



Network project for the decentralised and centralised dissemination of TNP3 results and outcomes

Closing address

Commissioner Orban, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, friends and colleagues.

Globalisation is a concept which is often used to explain positive – and sometimes not so positive – developments in modern-day society. However, when it comes to the issue of languages and intercultural communication, globalisation and the knowledge society are appropriate concepts to bring to mind.

Increased collaboration, trade and travel across linguistic and cultural barriers also increase the need for foreign language and intercultural competences – not only among a relatively small group of language experts, but among the majority of European citizens. These people all need foreign language skills in their professional lives, in their private lives and/or in connection with whatever sports, hobbies or other spare-time activities they may engage in.

At the level of the European Union, globalisation is reflected in the Lisbon agenda. And at European universities and other institutions of higher education, the Bologna process is serving the same purpose: It supports the exchange of students, the crossing of linguistic and cultural borders in education in order to prepare students for their working lives in the global society of the 21st century.

This conference marks 13 years of higher education network co-operation within the area of languages. The so-called SIGMA project that was launched in 1994, was a precursor for the sequence of Thematic Network Projects in the Area of Languages, of which this conference marks the end of the dissemination year of the third three-year project. And we, the European Language Council and the higher education institutions involved, have come a long way in the past decade as has been amply demonstrated in the course of today. Setting out with the first Thematic Network Project in 1996 to discuss among ourselves, we have since then established a network of cooperation partners in the private as well as the public sector at regional, national and European levels.

Now, there is no doubt that the change processes that have been instigated, and the impact that has been achieved as a result of these projects, will continue to materialise in the individual countries and institutions in the months and years to come. Each and every one of us must take back what we have learned in these projects and make it support the necessary change processes in our home environment.

The regional conferences, which have been held in all four corners of Europe this year, have clearly shown us that even though we all embrace the idea of

collaboration and dialogue between our HE institutions and our external stakeholders in the private and public sectors, it is not necessarily as simple as it may appear.

The results of the needs analyses that we have carried out, differ enormously and not only between countries. Even at a local level, the situation is extremely diverse and, depending on who one asks, a multitude of scenarios emerge. Therefore, this conference may mark the end of the thematic network projects, but there is still work to be done, and new projects are needed in order for us to better come to grips with this diversity.

Language use in a professional context is multi-faceted, and even though we may now have what we might term generic recommendations to the European institutions of higher education, there are more complex challenges ahead for these institutions.

How do we implement the flexibility needed to cater for the linguistic needs of society – not only in the short term, but actually on a long-term basis?

How do we ensure that students are sufficiently equipped to take advantage of the tools that do exist, and will come into existence, so that they can express themselves as accurately as possible with the sufficient and necessary knowledge of the world, and the ability to distinguish what is important and what is not in their intercultural or cross-cultural communication?

How do we teach all the general or generic non-language skills in conjunction with the content of our curricula? That is, how do we develop and implement a new university pedagogy that supports the throughput and output orientation that is needed and required?

And, to return to the issue of languages, we need to identify typical situations of foreign language use from which the students may learn, and from which they may also acquire the ability to continue to learn in new and unknown cultural contexts.

How do we determine what specific linguistic skills students should master at the end of the first, second or third cycle of the higher education system / systems? In other words, how do we, for instance in terms of the Common European Framework of Reference, define the generic competences and skills of the different levels in the European Qualifications Framework – from the beginning of the school system to the level of the doctorate?

How do we determine what is the responsibility of the educational system and what should be the responsibility of the workplace or the students and graduates themselves? Work-based learning is a key concept in order to ensure sustainable employability of all graduates.

I said that this conference marks the end of a series of Thematic Network Projects. However, it also marks the beginning of new and fascinating projects from which we can learn more about the linguistic needs at the crossroads between higher education and the other sectors of education as well as between higher education

and the labour market. So for those of you who are not tired yet, there are lots of challenges ahead that we can face together!

The European Language Council, in its 10 years of official existence, has worked and will continue to work to enhance the mutually beneficial dialogue and co-operation between the universities and the world of work, the other sectors of education, and the political decision makers at local, national, and European levels.

We are confident that we will be able to launch new projects shortly, building on what we have been able to achieve so far and thereby taking all of these issues to the next level.

At this point, thanks are due to the people who have made this conference possible.

Our special thanks go to Commissioner Figél and Commissioner Orban who, by speaking to us today, both have underscored the fact that the area of languages is a key issue at the highest European level.

Thank you to those of you representing our professional, economic and social partners. Thank you to Arthur Mettinger who has chaired the preparations for this conference and to all speakers: chairs, panellists and other contributors to today's programme. We appreciate your contributions and look forward to working with you again in the future.

And thank you to all the colleagues who have been involved in the project in the past four years, thereby laying the groundwork for what we have achieved and have been able to present here today.

Thank you to VLEKHO for hosting this conference and taking so well care of us. In particular, thank you to Ludo Teuwen, Head of the Department of Applied Linguistics. Without your support, this could not have happened. And thank you to Erik Uytterhoeven and his team for taking on the daunting task of logistics, catering and all other practical arrangements. Your hospitality has made all of us feel very welcome.

Last, but certainly not least, thanks are due to Wolfgang Mackiewicz. As always, you have carried the torch, shown the way through the maze of a project from which so many of us have learned so much. Without your leadership, we would not have been here today.

Thank you.

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