

This dual approach is not specific to modern languages, but the operative nature of the measures introduced in this field and the emphasis at all levels on the issue of languages, both in member states and at the European level, are striking. I am sure this phenomenon cannot be put down to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages alone; rather, it has come about because the realisation of the pressing need for educational instruments better geared to the variety of language skills required in Europe coincided chronologically with the CEFR providing the basic elements of a solution. In my view, this coincidence accounts for the Framework’s rapid success. Conversely, its success clearly heightens awareness of the needs, insofar as it makes certain solutions technically possible.

This specific dynamic is confirmed by the quantitative and qualitative success of the process of preparing country Profiles, initiated by the Council of Europe. Every stage in the preparation of each Language Education Policy Profile (including the Country Reports and the Experts’ Reports as well as the final Profiles themselves) encourages an analysis comparing the specific needs of a region or state and the Council’s policy instruments. It is fascinating to read the various Profiles published and to see how effective the Council’s guidelines and documents are when put to the test in specific situations.

It is clear from reading these Profiles that the European educational area is taking shape both by respecting the specific situations and needs of each of its components and by doing its utmost to ensure that the progress made possible by discussion at the European level – and formalised, *inter alia*, in Council of Europe documents – contributes to the developments under way in every European Region and state.

Example of the Validation Committee for the European Language Portfolio

The rapid development, thanks to the CEFR, of the European educational area for languages is sparking another change, one that is less visible but equally important: the rapid, widespread uptake of the CEFR in Europe is significantly altering each player’s position in the new European educational area for language teaching and learning. The direct, unambiguous relationship between states and the Council of Europe is gradually dissolving into a network of mutual responsibility.

Nevertheless, an apparent counter-example to this development is often put forward: the European Validation Committee for the European Language Portfolio. May I remind you that this validation body, set up by the Steering Committee for Education in 2000, has the task of examining each European Language Portfolio model developed by a state or a public or private institution and verifying its conformity with the letter and spirit of the Principles and Guidelines adopted by the Steering Committee. It is a case of verifying that the model incorporates the specific features common to all the portfolios and possesses the necessary qualities to fulfil its role in promoting plurilingualism, developing learner autonomy, developing acceptance of linguistic and cultural diversity and ensuring transparent qualifications by referring explicitly to the Common European Framework of Reference. Only models validated by this Committee may be known as European Language Portfolios, bear the Council of Europe logo and constitute an integral part of the momentum created around this tool in Europe.

We are indeed talking about a vertical approach, to go back to the image used earlier. The Council, through this Committee, validates references to Council of Europe tools of which a ministry or institution wishes to make use.

This is the reality, and although about eighty portfolios have been validated to date, others could not be validated on the first attempt; many designers have had to make significant adjustments to their models in order to obtain such validation.

That aspect aside, however, observation of the Validation Committee's *modus operandi* since its inception shows that, while abiding by its terms of reference, the Committee members soon incorporated into their work another element of current European developments in relation to the Framework. It could even be argued that one of the most important roles played by the Committee has been to encourage all the designers of portfolios to share the advances made as a result of adjustments to the various models over time. Indeed, there has been alarm in some quarters that the Committee's criteria have evolved since its inception and that model portfolios validated at its early meetings would probably no longer be accepted in the same form today, even though the Principles and Guidelines have not changed. The "case law" established by the Validation Committee, which is clarified and explained through regular updating of the reference documents, is in fact one instance of the polymorphic relationships between the various member states and the Council of Europe. A state's relationship with the Council of Europe can no longer be considered in isolation from what other states are doing.

Similarly, it is obvious that the Council can no longer carry out its work in the modern languages field without taking account of European Union initiatives. Since we are talking here about the European Language Portfolio, it is crucial, for example, to look at the development of such portfolios for adult learners and vocational training in relation to *Europass* introduced by the European Commission in 2005. Likewise, the European Language Portfolio's short-term future clearly can no longer be envisaged in isolation from the work and discussions of the Commission and the Union in relation to basic competencies for young Europeans and the documents that could or should accompany learners in the acquisition and validation of those competencies.

Who is responsible to whom?

It is generally considered that each state and institution is responsible for the quality of its own procedures concerning the assessment of language proficiency levels. But responsible to whom? To the Council of Europe? No, not just the Council! The very nature of the issues involved in the proper calibration of certification tests shows that this question has an impact on the benefit the various states and institutions can hope to gain from using these proficiency levels. If a state allows the proficiency levels to be used inappropriately, it jeopardises the work being done in other countries, undermining their value as Europe-wide benchmarks. It also deprives learners of the benefits of reliable certification of language proficiency, making international recognition less certain and reducing the value of what is a significant asset in the context of European mobility.

An institution or state that puts the guidelines and recommendations set out in the Manual for Relating Language Examinations to the CEFR to good use, equipping itself to ensure the proper linking of such examinations or certification by means of a quality assurance process or a national or regional validation institution, does so as much because it recognises its responsibility towards its learners and its European partners as out of a concern to comply with the recommendations of the Council of Europe's Steering Committee for Education.

Such local, regional and national initiatives can only be encouraged. However, the Council cannot ignore the potential – and even foreseeable – inconsistencies between the various

countries, regions and languages when it comes to implementing these quality assurance mechanisms. It is important not to overlook the danger that the very high stakes associated with internationally recognised certification and assessment may quickly result in certain languages or countries striding ahead of other languages. The danger is even greater for languages represented by social groups or linguistic minorities that do not enjoy the same institutional or private support as that accorded to other languages. Although the Steering Committee for Education does not consider the Council of Europe responsible for verifying the quality of examinations and certification linked to the Framework levels, it does have responsibilities in another area: it must closely monitor developments in Europe, issue warnings when a certain degree of balance between languages comes under threat and take the necessary action – within its field of competence, of course.

Let us now take a broader view by asking exactly what is happening in the various states in relation to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

A growing number of states have supported the translation of the Framework into their national language(s). This is consistent with the usual approach of making tools developed by the Council of Europe available to stakeholders in each country, thereby involving a “vertical” process.

The decision by some groups of countries sharing the same language to draw up specifications defining the linguistic and cultural content corresponding to different levels of the Framework has more serious implications for our discussions. This has been done for German (levels A1 to C2) and French (levels A1 and B2), and is in the process of being done for other languages such as Greek, Portuguese, Spanish and English; it will probably be extended to other languages. It is not an entirely new approach: the series of threshold levels developed in the 1980s set out, for each foreign language, those elements regarded as essential in order to communicate with its speakers. The situation has completely changed, however, owing to the adoption of these reference levels as learning targets in a growing number of countries.

