



Plurilingual Education in Europe

50 Years of international co-operation

**Language Policy Division
Strasbourg**

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Language Policy Division

Directorate General IV
Council of Europe
F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex

e-mail: decs-lang@coe.int

Fax :+33 (0) 3 88 41 27 06 / 88

Websites

Council of Europe
Language Policy Division
European Language Portfolio
European Centre for Modern Languages
European Day of Languages

www.coe.int
www.coe.int/lang
www.coe.int/portfolio
www.ecml.at
www.coe.int/EDL

Introduction

This paper is a contribution to the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the European Cultural Convention and a statement of Council of Europe current policy and some future options.

The Convention, which was opened for signature on 19 December 1954 provides a framework for developing international co-operation in the field of culture and education in support of the Council of Europe's core values: human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Intergovernmental programmes in language education have involved the 48 states party to the Convention in a broad and dynamic pattern of pan-European co-operation over half a century.

In this context, this paper recalls the history and main developments in language education policy and practice since the late 1950s to the present. The strong commitment of member states over many years has ensured that Council of Europe's programmes in language education have been, and remain, seminal in promoting innovation and a platform for dialogue and fruitful co-operation among policy makers and practitioners.

While it is retrospective, the paper is also concerned with how the Council of Europe can best assist member states in the future in responding to new challenges in language education within the terms of its specific mission and evolving political priorities.

In the context of the European Year of Citizenship through Education in 2005, this paper will also serve to stimulate discussion about the links between language education and education for democratic citizenship.

Guidelines for future action by the Council of Europe will be established by the 3rd Summit of Heads of State and Government to be held in Poland in May 2005. Within the framework of consolidating the Council's core values and strengthening social inclusion, the Summit will provide an opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to working out common policies and standards to meet the current challenges faced by Europe's 800 million citizens.

PART 1: COUNCIL OF EUROPE LANGUAGE EDUCATION POLICY

The Council of Europe's activities to promote linguistic diversity and language learning in the field of education are carried out within the framework of article 2 of the European Cultural Convention, which commits the states party to the Convention to promote the reciprocal teaching and learning of their languages.

Each Contracting Party shall, insofar as may be possible,

- a. encourage the study by its own nationals of the languages, history and civilisation of the other Contracting Parties and grant facilities to those Parties to promote such studies in its territory, and*
- b. endeavour to promote the study of its languages, history and civilisation in the territory of the other Contracting Parties and grant facilities to the nationals of those Parties to pursue such studies in its territory.*

In the spirit of this article the Council of Europe's work in the area of language education policy has developed over five decades in response to the changing needs and priorities of member states. The Council promotes policies which strengthen linguistic diversity and language rights, deepen mutual understanding, consolidate democratic citizenship and sustain social cohesion.

Council of Europe language education policies aim to promote:

PLURILINGUALISM: all are entitled to develop a degree of communicative ability in a number of languages over their lifetime in accordance with their needs

LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY: Europe is multilingual and all its languages are equally valuable modes of communication and expressions of identity; the right to use and to learn one's language(s) is protected in Council of Europe Conventions

MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING: the opportunity to learn other languages is an essential condition for intercultural communication and acceptance of cultural differences

DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP: participation in democratic and social processes in multilingual societies is facilitated by the plurilingual competence of individuals

SOCIAL COHESION: equality of opportunity for personal development, education, employment, mobility, access to information and cultural enrichment depends on access to language learning throughout life

Policies for plurilingualism

The emphasis from an early stage in Council of Europe projects on successful communication skills, motivated by increasing opportunities for interaction and mobility in Europe, remains important, but globalisation and internationalisation pose new challenges to social cohesion and integration. Language skills remain essential if individuals are to benefit from opportunities in employment and mobility but they are also necessary to participate actively in the social and political processes which are an integral part of democratic citizenship in the multilingual societies of Council of Europe member states.

This increasing focus on language policies for democratic citizenship and social cohesion reflects the priority which the Council of Europe accords to education for citizenship and intercultural dialogue in the 21st century. It is reflected in the goal of education for plurilingual and intercultural citizens capable of interacting in a number of languages across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

Council of Europe policy attaches particular importance to the development of plurilingualism – the lifelong enrichment of the individual's plurilingual repertoire. This repertoire is made up of different languages and language varieties at different levels of proficiency and includes different types of competences. It is dynamic and changes in its composition throughout an individual's life.

