



COUNCIL OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION



## Conclusions on multilingualism and the development of language competences

*EDUCATION, YOUTH, CULTURE and SPORT Council meeting  
Brussels, 20 May 2014*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

HAVING REGARD TO

- Articles 165 and 166 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union;
- the conclusions of the Barcelona European Council meeting of 15-16 March 2002, which called for action “*to improve the mastery of basic skills, in particular by teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age*”, as well as for the establishment of a linguistic competence indicator<sup>1</sup>;
- the Council conclusions of 19 May 2006, which defined the principles for a European Indicator of Language Competence<sup>2</sup>;
- the Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (*ET 2020*), which highlight the importance of strengthening linguistic competence<sup>3</sup>;
- the Council conclusions of 28 - 29 November 2011 on language competences to enhance mobility, which highlighted the importance of a good command of foreign languages as a key competence essential to making one's way in the modern world and labour market<sup>4</sup>;

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<sup>1</sup> SN 100/1/02 REV 1, p. 19, paragraph 44, 2nd indent.

<sup>2</sup> OJ C 172, 25.7.2006, pp. 1-3.

<sup>3</sup> OJ C 119, 28.5.2009, pp. 2-10.

<sup>4</sup> OJ C 372, 20.12.2011, pp. 27-30

# P R E S S

- Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing the *Erasmus+* Programme, which includes the aim of improving the teaching and learning of languages<sup>5</sup>.

#### AND IN PARTICULAR TO

- the Council conclusions of 22 May 2008 on multilingualism, which called on the Member States to work together to enhance European cooperation on multilingualism and to take appropriate steps to improve effective language teaching<sup>6</sup>;
- the Council Resolution of 21 November 2008 on a European strategy for multilingualism, which invited Member States to promote multilingualism in support of competitiveness, mobility and employability, and as a means of strengthening intercultural dialogue<sup>7</sup>.

#### CONSIDERING THAT

1. Linguistic diversity is a fundamental component of European culture and intercultural dialogue, and that the ability to communicate in a language other than one's mother tongue is acknowledged to be one of the key competences which citizens should seek to acquire.<sup>8</sup>
2. The linguistic landscape in the EU is complex and diverse, with national factors influencing language learning and teaching, and considerable differences in legislation and practice with regard to these.
3. Language competences contribute to the mobility, employability and personal development of European citizens, in particular young people, in line with the objectives of the *Europe 2020* strategy for growth and jobs.
4. The level of language skills of many young people in Europe could be improved and that, despite some progress in recent decades, there is still considerable variation across countries in terms of access to language learning.
5. Since they are the source of many modern languages, the study of classical languages such as Ancient Greek and Latin can facilitate language learning, as well as contribute to the sustainability of our common heritage.

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<sup>5</sup> OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, pp. 50-73.

<sup>6</sup> OJ C 140, 6.6.2008, pp. 14-15.

<sup>7</sup> OJ C 320, 16.12.2008, pp. 1-3.

<sup>8</sup> See the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning [OJ L 394, 30.12.2006, pp. 10-18].

## AGREES THAT

1. The EU and the Member States should assess progress in developing language competences, with each country contributing to this progress in accordance with its national context and circumstances.
2. Assessment of language competences could help to promote multilingualism and the effective teaching and learning of languages in school.
3. Such assessment could be conducted on the basis outlined in the Annex hereto and should cover all four language skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking.
4. The assessment could:
  - i) be organised at EU level
  - ii) take account - where available and in accordance with national circumstances - of national data;
  - iii) be organised with the support of a group composed of experts from the Member States and in cooperation with the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks, with a view to ensuring maximum comparability;
  - iv) be funded by the *Erasmus+* Programme - in accordance with the relevant provisions of Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013<sup>9</sup> and subject to the annual budgetary procedure;
  - v) require minimal resources on the part of schools and reporting efforts on the part of the Member States.

## INVITES THE MEMBER STATES, WITH DUE REGARD FOR THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY AND IN ACCORDANCE WITH NATIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES, TO

1. Adopt and improve measures aimed at promoting multilingualism and enhancing the quality and efficiency of language learning and teaching, including by teaching at least two languages in addition to the main language(s) of instruction from an early age and by exploring the potential of innovative approaches to the development of language competences.
2. Make efforts to develop appropriate methods for assessing language proficiency in accordance with the Annex hereto.
3. Develop measures to support children and adults with migrant backgrounds in learning the language(s) of the host country.
4. Exploit the potential of the *Erasmus+* Programme and the European Structural and Investment Funds to achieve these aims.

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<sup>9</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing 'Erasmus+': the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport and repealing Decisions No 1719/2006/EC, No 1720/2006/EC and No 1298/2008/EC.

5. Make greater use of European transparency tools and initiatives designed to support and promote language learning, such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, Europass, the European Language Portfolio and the European Language Label.

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES, WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE COMMISSION, TO

1. Exchange experiences and best practices via the Open Method of Coordination, in order to improve the effectiveness and quality of language learning and teaching.
2. Acknowledge the role which non-formal and informal learning can play in language learning, by exploring ways of recognising and validating language competences acquired in this way, in line with the 2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning<sup>10</sup>.
3. Explore ways of increasing the attractiveness of, and ensuring greater commitment towards, language learning, including through the use of ICT and Open Educational Resources, with a view to reducing the number of learners who abandon language studies before attaining an adequate level of proficiency.

INVITES THE COMMISSION TO

1. Explore the feasibility of assessing language competences in the Member States, including by using national data where available, with the support of a group composed of experts from the Member States and in cooperation with the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks.
2. Explore with the Member States and Eurostat, within the framework of the European Statistical System and with a view to improving comparability, ways of complementing existing EU data on the number of pupils in secondary education who are studying a third language<sup>11</sup> in line with the ambitions of the Barcelona objective and the *ET 2020* framework.
3. Continue and enhance cooperation with other organisations active in this field, such as the Council of Europe and its European Centre for Modern Languages."

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<sup>10</sup> OJ C 398, 22.12.2012, pp. 1-5.

<sup>11</sup> This third language may be any modern language taught in school. In addition, Member States may choose to provide the percentage of pupils whose third language is Ancient Greek and/or Latin. Other data which might be gathered include the number of languages taught and whether these are compulsory or optional.

ASSESSMENT OF LANGUAGE COMPETENCES

The assessment of language competences is based on:

The percentage of pupils aged 15 or, where appropriate due to national circumstances, 14 or 16 years old<sup>12</sup>, who attain the level of *independent user* in the second language studied.<sup>13</sup>

The term *independent user* corresponds at least to level B1, as defined in the Common European Framework of Reference for language competences (CEFR)<sup>14</sup>.

The data could be collected by means of an EU-wide survey assessing proficiency in the second language(s) of education systems and presented in such a way as to ensure maximum comparability. Use may be made of national data instead, providing that these are compatible with the CEFR.

National scores are aggregated as a simple average of the four components: reading, writing, listening and speaking. The result is a weighted average of these national scores which takes national population sizes into account.

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<sup>12</sup> Maximum comparability of data will be ensured.

<sup>13</sup> The main language(s) of instruction is/are considered as the *first* language(s), while amongst additional languages the one which is most widely taught is considered as the *second* language studied. Each Member State shall determine the languages which are to be considered as *first* and *second* languages in its case.

Only official EU languages may be considered as second languages.

<sup>14</sup> B1 (Independent User) is defined as follows: *Can understand the main points of clear standard input in familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.*