This implicitly raises the following question: what implications does the existence of reference level descriptions describing the language content to be acquired at different levels of proficiency have for the development of national curricula? Should, or can, the authors of such curricula review the language content to be taught at year levels whose learning targets correspond to one of the levels of the CEFR, when reference descriptions will be available that specify precisely which content allows a particular language proficiency to be attained at level A1, B1 or B2? Does a state have the wherewithal to create the right conditions, for each language taught, for the same kind of research as that conducted, in order to develop the specifications, by those countries considering themselves to be in charge of a particular language? Is it not preferable to take advantage of the help thereby provided by partner countries? It is true that the ground a learner has to cover in studying a language depends a great deal on the languages he or she already knows, and the specifications provided for each language have nothing to say about the practicalities of achieving different levels of proficiency in the language in question. In practice, however, whether or not the content to be learned includes a verbal mood or a particular form, where the learning target corresponds to one of the levels of the CEFR, may be determined by specifications developed by others. The practical implications of this situation are not significant, although they may have a major impact on the teaching of the languages in question. On the other hand, this is an interesting example in that it raises, albeit anecdotally, the issue of the responsibility of those concerned. A ministry or state can agree to share responsibility for defining teaching content in this way only if it explicitly subscribes to the new concept of a European educational area for languages.

Naturally, it may do so without necessarily claiming to support this development, defending its decision on technical grounds. However, this will undoubtedly mean it loses an important resource when it comes to explaining and justifying changes in course content.

Another example highlights the political willingness to take advantage of the European educational area in other ways. It concerns the application, in some countries, of the principle of mutual confidence in the assessment of pupils' linguistic proficiency and intercultural competence. It is clearly essential for language learning, the discovery of cultural aspects of the partner country and intercultural education to take into account the linguistic, educational and cultural situation of learners. The approach adopted here, however, consists in separating such learning from the assessment of its outcomes, making partner countries responsible for the certification of proficiency in their languages or, at the very least, seeking to engage in close co-operation with those countries in connection with the certification process. It is a very different approach to that adopted by other states wishing to develop their own certification systems for proficiency in foreign languages, sometimes out of a concern to take full responsibility for the teaching of those languages in their country, which is a very legitimate concern in some cases.

These two examples of explicit reliance on partner countries when it comes to defining course content and implementing forms of proficiency assessment raise, in very different ways, a new issue in the area of language teaching and assessment in Europe, namely: who is responsible for what?

Initially, we have seen that the issues around the calibration of language examinations and certification significantly broaden the scope of the debate, which is no longer confined to dialogue between member states and the Council of Europe. It is clear from these new examples that the momentum generated by the CEFR in Europe is starting to bring about a new balance in terms of responsibilities, placing increasing weight on horizontal relationships between member states and thus raising the issue of responsibility from a new perspective.

Inevitable diversification of ways of dealing with the different components of the CEFR

This development applies to all the issues connected with the CEFR.

The forum is intended to serve as a forceful reminder that the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages is not confined to the proficiency level scales. With a view to the future Europe we hope to see, that is, a Europe respecting and deriving strength from its diversity, it is even more important to explore the full potential of all the other components of the CEFR: real efforts to promote plurilingualism, an action-oriented approach to language learning, taking into account learners' needs and the development of learner autonomy.

Although these aspects are also developed in other Council of Europe instruments, such as the Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe and the European Language Portfolio, it has to be said that they do not receive political recognition through the same channels, in the same form or at the same pace as the issues of assessment and linking of language examinations and certification. With some exceptions, they are not included among the priorities set at the highest level.

This significant disparity in the recognition accorded to the various components of the CEFR can only be a cause for concern. As we know, all of these components are complementary and it is difficult to see how one can make the most of part of the Framework without getting to grips with the rest. Little is to be gained, for example, by

trying to use the scales and proficiency levels without analysing them in detail and attempting to promote an action-oriented approach to teaching and learning in conjunction with their introduction, without taking all the necessary measures to develop learner autonomy, for instance through self-assessment, and above all without accepting the full implications of the concept of plurilingualism underpinning the levels. The main advantage of the scales is that it is no longer necessary to refer to native-speaker standard in order to set learning targets and assess proficiency levels. Stopping at this point, however, is to stop halfway. The rationale behind the scales is that such targets should be designed in accordance with learners' needs, accepting the importance and potential advantages of attaining complementary levels in different languages and thereby adopting a positive approach to the concept of partial or specific competences. This is wholly bound up with the issue of responsibility. Allowing the CEFR to be interpreted and used in a piecemeal fashion is liable to result in a simplistic, standardising view of this tool, compromising much of the CEFR's contribution to the collective development of language teaching and assessment in Europe.

Moreover, this danger is starting to become apparent here and there with the reduction of the Framework to purely operational aspects of language learning and a focus on communication skills. In some, if not many, cases, this is coupled with disregard for the importance of familiarising pupils with the European cultural area and neglect of the cultural and intercultural components necessary for genuine communication, which also one of the justifications of the need for plurilingualism. We must pay attention to any expressions of unease that may emerge. They are a warning signal of deficiencies or imbalances in the implementation of the CEFR and the discourse associated with it.

Naturally, this does not mean nothing is being done in member states. However, the lower profile enjoyed at the European level by initiatives in these areas undoubtedly arises from the fact that they mainly involve specific measures taken in different countries and within certain education systems.

An innovative solution has been found to the problems of linking language examinations and certification in the form of a Manual and the publication of samples of learner productions intended to illustrate the different levels of proficiency. The question also arises as to whether there might be a case for the Council of Europe using this approach as a model for promoting the preparation of recommendations or even a guide to help member states make the most of what the CEFR has to offer in terms of curricula, teaching materials and teacher education.

Raising the issue of the impact of measures taken in countries or regions, in connection with the CEFR, on the European educational area comes down to considering the most effective strategies for ensuring that such measures make the greatest possible contribution to positive developments in all of these fields at the European level.

In this connection, I would like to turn around the question I asked at the beginning of my presentation in order to define the Council of Europe's responsibility in relation to the momentum generated by new developments in a given country. Although a negative response has been given to the question of whether the Council of Europe should monitor the linking of language examinations offered in the various states, it seems to me that it is both possible and desirable to ask the Council of Europe how it can draw on measures introduced in different places in order to help pool the necessary resources and expertise with a view to addressing the issues that will undoubtedly arise in respect of the implementation of key aspects of the CEFR. A perusal of the Language Education Policy Profiles already produced highlights numerous examples of such issues.

The Council of Europe has demonstrated its ability to respond appropriately to issues arising from the practices or needs of certain countries or from new developments. The way the Council grappled with the issue of languages of instruction, raised by many countries following the introduction of the CEFR, is an outstanding example. The Council responded rapidly because this is a highly political issue. However, it is also important to respond in a similar manner to issues of a less political nature, obviously in appropriate ways. Another example is the shift in emphasis since the last European seminar on the European Languages Portfolio, held in Lithuania in September 2006, where the Language Policy Division and the Validation Committee wished the discussions and exchanges to focus on the implementation of this document rather than its content. This is a development geared to the needs observed at local level in relation to the implementation of Council of Europe instruments.