The use and development of an individual's plurilingual competence is possible because different languages are not learned in isolation and can influence each other both in the learning process and communicative use. Education systems need to ensure the harmonious development of learners' plurilingual competence through a coherent, transversal and integrated approach that takes into account all the languages in learners' plurilingual repertoire and their respective functions. This includes promoting learners' consciousness of their existing repertoires and potential to develop and adapt those repertoires to changing circumstances.

A plurilingual person has:

- a repertoire of languages and language varieties
- competences of different kinds and levels within the repertoire

Plurilingual education promotes:

- an awareness of why and how one learns the languages one has chosen
- an awareness of and the ability to use transferable skills in language learning
- a respect for the plurilingualism of others and the value of languages and varieties irrespective of their perceived status in society
- a respect for the cultures embodied in languages and the cultural identities of others
- an ability to perceive and mediate the relationships which exist among languages and cultures
- a global integrated approach to language education in the curriculum

Five decades of European co-operation

Programmes of intergovernmental co-operation have been carried out by the Language Policy Division (formerly the Modern Languages Section) in Strasbourg for almost fifty years (since 1957), and by the European Centre for Modern Languages (Graz, Austria) for ten years.

The Division in Strasbourg focuses on instruments and initiatives for the development and analysis of language education policy for the countries which have ratified the European Cultural Convention (for all languages - mother tongue/first language as well as foreign, second or minority languages), and provides a forum for debate on policy development.

The Centre in Graz (ECML) has as its mission the implementation of language policies, including support for the policy instruments developed in Strasbourg, and the promotion of innovative approaches. Its strategic objectives include the practice of modern language learning and teaching and the training of multipliers.

Guiding principles

The programmes in the late 1970s and 1980s led to an international consensus on the guiding principles underlying language education policy.

- Language learning is for *all*: opportunities for developing their plurilingual repertoire is a necessity for all citizens in contemporary Europe
- Language learning is for the *learner*: it should be based on worthwhile, realistic objectives reflecting needs, interests, motivation, abilities
- Language learning is for *intercultural communication*: it is crucial for ensuring successful interaction across linguistic and cultural boundaries and developing openness to the plurilingual repertoire of others
- Language learning is for *life*: it should develop learner responsibility and the independence necessary to respond to the challenges of lifelong language learning
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- Language teaching is *co-ordinated*: it should be planned as a whole, covering the specification of objectives, the use of teaching/learning materials and methods, the assessment of learner achievement, and the development of appropriate convergences between all languages that learners have in their repertoire or wish to add to it
- Language teaching is *coherent and transparent*: policy makers, curriculum designers, textbook authors, examination bodies, teacher trainers, teachers and learners need to share the same aims, objectives and assessment criteria
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- Language learning and teaching are *dynamic* lifelong processes, responding to experience as well as changing conditions and use

PART 2: HISTORY AND CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

A brief history

Early programmes of international co-operation in Strasbourg focused on the democratisation of language learning for the mobility of persons and ideas, and on the promotion of the European heritage of cultural and linguistic diversity. Projects assisted member states in implementing reforms aimed at developing learners' communication skills and encouraged innovation in language teaching and teacher training, with an emphasis on a learner-centred approach. While continuing to promote innovation for successful communication and intercultural skills, more recent projects have increasingly addressed the social and political dimensions of language learning, focusing on language education for democratic citizenship, diversification in language learning, improving coherence and transparency in language provision, and the language education rights of minorities. The European Year of Languages (2001) led to further initiatives to support member states in developing policy responses to the new challenges to social cohesion and integration.

The results of these projects have been embodied in a Resolution and a number of Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers and Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).

