

2018 ECSPM SYMPOSIUM  
**PARADIGM SHIFT IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION**

**Appraisal of the new strategy for languages in education**  
*Stimulus for panel discussion*

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## POINTS FOR PLENARY DISCUSSION

1. It is no easy matter to attempt to manage the significant linguistic diversity in the EU, to safeguard its linguistic wealth, to protect the linguistic rights of all European citizens, and to provide support especially to young Europeans learning what have traditionally been called 'foreign' languages in school.
2. This brief introduction to the first session of our 2018 ECSPM Symposium intends to bring forth some points of interest to all of us participating in this event, and before giving the floor to other participants to comment on these points to have Professor Thomas Tinnefeld, of Saarland University and Dr Ellinor Haase, Chair of the ICC – International Language Association, to position themselves with regard to these or other points they wish to introduce for discussion.



## EU LANGUAGE & LANGUAGE EDUCATION POLICY

1. The official rhetoric of the EU describes the linguistic diversity by which it is characterized as “an asset for Europe and a shared commitment” (COM(2008) 566 final of 18.9.2008), while it also represents languages as commodities for employability, mobility and economic growth (Strategic Framework for Education & Training 2020).
2. Since the European Council Resolution in 2002 (2002/C 50/01), on the promotion of linguistic diversity and language learning, there has been a commitment on the part of the EU to help Member States to achieve the objective of all students learning their ‘mother tongue’ + 2 foreign languages from a very early age.
3. In 2018 this objective is being reworded as “Ensuring that every young European is able to communicate, at variable degrees and according to their needs and interests, in at least two other languages in addition to the language of schooling, by the time they finish upper secondary education.”



## THE CONTEXT

While the EU has opted for institutional multilingualism and its language policies reflect efforts to manage its unique language diversity, decisions and recommendations are often contradictory partly because they are not part of a cohesive overall strategic plan. For example,:

EU institutions do not have a language policy themselves nor institutional criteria for language use;

- press releases and other operations are usually published in English only;
- individual member states are not required or rewarded if they promote multilingualism on the basis of specified criteria;
- there is increasing English Medium Instruction
- little support is offered to smaller languages.



## SUPPORT TO LANGUAGES

- One very recent positive move with regard to language equality in the EU is the European Parliament's positive vote on the joint CULT/ITRE report on "Language equality in the digital age". The texts adopted is on the EU website (link below).
- In this context, I would like to propose that the ECSPM and the ECSPM Symposium support the Human Language Prep Project, submitted by our partners "Cracking the Language Barrier" (letter of support in your folders)



## THE EU AND LANGUAGE EDUCATION

- On the negative side is that some languages are treated as more important than others:
  - There are the 'big' languages which are treated as commodity languages as they seem to be important for EU's economic growth and development. These are the language taught and learnt in schools while EMI is becoming increasingly common
  - There is almost no support for the teaching and learning of less 'important' EU languages.
  - The position of the European Commission seems to be that that children from immigrant families bring with them have no value as symbolic capital in themselves; their maintenance can be beneficial for the children, but the requirement is for them to acquire full proficiency in the language of schooling and to learn the commodity languages taught in school.



# THE 2018 EUROPEAN COMMISSION PROPOSAL FOR A EUROPEAN COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

1. The European Commission, publishes a proposal for a Council Recommendation on a 'Comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages' along with its Annex.
2. These document are significant for the support of language learning, but
  - it contains a monoglossic discourse and does not support the development of plurilingual competence.
  - it appears as though (a) Foreign language learning/teaching, (b) Managing multilingual classrooms, and (c) Literacy in the 'mother tongue' are 3 totally different issues. But are they?



## RETHINKING LANGUAGE EDUCATION

- A proposal presented to the EC by a group of experts who were invited to prepare a recommendation for language education policy design finds me in agreement and I put it forth for discussion and an action plan
- The paper is entitled "Rethinking Language Education in Schools" and it is available as a pdf document A case is made for a major change in current practices in schools and stress that, in order to address today's societal, economic and technological challenges, it is important to rethink the concepts of
  - (a) literacy,
  - (b) multilingualism,
  - (c) mother tongue



## LANGUAGE EDUCATION PARADIGM SHIFT

- I would now like to give the floor to the two discussants first and then to the Symposium participants to take a position and give feedback regarding
  - (a) the approach proposed by the European Commission
  - (b) the ‘Rethinking Language Education in Schools’ document