In the new geography of the European educational area for languages, it seems to me that the relationship between member states and the Council must be two-way. The Council makes a decisive contribution to shaping this new educational area by developing language policy instruments and offering training in their use. By paying close attention to the needs of member states, it can probably do more to help them introduce new ideas in the implementation of plurilingual education and accept the educational implications of the concepts underpinning the CEFR.

In conclusion, the CEFR and the Council of Europe's various language policy tools have clearly had a very significant impact in Europe. For many, the rapid and widespread uptake of the CEFR – taking advantage of the need to revitalise language teaching – was an opportunity to ensure that recognition of the importance of making such teaching more effective and achieving greater transparency led to practical action. It is equally clear, however, that the use of these Council tools has given a particular shape to the process set in motion over the last few years. While responding to the needs identified and expressed for greater transparency, a common scale of proficiency levels and a more communicative approach to language teaching, the CEFR also introduces other elements of language policy that go together as a package.

This has numerous implications for the *modus operandi* of a European educational area that is both strengthened and profoundly transformed by them. In this new landscape, it is no longer a question of “*What can the Council of Europe do for us?*”, but rather of “*Who does what?*” and “*Who is responsible for what?*”

Three key areas for development may be identified:

- Each member state has at least as great a responsibility to all its partners as to the Council, and each, in accordance with the specific nature of its education system, will surely have to work out the best possible way of shouldering its responsibilities.
- While the various spheres of development all complement one another, they do not move at the same pace; some of them are carried along by political priorities, while others still require efforts of explanation and persuasion. It is logical, therefore, that not all aspects of the CEFR will take the same route. As a result, the Council's responsibilities may differ from those it has in areas such as assessment.
- The issue of the Council's responsibility is gradually being displaced by the rapid uptake of the CEFR. During this presentation I discussed two examples of issues that, to my mind, reflect this shift: how can the Council alert its partners and warn them about the possibility of growing imbalances between languages in relation to the introduction of quality assurance mechanisms for assessment processes? How can it watch out for, and warn against, a counter-productive imbalance in the implementation of the various components of the CEFR?

Lastly, in relation to the latter point, our discussions would be incomplete if they were confined solely to the responsibilities of states and of the Council of Europe. Indeed, one of the key aspects of the CEFR involves a much broader range of players. I am talking about plurilingual education. There is a fundamental difference between plurilingual and intercultural education, as defined by the CEFR, and the most common approaches to language teaching. Plurilingual and intercultural education cannot be seen solely as the outcome of the language learning and teaching process, but changes the way we think about, develop and provide language education: it is an education in values as much as the acquisition of language skills; it is designed to enable each individual to develop and enhance his or her own plurilingual profile; it is geared to life-long learning thanks to the development of individual competencies, the acquisition of appropriate behaviours and strategies and the promotion and recognition of linguistic and cultural diversity. It takes as its starting-point and end-goal the knowledge, abilities and competencies of individuals in their actual situation and social environment rather than the issues associated with teaching one or more languages. This fundamental challenge raised by the CEFR can be met only by means of responsible, concerted action by all those involved in the education process: curriculum designers, trainers, authors of teaching materials, those in charge of examinations and assessment, head teachers and language teachers, not to mention, of course, the crucial task of explaining this approach to employers and end users of education systems. We are well aware that these changes are the slowest to implement and will encounter the greatest resistance. Yet it is perhaps for this very reason that we must make them an urgent focus. The manifold players involved in such a wide-ranging transformation may give the impression that responsibilities are dispersed, leading to lack of action. Such dispersal is not inevitable. It can be avoided if all those in positions of responsibility, at whatever level, sincerely wish to understand and emphasise the fact that this approach goes hand in hand with all the other components of the CEFR.

The division of responsibilities has clearly changed a great deal, but it is continuing to undergo major changes. It must be the subject of discussion and careful monitoring. This is my belief, and the very purpose of my presentation. It is essential to take a realistic view of how the CEFR has changed the European educational area and to watch for the danger of aberrations or distortions of the potential of this tool, not only with a view to adapting to the needs in Europe, but also – and I shall finish by looking to the future – out of a responsibility to parts of the world and non-European countries that are taking a close interest in the CEFR. It is probably too soon to talk about this in detail, but it is not too soon to consider the benefit these countries will also derive from the responsible use of the CEFR on our own continent.

Contextualising uses of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

Daniel Coste

Numerous people were involved in designing and preparing the Framework of Reference. We must not underestimate the contribution made by our colleagues in Switzerland, who did so much to get the project off the ground before, during and after the symposium, held in Rüslikon in 1991. The first mention must, however, go to the decisive part played by John Trim, Director of the “Modern Language” projects, in making the fundamental, and undeniably political, choices which transformed a project which was, in a sense, technical to start with, into something vastly more ambitious and far-reaching. In fact, at the beginning, the proposed reference instrument’s sole focus was to be the comparability of language certificates, the aim being to help various categories of user by bringing a minimum level of transparency and consistency into a complex and sometimes opaque panorama.

- The first change made at John Trim’s instigation involved extending the Framework’s reach to cover, not just assessment, but also teaching and learning - and cover them in a very open spirit, with no methodological dogmatism.
- The second extension reflected a desire, at a time when the Berlin Wall had recently come down, and new European countries were preparing to join the Council, to make the Framework of Reference an instrument for dialogue and co-operation with those countries, whose different educational and teaching traditions it would also have to allow for.

These were major challenges, on various levels, for a language education policy which was not concerned solely with either languages or education, and which involved acceptance of serious responsibilities.

I am mentioning these three and, as it were, interlocking aims now, as the end of this meeting in Professor Trim’s honour approaches, not just because I am anxious to render unto John the things that are John’s, and highlight the political considerations which sparked the project, but also because I believe that these three rather disparate aims (comparing certificates, gaining an overall picture of teaching and learning facilities and resources, contributing to dialogue between different teaching cultures) have a bearing on projected in-context uses of this reference instrument, and on the rather varied uses already made of it in practice.

So? Contextual uses of the Framework of Reference? In many ways, this may seem a paradox, when one remembers that, in some of its potential applications, the Framework functions as a clearly defined standard, a stable yardstick, a central and single system for scaling language competences.

A glaring paradox indeed! As a reference instrument, the Framework was intended – not just in its repeated use of such phrases as “Users of the Framework may wish to consider and where appropriate state ...” “Les utilisateurs du Cadre de référence envisageront et expliciteront selon le cas ...” (and John Trim was the one who insisted on constantly leaving the ball in the user’s court), but in its essence and structure - to be flexible and context-amenable. It is modulable, malleable and multi-referential. It contains numerous adjustable parameters, and it is in context that each of them is assigned a value, that a profile is constructed, and that standards and indicative thresholds may be determined.