1969: Resolution N° (69) 2 of the Committee of Ministers

1982: Recommendation N°. R(82) 18 of the Committee of Ministers

1998: Recommendation N°. R(98) 6 of the Committee of Ministers

1998: Recommendation 1383 Linguistic Diversification (PACE)

2001: Recommendation 1539 European Year of Languages (PACE)

Key moments in history

- 1957 First intergovernmental conference on European co-operation in language teaching
- 1963 Launch of first major Project on language teaching
- 1975 Publication of first 'Threshold Level' specification
- 1989 New member states begin to join intergovernmental projects
- 1994 European Centre for Modern Languages established
- 2001 European Year of Languages
 - Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
 - European Language Portfolio
 - European Day of Languages declared an annual event

Early initiatives 1963 – 1972

Following initiatives to plan the development of modern language teaching in Europe in the late 1950s, the first major Project in Modern Languages (1963-1972) promoted international co-operation on audio-visual methods and the development of applied linguistics, including support for the founding of the International Association of Applied Linguistics (AILA).

Unit-credit scheme 1971 - 1977

The feasibility of a unit-credit scheme for language learning in adult education was explored and this provided guiding principles for subsequent projects. A notional-functional model for specifying objectives was elaborated, and the concept was exemplified initially for English in *Threshold Level* in the mid-1970s. This was a specification in operational terms of what a learner should be able to *do* when using the language independently, and of the necessary knowledge and skills. The initial *Threshold Level* specification for English, together with the

specification developed for French (*Un Niveau-Seuil*), provided the basic models which have been adapted for almost thirty other languages. The model has been extremely influential in the planning of language programmes, providing a basis for new national curricula, better textbooks, popular multimedia courses and more realistic and relevant forms of assessment. An intermediate objective (*Waystage*) and a higher level objective (*Vantage*) were developed in the 1990s.

Language Learning and Teaching for Communication 1981 –1988

The guiding principles established in the first project were applied in a series of projects covering all sectors of education and Recommendation No. R(82) 18 served as a framework for the reform of curricula, methods and examinations throughout the 1980s. A schools interaction network played a major role in sharing expertise and experience between member states and in bringing innovation to classroom materials and methods. Teacher trainers were seen as key agents of this innovation and a series of international workshops on specific priority themes were hosted by countries for them and other multipliers.

Language learning for European Citizenship 1989 – 1997

This period witnessed the rapid enlargement of the Council of Europe and the enrichment of the programme by the participation of the newer member states from Central and Eastern Europe. A series of ‘new-style’ twinned workshops was organised on issues such as information and communication technologies, bilingual education, educational links and exchanges, learner autonomy, enriched models for specifying objectives. An initial co-ordinating workshop hosted by a member state launched a two year programme of development and the results were received, dissemination planned and recommendations made at a second follow-up workshop in a partner host country.

The results and the recommendations of a concluding conference in 1997 in Strasbourg led to Recommendation No. R (98) 6 of the Committee of Ministers Concerning Modern Languages. This emphasises intercultural communication and plurilingualism as key policy goals and sets out concrete measures for each educational sector and for initial and in-service teacher education.

Recommendation No. R (98) 6 encourages member states to promote widespread plurilingualism:

- by encouraging all Europeans to achieve a degree of communicative ability in a number of languages;
- by diversifying the languages on offer and setting objectives appropriate to each language;
- by encouraging teaching programmes at all levels that use a flexible approach - including modular courses and those which aim to develop partial competences - and giving them appropriate recognition in national qualification systems, in particular public examinations;
- by encouraging the use of foreign languages in the teaching of non-linguistic subjects (for example history, geography, mathematics) and creating favourable conditions for such teaching;
- by supporting the application of communication and information technologies to disseminate teaching and learning materials for all European national or regional languages;
- by supporting the development of links and exchanges with institutions and persons at all levels of education in other countries so as to offer to all the possibility of authentic experience of the language and culture of others;
- by facilitating lifelong language learning through the provision of appropriate resources.

The European Centre for Modern Languages

Mission and strategic objectives

The European Centre for Modern Languages (Graz) was established in 1994 to support the implementation of Council of Europe language education policy, and in particular to provide a practical response to a need clearly expressed by the member states for the reinforcement of the Council of Europe's successful cooperation in the field of language teaching, and in particular teacher training. Set up for an initial trial period, the Centre was confirmed in 1998 and the number of countries becoming members of the Enlarged Partial Agreement creating the ECML increased rapidly from the eight founding members to 33 in 2004.