What the Framework primarily gives its users is a common language and a common instrument, which they can use to compare different options - national, regional or other.

Different these options may be, but comparing them is possible, and one reason for doing so is to give individuals (workers, students, migrants, and also pupils at school) optimum support as they move from one context to another.

However, and this is one of the chief reasons for the present forum, this was not exactly what happened. In many cases, indeed, the reverse: the Framework was seen as a European standard, a kind of prescription or injunction, with contexts being forced, willy-nilly, to fit it - because it came from a European institution, and because other countries, regions, educational establishments, textbook publishers or authors, curriculum planners and test developers took its B2 or C1 as their target and benchmark.

This created (still creates?) a danger of the Framework's becoming a closed instrument - a top-down procedure. In these circumstances, it is not surprising that people should turn to the body which supposedly laid down this single standard, the Council of Europe's Language Policy Division, and ask it to confirm that they are applying it correctly - to give them a certificate of approval and conformity, like that attaching to European technical standards, which are universally binding and leave no room for subsidiarity.

We all know that there are a few problems in practice, particularly with national examinations. But we all must recognise - and hopefully have recognised - that issuing certificates of conformity of this kind is no part of the Council of Europe's job.

One of the things we must now try to do is ascertain the reasons for these aberrations. Several explanations are possible - economic or organisational factors, or practical defects in the Framework itself. I think it likelier that the product (the Framework) has failed to match customer requirements - or that those requirements have themselves shifted ground and changed.

Let us look first at the problems involved in defining levels of proficiency. On the assumption that, as I have said, users originally wanted an instrument they could use to compare and rank existing diplomas and certificates, two things are now happening: firstly, the Framework is doing more than it was asked to do, since its uses extend beyond comparing things as they are; secondly, requirements are expanding very rapidly to include a measuring instrument which can define proficiency levels exactly, calibrating them as precisely as the graduations on a medical thermometer or the bar-setting marks in a pole-vaulting contest. What users want is not a differentiated profile of unevenly developed skills, but a single line running through speaking and writing, reception and production, and interaction - something which embodies objective convergence between the people who devise international tests and certification procedures, the people who determine the aims of education systems, and the people who write textbooks. The result of all this is that A2 or B2 rapidly become global, summary labels, signifying that an A2 or B2 learner has attained that level, across the board, in all the skills to which descriptors are attached.

However, the Framework's scales and descriptors are designed to serve a diametrically opposite purpose: as Brian North has again reminded us here, the most general descriptors certainly describe progression in levels of general competence, but they cannot determine points on any one scale precisely. It is the most specific descriptors which make fine distinctions and employ several scales, assigning values to a number of parameters and fully exploiting the multi-referentiality which is the Framework's distinctive feature. This indeed is the price of genuine contextualisation, which is "made to measure" and certainly costs more, but provides a better fit than any "off-the-peg" item.

All of this has two problematic effects, which the present forum has considered:

- Firstly, use of the Framework can become approximate and haphazard ("How do I know that your B2 is my B2?"). For example, when people say "In our school

system, pupils reach B2 for the first foreign language, and A2 for the second”, it is rather hard to know exactly what this means in a given context or contexts. And going into more detail and saying, for example, “B2 for speaking and B1 for writing” does not really give a better picture - though it does mark a move towards a certain profiling of aims.

- Secondly, experts on testing techniques, and the people who devise tests and determine success thresholds, can easily argue, in these circumstances, that the Framework, as yardstick, is too approximate.

Approaching the question from another angle, and coming back to the Framework’s intended purpose, it must be emphasised that it can be used in many ways, and embodies a number of strong options.

Firstly, it is, in several respects, multi-functional:

- It does not propose strict levels, but zones or bands, for which parameters must be set locally, if precise standards and thresholds are wanted.
- The descriptors attached to its many scales give considerable scope for variation, depending on how they are combined and on which parameters are used, in determining or assessing differentiated profiles, *inter alia* for various skills, and in using specific selected criteria (socio-linguistic, grammatical, etc.) for each of those skills.
- It offers a broad range of options concerning methods, types of task, and practical approaches to learning.
- Its proposals on curricula (curriculum scenarios, modularity, personalised learning paths and aims, etc.) are very flexible.

Secondly, it embodies a number of strong options, which are themselves ranked:

- Its descriptions of language use and learning are competence based and action-oriented (“Can do ...” in a given domain).
- It affirms and promotes plurilingualism and introduces the concept of plurilingual and pluricultural competence.
- It includes plurilingualism among more general principles and values, relating to democracy, citizenship and intercultural understanding (social cohesion is less explicitly present, as an educational aim, in the Framework than in later instruments, such as the Guide, and indeed the European Language Portfolio).

There is certainly no incompatibility between these various dimensions, but there may be some interplay, and even friction, between the openness which is central to the Framework, and the strong options which it also proposes. It can also be read and used in different ways, depending on the “level” of strong options the user chooses to emphasise.

- Not using the various parameters and profiling possibilities offered by the Framework, and sticking to “A2”-type horizontal macro-definitions (for all skills and without indicating the parameters employed) is tantamount to imposing what seems a single, common standard, without defining it clearly – thus leaving it open to various interpretations.
- Following only the first (competence based and action-oriented) option means interpreting the Framework in a way which may be seen, in many contexts, as

technocratic and restricting the aims of education. Unless due care is taken, this may boomerang.

These, however, are precisely the directions in which uses of the Framework have generally been moving, since it was first applied in specific contexts.

In various settings and on various levels of discourse - this may have struck you in some of the things said here – people who talk about the Framework are actually referring only to its scales of proficiency and their descriptors. This is a kind of reverse metonymy: instead of a part's denoting the whole (like the old use of “a sail” to mean “a ship”), the whole designates a part: “the ship” means “the sail”, and “the framework” means “the levels of proficiency”.

It is worth spending a few moments on this example of everyday metonymy. If people say “sail” when they mean “ship”, the reason may be that the sail is the thing they see first from a distance, and the thing which propels the whole by responding to the wind. In the Framework's case, the six levels are clearly the most eye-catching feature, and the part most responsive to the trends of the moment. At the same time (sticking with this simple metaphor), the sail, though it may provide propulsion, is nothing without the hull and its contents: the people it carries, who regulate the course.

The sail and the wind. We know which wind is blowing on the language scene in Europe today: the wind of assessment – a good wind and a healthy one.

- It is actually quite natural that those who use, and benefit from, languages on a European labour market, in a European knowledge society - employers and workers, students and universities – should expect language learning systems, not only to develop certain practical skills, but also to provide reliable, recognised means of measuring those skills, and so making them useable in the various parts of Europe to which individuals' careers and lives may take them. We know about the recently introduced Europass, which details the holder's qualifications and professional experience – and also his/her levels of language proficiency.
- There is nothing inherently surprising in the fact that, in many European countries, decisions to admit or reject migrants, to award or refuse nationality, are taken on the basis of (among other things, and with great variations in the level of proficiency required) tests of the applicant's ability to function in the language of the country where he/she wishes to work and/or settle down.
- It is reasonable that society should expect education systems to be accountable, and that the national or regional authorities in charge of those systems should today be anxious to set measurable targets and guarantee the acquisition of key competences, including language skills.
- And it is certainly a good thing that the European Union authorities, as part of a deliberate and incentive policy to compare school systems' performance by measuring them against agreed benchmarks, should now have an indicator of this kind for modern languages.

In **all** these contexts, where the stakes are particularly high, we find that the Council of Europe's Framework is tending to become *the* reference point. This is an area where the responsibilities - political (nationality), economic (employment), social, and also cultural, humanitarian and, obviously, educational - are considerable. It also involves language-policy issues, relations between languages being one of them.

In these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the long and well established language training market should now be joined by a language assessment market, on which major

assessment and validation agencies – and also small start-up businesses and freelance consultants - are trying to gain, or are gaining, a foothold.

The importance of the issues is precisely one of the reasons why there are (at least) three clearly perceptible types of tendency and tension.

- 1.: A tendency to simplify, for reasons connected with the cost of processing data relating to vast numbers of people. Operators accordingly work with all, or only some, of the Framework's six levels, but avoid going into too much detail, since covering differentiated profiles, nuances and variants would be too complex and costly (in terms of manpower, time and money). Clearly, however, this tendency to simplify carries some risk of homogenisation. For one thing, it falls far short of exploiting the Framework's scales fully; for another, it limits possibilities for differentiated contextualisation.
- 2.: A questioning of the Framework's scientific rigour, on the ground that it has not been sufficiently validated in empirical and statistical terms, outside the original Swiss groups. Such criticisms are easily understood, since the Framework – given that many of its uses have obvious political and/or economic implications - must offer minimum guarantees of validity and reliability. And, unsurprisingly, this debate involves both moderates, whose views on what can be measured are realistic, and fundamentalists, who want to quantify everything.
- 3.: A desire for a single, shared validating agency to guarantee conformity – an institution whose special scientific expertise or well-established international authority rule out any possibility of its verdicts' being contested. This gives rise, in turn, to two sub-tendencies: a tendency to use the Manual to defend and illustrate the Framework, and to lay down detailed procedures on linking examinations (present, projected or in process of change) to the Framework's levels and descriptors; and a tendency to argue that the Framework should itself be refashioned, or even replaced with a more strictly graduated measuring instrument.

Let me make one thing clear: I am neither condemning nor promoting any of these tendencies. In their own terms, they are all undoubtedly justified and legitimate. But, if this Forum is genuinely useful and timely, that is because we now need to look squarely at the various demands people make on the Framework, and the many things it has done for them, and accept that its considerable, and largely unexpected success, has now brought us to a point where the various user authorities need co-ordinated, and ideally convergent, policy guidelines.

Before coming a little closer to the central question of contextualisation, I should like to make a brief, parenthetical point, which will not – I hope – seem entirely digressive. We all know (although some of the Framework's users tend to forget this) that its various levels are not equidistant in terms of the effort and time needed to progress from one to the next: a learner has to work longer and harder to advance from B2 to C1, than from B1 to B2. But a more basic question is whether, in terms of learning and using languages, our assumption that the same types of descriptor are valid for all levels is, if not founded, at least adequate as a working hypothesis.

Even without in any way questioning the descriptors' validity and diagnostic value for specific levels of proficiency, we may still consider that their applicability to the skills implied by any given level becomes more limited as the learner's mastery of a language and its uses increases. In principle, there is no incompatibility here with the descriptors' diagnostic value. Without "covering" everything (how could they?), they can still function as adequate and serviceable indicators of the various levels.

This rather summary analysis could also be linked to the fact that the Reference Level Descriptions used to make levels in different languages more detailed are not identical for the same level. Here, it would be interesting, and revealing, to compare Profile B2 for German, Référentiel B2 for French and Vantage B2 for English. But this question of Reference Level Descriptions and their possible variations actually brings us back to one aspect of in-context uses of the Framework.

In his paper, Francis Goullier confronted one of the big issues at this forum: determining who does what, which levels of subsidiarity apply when it is a question, not of deciding whether a given use of the Framework is orthodox and complies with a specific standard (since openness to multiple uses and variations in references to descriptors and levels are basic to the Framework's design and structure), but whether that the use made of reference to the Framework is transparent and consistent enough to make comparisons possible. The question is not "How do I know that your B2 is my B2?", but "How can I compare my B2 with your B2?" Or, more directly, "What's your B2 like?"

One of the ambiguities attaching to various uses of the Framework's scales is due to the fact that, although people are happy to continue assuming that C2 means "near-native competence" (implying that there is something higher and better), most of them agree that the overwhelming majority of native speakers – not ideal ones, but real ones – are unlikely to possess uniform C2 skills, i.e. to operate at C2 level across the board on all the Framework's scales. The question is: have the implications of this been fully grasped, particularly with regard to non-native speakers and the other Framework levels?

Taking Francis Goullier's realistic and politically important points a little further, we might thus consider replacing the frequently asked question "What authority validates my B2 and gives me the certainty that it is the right one?", with two basic questions, "How can I compare your B2 and mine?" and "How can I validate differentiated skill profiles?" We can also assume that the answers should not come from the Council of Europe, but emerge from "horizontal" discussion within the European education area. Indeed, this point has been grasped and applied by the major language validation agencies, such as those within ALTE - it being understood that the rule they all follow within the consortium is that their reasons for referring to A2 or B2 must be clearly explained, and that simply citing them is not enough.

It is true that other institutions, and particularly national school systems, are less concerned than the major "testers" with external language policy and commercial viability, but, on the other hand, national, social and identity issues are more sensitive and more context-dependent for schools. Hence the necessarily complex and delicate nature of the harmonisation, comparison and mutual recognition which most of them now want at European level - but which must not be mere window-dressing or clash with education cultures shaped by a specific country's past.

It is in connection with education systems alone, or primarily, that I should now like to say something about contextualisation, referring both to the various types of contextualisation and the agencies and protagonists involved, and assuming that the Framework comes in only when the context in which it is to be used is being considered beforehand or along the way.

For purposes of analysis, I shall distinguish five types of contextualisation which, although different, can combine in various ways. I shall also assume that contextualisation of the Framework, whatever form it takes, is meaningful only when it is part of a plan for change and development, i.e. when it is not a mere re-labelling exercise. No contextualisation without action. Or, putting it in other, only seemingly paradoxical, terms: omitting to contextualise always means accepting an external instrument as it stands, without anything else changing.