The ECML's mission is to give practical support for its member states in the implementation of their language education policies. It does this by promoting innovative approaches and disseminating good practice in the learning and teaching of modern languages. Through its programme of international workshops, conferences and research projects, the ECML provides an international platform for gathering and disseminating information, for stimulating and facilitating discussion and for training multipliers. It also maintains Europe-wide networks for teacher trainers, researchers and educational administrators.

The first medium-term programme of the ECML (2000 - 2003)

After an initial series of annual programmes, the ECML introduced its first medium-term programme in 2000 – 2003 with a format based on projects designed to develop from theory to practice within a lifespan of 3 – 4 years. The projects in the first programme addressed a number of priority issues facing language educators and attempted to provide practical approaches to dealing with them. Some, for example, examined the relationship between theory and practice in language teaching, demonstrating that coherent practice is impossible without a basis in an adequate theory. Others explored the twin and complementary themes of teachers and learners, showing how methodological and technological development has led to teachers having to adapt to new roles and to acquire new competences, especially in the domain of ICT. Further ECML studies showed how innovatory approaches could extend the scope of language education and make improved learning possible for more people. The issue of quality was considered central in language education – ‘doing the right things’ and ‘doing them right’.

The results and practical tools produced by the projects have been published in some thirty booklets and CD Roms.

Some project results

The status of language educators:

set out to increase the visibility of the profession, identifying the key constituents of the status of language practitioners and questioning teachers on their opinions. This gave rise to a metaphorical self-definition called “Teachers’ Wonderland”, describing a set of conditions in which language educators wish to operate as professionals

Teacher education and professional status of teachers

Mediating between theory and practice in the context of different learning cultures and languages:

examined which theories influence actual classroom practice in language education. The project showed that traditional methods were still generally prevalent. It underlined the need for new forms of learning, particularly the use of modern technology, to be emphasised in teacher training

Teaching materials

Incorporating intercultural communicative competence in teacher education:

highlighted the neglect of this dimension in many national curricula. It produced a practical intercultural communication textbook "*Mirrors and windows*" for use both in class and in teacher training programmes

ICT and young learners:

created a web tool to enable on-line publishing and, through the "*Stars project*", created four cuddly characters about whose adventures children invented and published stories in their foreign language classes

Neighbouring language teaching in border regions:

set out to identify innovative approaches where the proximity of the target language could be used to good effect. These have been disseminated via a coordinating body, an online database, publications and seminars

Research and
Development

Janua Linguarum –the Gateway to Languages:

examined the introduction of language awareness into the curriculum. Awakening to languages introduces children to language diversity by presenting them a number of languages of different origin and status. The project demonstrated that such an approach provokes positive attitudes to diversity in general and an aptitude for analysing languages which can facilitate their learning at a later stage

The second medium-term programme of the ECML (2004-2007)

The ECML's programme of activities for the period 2004-2007 continues to contribute to the implementation of Council of Europe policy by more specifically addressing the question of the role of language education in social cohesion. The projects address four broad areas:

- coping with linguistic and social diversity - provisions, profiles, materials;
- communication in a multicultural society: the development of intercultural communicative competence;
- professional development and reference tools for language educators;
- innovative approaches and new technologies in the teaching and learning of languages.

The Centre's programme also includes activities beyond these central projects:

- provision of an information infrastructure for the promotion of the European Day of Languages (26 September), in cooperation with the Language Policy Division
- support for activities designed to respond to specific development and training needs at regional and national level;
- involvement in international projects funded by other sources
- activities to improve the ECML's impact in the member states and ensure optimal dissemination of the results of its work;
- activities to ensure collaboration and synergy between all the projects included in the programme.

Several projects support wide and effective use of the instruments for enhancing the quality of language education developed by the Language Policy Division, in particular the European Language Portfolio.