First type: taking account of the multi-referentiality of the proficiency scales

In a given context, this involves setting, for different languages, learning objectives which are more detailed (and possibly, for some languages, more diversified) than the “horizontal” levels normally taken as a reference point. Examples: for one language, a broad range of communication skills will be the aim while, for another, a particular skill will be emphasised; for one language, socio-linguistic competence will be considered more important than for others, etc. Diversification, not just of the languages offered, but also of the languages actually chosen, in school systems, also depends – assuming that effective diversification always presupposes some differentiation of objectives – on contextual decisions of this kind. There is no pretending that this kind of contextualisation is always problem-free in practice, since it does not accord with the usual approaches. Attention must thus be paid to political sensitivities and education cultures. The main thing is to take the medium-term view and assume, for example, that different objectives, at different levels, can be set for the various language skills at an intermediate stage, depending on needs. Be this as it may, it must be emphasised that this first type of contextualisation involves using the resources offered by the Framework in its present form more effectively than at present and, in that sense, going into it more deeply.

Second type: exploiting methodological and pedagogical avenues and openings

Obviously, the Framework’s bridge-building function between cultures does not limit teaching and learning to a communicative-type approach that has not been renewed. Taking just one small example, I might mention mediation, which is fully recognised and covers a broad range of pedagogical practices (including translation between languages) and note that the chapters concerned – again largely due to John Trim, and also Joe Sheils – list numerous teaching approaches and methods, which can be varied and mixed in different ways, depending on contexts, and on the margins for initiative and change available in each. It is also worth recalling that the Framework’s approach to curriculum objectives and scenarios is based on flexible modules.

In this type of contextualisation, as in the first, all that is required is to go deeper into the Framework and choose, from among the resources and practices it suggests, those which answer local needs. To borrow a colleague’s culinary metaphor, the scales and levels have obviously been the main course for consumers of the Framework so far, and the rest a mere side dish - indeed hors d’oeuvre or appetiser. People may thus have assumed too readily that the action-oriented vision of language use and learning implies exclusive use of teaching methods focused on communication in too narrow a sense of that term.

Third type: supplementing and extending the reference tools in certain directions

Requirements and options in specific contexts can obviously go beyond the things which the Framework offers users. The following are two examples:

- Bilingual education, in which knowledge is conveyed through a non-first language, certainly requires suitable descriptors of existing bilingual systems, covering – among other things - the disciplines where this method is used, and the types of discourse or the communication activities which those disciplines employ.
- The Framework says little about the various aspects of intercultural competence, which also requires, in many contexts, descriptors, or types of descriptor, different from those we have at present. Specifically, this question has been raised in connection with the European Language Portfolio, and some of the reference level descriptions, such as B2 for French.

Other situations, which call for some extension of the Framework, might be mentioned. Eventually, extension may bring us to a point where we have to ask how far we can go without leaving the present Framework behind or needing a new “framework”. This is precisely the kind of question raised by the current emphasis on languages of education, including mother tongue/national language(s)/languages of instruction. This brings us to the fourth type of contextualisation I want to consider.

Fourth type: full commitment to plurilingual education

I said just now that the Framework’s strong options included, not just a description of language use and learning based on skills and practice (“Can do ...” in a given domain), but also affirmation and promotion of plurilingualism, and introduction of the concept of plurilingual and pluricultural competence. Contextualising this second option means asking ourselves how, in a given context, the Framework can serve a language teaching policy which effectively develops plurilingual competence and, as Jean-Claude Beacco and Michael Byram urge in the *Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe*, educates learners for plurilingualism. Plurilingualism can be understood in various ways here, but is usually taken to mean that all teaching of (and through) languages requires a global approach, which covers first, classroom, foreign, regional, minority and immigration languages, and includes the development of individual plurilingualism among the aims of education.

Pursuers of this ambitious goal can find useful material in the Framework’s various sections but, first, they will have to reread it through the *Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe*, and, secondly, the contextualisation they effect will be close to the work required by a Language Education Policy Profile. In other words, the Framework itself is reframed (*recadré*) or appropriated within a larger framework (*encadré*) - no longer a multi-purpose toolbox, but an instrument completely focused on one broad objective. The third type of contextualisation involved enlarging and extending the Framework. The fourth essentially involves tying it to a set of options which certainly embody general principles, but can be implemented only in a national, regional or local context, depending on the languages at issue and the methods adopted to promote plurilingualism.

Fifth type: plurilingualism, social cohesion and participatory democracy

The Council of Europe sees promoting plurilingualism as one aspect of promoting more general values, relating to democracy, citizenship, intercultural understanding and social cohesion. As it stands, the Framework has little to say about those values, although - as we have seen - some of its uses have political effects and implications. Human rights, protection of minorities and education for citizenship are not at odds with the Framework but, although action to promote these values is the subject of international appeals and recommendations, and is part of the European institutions’ brief, it is usually taken in practice on the ground and in specific contexts.

In terms of these contexts, the issues they raise and their practical details, the Framework is just one small instrument among others, but making it a definite part of this process is important. Not because this is the politically correct thing to do in a European area where domestic and international tensions are not lacking, but because the democratic building of a plural Europe demands a plural language policy too, and because unity based on a single language is not - far from it - the best path to social cohesion in a nation or political cohesion in Europe today. Obviously - and there is nothing wrong with this - the fact remains that the Framework belongs and has meaning in this context only in terms of a far broader set of analyses and strategies, mobilising the responsibilities of numerous players and authorities, in addition to those active in the education system.

The time has now come to highlight a few findings and conclusions, of which some may seem self-evident, others provocative.

- The Framework, with all the ways in which it is presented and used, must recover its true function, and not be treated as sacred (or indeed nefarious!). It is an instrument of reference, not an object of reverence. The six levels must not be confused with the ten commandments. And there is, fortunately, life outside the Framework.
- We should not be surprised that most users of the Framework have so far focused on its levels and scales, with a view to assessment: the demand was strong, the issues were important, and the instances involved were particularly powerful. Moreover, the resultant European process was spectacularly useful and consensual.
- But these widespread uses must be treated with caution: we must be wary of an over-scrupulous attention to psychometric technicity just as much as we must guard against a laxity which invokes the Framework's levels a little too readily.
- The Framework has far more to offer (all of it useful) than most of its users have so far taken from it – even admitting that it is complex, sometimes proliferous and not entirely consistent, in spite of the immense effort which John Trim put into polishing the published version.
- Above all, whenever it is used for purposes of language policy and educational planning, the Framework is just one instrument among others, and should be used with others, taking careful account of the contextual dimensions. Any context in which it is used must be analysed from other angles too, angles which the Framework on its own does not cover: needs analysis, and perceptions of certain languages, must be examined - and non-standard conclusions will inevitably be reached.
- The Framework becomes fully meaningful and useful only when it is accepted as a shared point of reference (not a standard), which can be used to compare contextual choices, including those made in using its levels and scales.
- Even though the concept of plurilingual competence obviously includes the first language (the so-called mother tongue), the Framework remains limited, in most of its conclusions and proposals, to foreign languages, and this is no longer sufficient today – at least for the fourth and fifth types of contextualisation which I have mentioned. This is another reason why the time has now come to start working on new and more ambitious projects, in terms of which we shall certainly have, in due course, to reposition and adjust the Framework.

We must guard against a Europe which would, in our specific area, sacrifice diversity to unity or, conversely, take respect for diversity as a reason for rejecting any move towards unity. With all its limitations, the Framework is, like the other instruments the Council of Europe has developed in the past, and will elaborate in the future, a fair example of what we need: tools for analysis and catalysis which we all share, but can use in diverse ways by contextualising them carefully.

I lay no claim to breaking new ground, but I have tried to show that these contextual uses, seen as deliberate intervention in a given environment, can take various forms, apply on different levels, have different aims, and involve different types of player. All of these many contextual applications are legitimate and meaningful but, just as the Framework itself offers a range of (as it were) built-in options, so some of the contextual applications exploit it more fully, while others extend or transcend it.

There may be tensions, and even contradictions, between these various levels of use. The only way of resolving them is probably to adopt a position outside and above the Framework, and focus on the fundamental values of democratic citizenship, social cohesion, and intercultural understanding and co-operation – not as a platform for bandying facile slogans and mouthing pious platitudes, but as an inspiration and point of reference for practical action in specific contexts.

CEFR in relation to the policy aim of the Council of Europe

John L. M. Trim

May I first express my gratitude for the great and unexpected honour bestowed upon me by the Council of Europe in associating this important occasion with my name. This gesture, as I see it, is less concerned with the work of one single individual, as it is a recognition and celebration of the coherence and continuity of effort by literally thousands of language professionals, educational administrators and most significantly, of language learners, for which the modern language projects of the Council have provided a focus over the last third of the last century, and still do. Beyond this, it recognises that as we attempt to define and tackle the issues of our own time, we build on the insights and achievement of past generations, many of which we take for granted and pass unnoticed. Some names stand out: Quintillian, Comenius, Otto Jespersen, Harold Palmer, Leonard Bloomfield, and more could be mentioned than there is time to cite.

Our work arose from the Council's major project on modern languages in the 1960s, animated by Sven Nord. It is a cause for regret that some valued colleagues, notably Jan van Ek and Denis Girard, are no longer with us, and that others, particularly Antonietta de Vigili, for long the driving force of the projects, though present in spirit, are unable to attend. It is a particular pleasure that so many others are still active and creative such as Daniel Coste, whose brilliant paper on the contextualisation of the Common European Framework of Reference, elegantly expresses the aims and values he has brought to our work since the conception of *un niveau – seuil* in the 1970s, and Brian North, who joined us as fellow member of the authoring group of the CEFR, bringing new experience, energy and insight in the 1990s.

In his paper, Daniel Coste drew attention to some of the wider concerns of the Council of Europe: 'La promotion du plurilinguisme se situe elle-même, pour le Conseil de l'Europe, sous l'égide des valeurs plus générales, touchant à la démocratie, à la citoyenneté, à la compréhension interculturelle, à la cohésion sociale'. He points out that there are few references to these values in the CEFR itself. I should like to develop this a little further.

I have always held that the continuing language programme within the Council of Europe must be rooted in the nature, aims, values and *modi operandi* of the Council of Europe itself.

The Council of Europe is an intergovernmental organisation, based essentially on the voluntary cooperation of member states, with limited human and material resources. Work in the language field, as in any other, must therefore commend itself to member states by the practical usefulness of its products in relation to national needs and policies. It is not an academic institution or a foundation for conducting or funding research. Thus the CEFR cannot be imposed on member governments unless they all agree to its use, nor can that use be more strongly disciplined than they are all willing to accept, given the principle of subsidiarity, often jealously guarded in matters of the national education system. The work may, of course, appeal directly to the field through publications and meetings such as this, though there again, success depends on major institutions seeing its use as in their own (enlightened) self-interest. If they are so convinced, they are more likely to be willing to invest their own resources, human and material, in participation in projects which promise useful outcomes. The CEFR, as other Council of Europe projects, relies heavily on such investment of time, effort and material resources. The unforced cooperation of language professionals and educational administrators of all kinds, at all levels, was an outstanding feature of our projects and the excellent personal and working relations among them have been the greatest source of personal satisfaction in my professional career.

It is, I think, proper that work sponsored by the Council of Europe should serve the long-term aims and interests of the organisation. These include:

- the promotion of international understanding and cooperation not only by the mediation of translators and interpreters, indispensable though that is, but by the direct interaction of whole peoples. The role of language in this respect is self-evident but the action-oriented approach of the T-level series and the CEFR is based on this consideration. The Council of Europe has promoted language learning not for its own sake, as a mental discipline or as an aspect of elite personal culture, but as a tool for everyday social interaction among fellow Europeans, promoting and facilitating vocational and educational mobility. Much of the enthusiastic take-up of the CEFR has been due to its perceived value as a basis for the comparability of language qualifications to make mobility easier.
- Another basic CoE aim is the strengthening of democratic structures and procedures. In this respect, modern language projects have set out to strengthen the self-awareness of learners and their effective freedom of thought and action, with social responsibility. The CEFR is conceived as one tool that will give all those working in the language field greater autonomy based on knowledge, understanding and skill and as a basis for the negotiation of objectives and methods between teachers and learners. It is also intended to facilitate communication and interaction among independent agents while increasing rather than limiting their freedom of action.

The maintenance and development of linguistic and cultural diversity is a Council of Europe aim, enshrined in the Convention on Minority languages in a typically cautious fashion. There has been some backlash recently against societal multiculturalism as divisive, reinforcing separatism and blocking the integration of immigrants and encouraging ghetto formation. Here the concepts of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism, largely developed by Daniel Coste, are of real value, since they take a holistic view of linguistic and cultural competence, to which all linguistic and cultural experience contribute. Both at individual and societal levels the concept is dynamic, since the components from the experience of different language and cultures interpenetrate and interact, forming something new, enriched and in continual development. This approach meets better the realities of globalisation than various forms of purism which regard each language and culture as a separate entity, to be preserved and protected against the threat offered by alien forces. Most users of the CEFR have applied it only to a single language but its descriptive apparatus for communicative action and competences, together with the 'can-do' descriptors of levels of competence, are a good basis for a plurilinguistic approach to language across the curriculum, which awaits development.

This Forum has shown the dynamism of the Council's work in the language field as, in any view, a necessary ongoing aspect of its major policy objectives and I wish my successors – and yours – every success in the years ahead, as, through your teaching and example, you make your own distinctive contribution to the realisation of our common vision for Europe – a space in which ordinary people can meet, get to know and like each other, and work together harmoniously and effectively. Good luck!