European Year of Languages

The *European Year of Languages 2001*, organised by the Council of Europe (Language Policy Division) and the European Union, saw the active involvement of 45 countries in a sustained effort to promote linguistic diversity and increased language learning. The Year was characterised by over 26,000 activities ranging from language festivals, competitions and media events to conferences on key issues in language education. Many countries reported major developments in language teaching and new partnerships were created between policy deciders and professionals responsible for ‘foreign’ languages and national/official languages, regional or minority languages, and languages of migrant communities. The Year served to highlight the central importance of language education policy not only for economic success, but also for social inclusion, linguistic rights, democratic citizenship and intercultural understanding.

The follow-up to the Year has taken the form of new policy initiatives in member states, including the widespread use of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, and the first stages in the introduction of the European Language Portfolio.

The long-term goals of the Year are recalled in the European Day of Languages which has been declared an annual event by the Council of Europe to be celebrated on 26 September.

The European Day of Languages aims

- to raise awareness of the rich linguistic diversity of Europe, which should be maintained and promoted
- to promote language learning and greater diversity in languages learned
- to encourage the development of lifelong language learning as a way of responding to economic, social and cultural changes in Europe

PART 3: POLICY INSTRUMENTS AND INITIATIVES

- ◆ Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR)
- ◆ Reference Descriptions for national/regional languages
- ◆ European Language Portfolio (ELP)
- ◆ Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe
- ◆ Language Education Policy Profile

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR)

The CEFR is an instrument to assist member states to develop policies for plurilingualism. It was introduced at European level in 2001 and its reference standards are widely used for programme planning and assessment in national and international contexts.

The CEFR offers a comprehensive descriptive scheme for reflecting on language learning and teaching and sets out in detail what a competent language user has to do in order to communicate effectively with other users of the language. It offers illustrative descriptors for language activities and competences at six levels of proficiency, from the most basic (A1) to the highest (C2). The six ascending levels of proficiency describe what the learner *can do* in positive terms and how well the learner performs.

The CEFR is a descriptive tool that aims to provide

- coherence and transparency in language education by offering a common basis for the elaboration of curricula and syllabuses, teaching/learning materials and assessment
- a common basis and language for reflection and communication among language professionals across different languages, education sectors, and national boundaries
- common reference points to facilitate national and international co-ordination in planning language teaching and in relating examinations to common European standards or benchmarks.

Relating examinations to the Framework levels

The CEFR provides a reliable basis for the comparability and mutual recognition of language competences and qualifications in Europe. In order to facilitate this process, the Language Policy Division introduced a pilot scheme to assist examination providers in establishing reliable links with the CEFR levels. A Manual *Relating Examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* together with illustrative examination material is being developed for this purpose.

Reference Descriptions for national/regional languages

Policy on teaching the national/official and regional languages of member states as a second or foreign language is now influenced by the CEFR. The previous model of 'Threshold Level' and other related descriptions is being enriched and extended by the application of the six level CEFR model in the elaboration of Reference Descriptions for planning teaching and assessment for specific languages, for example German, Czech, French, Greek, Italian, Portuguese....

The European Language Portfolio (ELP)

The ELP was developed in a pilot scheme in the late 1990s and introduced to a wider target group in 2001. It is a personal document which allows the owner to show achievements and competences in different languages, at any level, in an internationally transparent manner, and to record significant contacts with other cultures. It is designed to promote plurilingualism by enhancing motivation and support for improved and lifelong language learning.

The ECML is supporting the implementation of the ELP through a teacher training kit and the sharing of information on key issues in designing and co-ordinating ELP projects.

The ELP has three components:

- a language passport that the owner regularly updates as a summary description of his/her linguistic identity, language learning achievement, and intercultural experience;
- a language biography that is used to set language learning targets, monitor progress, evaluate outcomes, and reflect on significant language learning and intercultural experiences;
- a dossier in which the owner keeps an up-to-date selection of personal work illustrating what he/she can do in languages other than the mother tongue.

The ELP has two functions:

- in its reporting function it supplements the certificates and diplomas that are awarded on the basis of formal examinations by presenting additional information about the owner's language learning and intercultural experience and concrete evidence of language proficiency. It also allows the owner to document language learning that has taken place outside formal education. Transparency is achieved by using the six proficiency levels of the *Common European Framework for Languages*
- in its pedagogical function the ELP is designed to promote plurilingualism, raise intercultural awareness, make the language learning process more transparent to the owner, encourage reflective learning, and foster the development of learner autonomy and the skills that support lifelong learning.