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Programme of the Forum

Tuesday 6 February 2007	
8.00 - 9.45	Registration: Main entrance of the Palais de l'Europe
10.00	<p><u>PLENARY</u> - Assembly Chamber</p> <p><i>Official opening:</i> Terry Davis, Secretary General of the Council of Europe</p> <p>Mady Delvaux-Stehres, Minister of National Education and of Vocational Training, Luxembourg</p> <p>Marc Foucault, Director of European and International Relations and Co-operation, Representative of the Minister of National Education, Higher Education and Research, France</p> <p>Gabriele Mazza, Director of School, Out-of-School and Higher Education, DG IV, Council of Europe</p> <p><i>The multilingualism policy of the EU: new perspectives:</i> H. Hartung, Head of Unit 'Multilingualism Policy' of the European Commission</p> <p><i>Introduction to the aims and objectives of the Forum:</i> J. Sheils, Head of the Language Policy Division and J. Panthier, Administrator, Council of Europe</p>
11.15	Break (<i>Refreshments offered by the Ministry of National Education, Higher Education and Research, France</i>)
Chair: M. Byram 12.00 12.30	<p><u>PLENARY</u> - Assembly Chamber</p> <p><i>Council of Europe Language Education Policy and the CEFR:</i> J.C. Beacco</p> <p><i>Using the Common European Framework of Reference</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The CEFR in the Netherlands: E. Van Hest ▪ The CEFR in Catalonia in adult language teaching: adaptation of curricula and certification: N. Figueras ▪ From the CEFR to the European Language Portfolio: D. Little
13.30	Lunch
Tuesday 6 February (afternoon)	
Chair: W. Martyniuk 15.30 15.50	<p><u>PLENARY</u> - Assembly Chamber</p> <p><i>The CEFR and the common reference levels: validated reference points and local strategies:</i> B. North</p> <p><i>Results of a survey on the use and impact of the CEFR:</i> J. Noijons and W. Martyniuk</p> <p>Introduction to Group Work</p>
16.20	Break (<i>Refreshments offered by CITO, the Netherlands</i>)

16.50	<p><i>GROUP WORK - <u>SESSION 1</u> on needs in using the CEFR - introduced by case studies</i></p> <p><u>Group 1 and 2: Evaluation</u> Room 6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Links between tests and diplomas in French as a foreign language and the CEFR: C. Tagliante ○ Mapping the Dutch foreign-language examinations onto the CEFR: H. Kuijper and J. Noijons ○ Using the CEFR for assessing language competences in Finland: S. Takala <p>Presentation of case studies to <i>both groups together</i> in Room 6; the groups then separate: Group 1: Room 6 Group 2: Room 7</p> <p><u>Groups 3 and 4: Curricula and Teacher Training</u> Room 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The scenario: a tool for language education policies - Aosta Valley, Italy: M. Cavalli ○ Revision of modern languages programmes in the light of the CEFR in France: G. Gaillard ○ Use of the CEFR in teacher training in the Netherlands: D. Meijer ○ Use of the CEFR in teacher training in Poland: H. Komorowska <p>Presentation of case studies to <i>both groups together</i> in Room 3; the groups then separate: Group 3: Room 3 Group 4: Room 2</p>
19.00	<p>RECEPTION hosted by the Permanent Representation of France to the Council of Europe - <i>Salon bleu</i></p>
<p>Wednesday 7 February 2007- <i>Assembly Chamber</i></p>	
<p>Chair: J. Sheils</p> <p>10.00</p> <p>10.45</p> <p>11.00</p> <p>11.20</p> <p>11.30</p>	<p><u>PLENARY</u> - Assembly Chamber</p> <p>Reports on Group Work Discussion</p> <p><i>The European Indicator of Language Competence: O. Bjerkestrand, European Commission</i></p> <p><i>The promotion of the CEFR in the activities of the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML), Graz (Austria): S. Slivensky</i></p> <p><i>Language Policies for Democratic Citizenship and Social Inclusion: J. Sheils</i></p> <p>Break (<i>Refreshments offered by CITO, the Netherlands</i>)</p>
<p>Chair: J. Noijons</p> <p>12.00</p> <p>12.20</p>	<p><u>PLENARY</u> - Assembly Chamber</p> <p><i>The impact of the CEFR and the work of the Council of Europe on the new European education area: F. Goullier</i></p> <p>Reactions and Discussion Introduction to Group Work: F. Goullier</p>
13.15	Lunch

15.15	<p><i>GROUP WORK - SESSION 2</i> on mutual responsibilities in defining and implementing language policies based on the CEFR</p> <p><u>Group 1 and 2: Evaluation</u> Group 1: Room 6 Group 2: Room 7</p> <p><u>Groups 3 and 4: Curricula and Teacher Training</u> Group 3: Room 3 Group 4: Room 2</p>
16.45	Break (<i>Refreshments offered by CITO, the Netherlands</i>)
Chair: J. Panthier 17.15	<p><u>PLENARY</u> - Assembly Chamber</p> <p>The CEFR in a national context: D. Charbonnier (France)</p> <p><i>The CEFR in a global context:</i> K. Kakazu (Japan), J. Bott Van Houten (United States of America) and L. Vandergrift / J. MacDonald (Canada)</p>
18.00 - 18.45	<p><u>Panel: Language Education Policy Profiles:</u> the CEFR and related Council of Europe instruments applied to the analysis of language policies</p> <p>Ch. Berg (Luxembourg), S. Skapiene (Lithuania), G. Langé (Lombardy) J. Berntzen (Norway), D. Coste (Council of Europe Rapporteur for Profiles)</p> <p>Moderator: M. Byram</p>
Thursday 8 February 2007	
Chair: J.C. Beacco 9.00	<p><u>PLENARY</u> - Assembly Chamber</p> <p>Reports on Group Work Discussion</p>
9.45	<i>Contextualising the use of the CEFR:</i> D. Coste
10.15	<i>The CEFR in relation to the policy objectives of the Council of Europe:</i> J.L.M. Trim
10.30	Break
Chair: J. Panthier 11.00	<p><u>PLENARY</u> - Assembly Chamber</p> <p><u>Panel: Beyond levels towards plurilingual education</u> N. Figueras, L. King, H.J. Krumm, D. Little, H. Mulder, H. Vollmer Moderator: J.C. Beacco</p>
12.00	<p><i>Forum Conclusions:</i> F. Goullier, Rapporteur</p> <p><i>Closing</i></p>
12.45	G. Battaini-Dragoni, Director General of DG IV - Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport
13.00	Departure of participants

Appendix 2: List of participants

NATIONAL REPRESENTATIVES / REPRESENTANTS NATIONAUX

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