New policy initiatives

The European Year of Languages 2001 provided a stimulus for the Language Policy Division's new programmes launched at an intergovernmental conference in Strasbourg in 2002. In the follow-up to the Year the primary focus shifted from the conditions for successful language teaching and learning to the social and political implications of language education for plurilingualism. The Division's new initiatives include support to member states with policy analysis and renewal, and the promotion of a global approach that develops convergences between 'foreign' and other languages in the curriculum.

Two specific initiatives were launched: a draft policy Guide which presents approaches to the development of policies; an offer to assist member states with an in-depth reflection on their language education policy with a view to planning new initiatives.

Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe

The *Guide* helps member states to consider:

- the necessity of formulating and implementing language education policies that are coherent with the promotion of social inclusion and the development of democratic citizenship in Europe
- how policies of language education can be developed and maintained in pursuit of linguistic diversity in societies and plurilingualism for citizens of Europe.

The *Guide* describes how language education policy can provide an inclusive and coherent education for plurilingualism. It is concerned with the whole of language education, including education in the 'mother tongue/first language' when it is the official and/or national language of the area in question as well as with 'foreign', 'second' or 'minority' languages. The *Guide* thus addresses issues related to diversification in the offer of languages in the curriculum and a global approach to language education.

The 'Main Version' of the *Guide* provides the scientific and professional argument and evidence in detail for language policy specialists. The 'Executive Version' is for policy makers who may have no specific specialist knowledge of technical matters in language education. The *Guide* is accompanied by individual 'reference studies' on particular themes for readers who need further detail on specific issues.

Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe

- analyses the strengths and weaknesses of current language education policy common in European countries and explains the principles and recommendations of the Council of Europe
- presents ways of identifying and analysing the non-linguistic and linguistic factors in a given geographical area as a preliminary to developing an appropriate policy for diversity
- describes the range of technical forms of organisation of language education upon which those developing policies can draw in their implementation.

Language Education Policy Profiles

Expert assistance at international level is available to member States wishing to reflect upon their language education policy. The aim is to offer countries or regions or municipalities the opportunity to undertake a self-evaluation of their policy in a spirit of dialogue with Council of Europe experts, with a view to possible future policy developments. Developing a Language Education Policy Profile does not mean external evaluation. It is a process of reflection by the authorities and involves civil society, together with Council of Europe experts who have the function of acting as catalysts.

A Language Education Policy Profile involves several steps:

- preparation of a Country Report by the authorities describing and evaluating current policy and outlining new or planned initiatives
- visit of a Council of Europe Expert Group followed by the elaboration of an Experts' Report in dialogue with the authorities
- Round Table or other forum to take the reflection further
- production of a forward looking Language Education Policy Profile jointly by the Council of Europe Expert Group and the authorities

The scope of the Profile includes analysis of language education as a whole. The Experts' Report pays particular attention to education for plurilingualism, and the teaching and learning of national / official languages, foreign languages, and regional and minority languages.

The Round table allows for a wide range of participation, from the education system, government, and civil society.

The final *Profile* integrates all points of view in a description of the current situation, and options for future developments.

CONCLUSION

The Council of Europe will continue to contribute to the promotion of linguistic diversity in language education policy. Policies to develop plurilingualism among individuals need to counterbalance the market forces which tend to lead to linguistic homogenisation, thus limiting the potential of citizens to develop their unique individual linguistic repertoire.

The development of plurilingualism among individuals provides the necessary conditions for mobility for work and leisure purposes in multilingual Europe, where the plurilingualism of the workforce is a crucial part of human capital in a global economy.

Plurilingualism is secondly a key factor in ensuring participation in democratic processes in multilingual national and international contexts. It is particularly crucial for social and political inclusion of all members of society, and for active shared democratic citizenship among Europeans.

Thirdly, plurilingualism is vital in an information and learning society where access to and the management of knowledge and learning are crucial factors in social and economic developments.

Plurilingualism needs to be developed, therefore, not just for utilitarian or professional reasons, but also as a value that plays an essential role in raising awareness of and respect for linguistic diversity.