

# The ECSPM Declaration for Multilingualism in Higher Education

**Thomas Tinnefeld**  
Professor of Applied Languages  
Saarland University of Applied Sciences  
Saarbrücken, Germany

ECSPM Symposium  
University of Strasbourg  
24 March 2023

# Declaration for Multilingualism in Higher Education

[Home](#) / [Declaration for Multilingualism in Higher Education](#)

We are pleased to announce that we now have a final draft of the ECSPM “Declaration for Multilingualism in Higher Education” and you can access it below in several languages – and soon in even more.

When we have all the translations and amendments being prepared, will be finalising the Declaration after discussing it at the **2023 ECSPM Symposium**.

Following the aforementioned actions, we intend to petition change in Higher Education, so that multilingualism in teaching and learning, in research and publishing, governance and communication is legitimated through explicit institutional language policies.

The petition will be addressed to: (a) the Education Department of the Council of Europe, (b) the Higher Education Unit of European Commission (EAC.B.1), (c) the European University Association (EUA), and (d) the Higher Education Institutions across Europe.

**Български/Bulgarian • català • Deutsch • ελληνικά/Greek • eesti keel/Estonian • English • español • euskara/Basque • français • frysk/Frisian • galego/Galician • hrvatski/Croatian • íslenska/Icelandic • italiano • latviešu/Latvian • lietuvių/Lithuanian • magyar nyelv/Hungarian • nederlands/Dutch • polski • português • slovenščina • svenska/Swedish • Türkçe/Turkish • українська мова/Ukrainian.**

## DECLARATION FOR MULTILINGUALISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

*While acknowledging that this document has no legally binding effect, it declares public commitment to contributing actively and constructively to the development of policies for multilingualism in HE. The Declaration is open for signature by those concerned with multilingual literacies and epistemologies, linguistic diversity, and respect for linguistic rights, and specifically by: (a) research/academic units, organisations, federations, associations (with or without legal entity), (b) individual persons, in their capacity as members of academic units and other social bodies actively involved with languages in education.*

### PREAMBLE

Internationalization policies, which are of interest to an increasing number of higher education institutions (HEIs), as well as to national and supranational policy agencies, aim – or so they claim – at enhancing higher education quality, in an increasingly interconnected world. In the case of the EU, internationalisation policy initiatives are meant to achieve greater equity among higher educational systems in the context of the ‘European Education Area’, promoting transnational cooperation, partnerships among HEIs and collaboration among EU Member States to succeed in creating ‘inclusive national education and training systems’. However, internationalisation has increasingly led to the use of English as a ‘lingua academica’, to English Medium Instruction (EMI) and to the ‘Englishisation’ of HE. Despite the mounting evidence regarding the drawbacks of the exclusive use of English in teaching, research, academic publishing, and networking, it is increasingly supported by national authorities and policy makers presuming that English is a means to economic development, modernization, and global communication. However, the use of English at the expense of the official/national language(s), as well as regional or minority languages, may lead to domain-specific abandonment and the repudiation of linguistic rights. Moreover, the use of English at the expense of other languages with or without significant cultural capital has consequences for linguistic and cultural diversity, leading to impoverishment of social and epistemological knowledge.

### GENERAL STATEMENT

The signatories of the “Declaration for Multilingualism in Higher Education”, drafted by the European Civil Society Platform for Multilingualism (ECSPM), support the basic principles of the “Helsinki Initiative on Multilingualism in Scholarly Communication”<sup>1</sup>, and commit to contributing to policy-making decisions and practices which:

- 
- 

<sup>1</sup> Here is a summary of the Helsinki Initiative on Multilingualism (<https://www.helsinki-initiative.org/en>):

(1) Support dissemination of research results for the full benefit of the society by making sure that: a) researchers are merited for disseminating research results beyond academia and for interacting with heritage, culture, and society, and b) equal access to researched knowledge is provided in a variety of languages; (2) Protect national infrastructures for publishing locally relevant research by making sure that: a) not-for-profit journals and book publishers have both sufficient resources and the support needed to maintain high standards of quality control and research integrity, and b) national journals and book publishers are safeguarded in their transition to open access; (3) Promote language diversity in research assessment, evaluation, and funding systems by making sure that: a) in the process of expert-based evaluation, high quality research is valued regardless of the publishing language or publication channel, and b) when metrics-based systems are utilized, journal and book publications in all languages are adequately taken into account.

- safeguard and support the use of several languages, in addition to the official language(s) of HEIs in governance, research and publications, teaching-learning, and communication
- secure and fortify plurilingualism particularly in teaching and learning, transnational research collaboration and
- rely on the use of language technology tools for services for teaching and learning that facilitate the use of different languages.

### AWARENESS RAISING

The signatories of the ECSPM Declaration for Multilingualism in Higher Education commit to contribute to raising their university authorities’ awareness, as well as the cognizance of those responsible for language policies, linguistic management and curricula development, directors of research units, scholars, researchers, students, teaching and administrative staff, as civil society that:

- 1) Being proficient in one’s official/national language, home/heritage or any other language learnt does not secure epistemological literacy in that language, which entails very different discourse practices than vernacular literacies. However, both are important for the construction of meaning in educational contexts, by both students and teachers.
- 2) When teaching or learning in a language other than one’s own, they cannot/should not be expected to produce a nativized variety of this language.
- 3) It is important for university students and staff to be encouraged to make use of all the languages and language varieties they have in their repertoires for meaningful communication in different contexts of their academic life.

### SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The ECSPM Declaration for Multilingualism in Higher Education signatories make the following recommendations to be adopted by policy makers, transnational, national or state organisations, agencies, universities, research institutions, research funders and researchers:

1. Provide opportunities for different languages (not just English) to be the medium of instruction in programmes, courses, modules, alongside the official language of the institution.
2. There are many “unseen” languages in all educational institutions and there should be room for those languages to become visible and to come to be recognised.
3. Provide preconditions for language selection to ensure quality of education.
4. Make sure that instructors offering courses in languages other than the official language(s) of the institution have epistemological proficiency in those languages.
5. International students should be helped to integrate into the academic community and therefore offered opportunities for support and intensive language classes.
6. Avoid exclusively monolingual/monocultural educational experiences (e.g. provide bibliography, language technology tools, videos in different languages).
7. Research groups across universities should be encouraged to decide on the language(s) they will be using at different times (during interaction, dissemination of research outcomes, publication of results).
8. Encourage translation and parallel use of languages and invest in language technology tools.

# Available in these languages:

Български/Bulgarian • català • Deutsch • ελληνικά/Greek • eesti keel/Estonian • English • español • euskara / Basque • français • frysk / Frisian • galego / Galician • hrvatski/Croatian • íslenska/Icelandic • italiano • latviešu/Latvian • lietuvų / Lithuanian • magyar nyelv/Hungarian • nederlands / Dutch • polski • português • slovenščina • svenska / Swedish • Türkçe / Turkish • українська мова / Ukrainian.



---

*While acknowledging that this document has **no legally binding effect**, it declares **public commitment** to contributing actively and constructively to the **development of policies for multilingualism in HE**. The Declaration is **open for signature** by those concerned with multilingual literacies and epistemologies, linguistic diversity, and respect for linguistic rights, and specifically by: (a) **research/academic units, organisations, federations**, associations (with or without legal entity), (b) **individual persons**, in their capacity as members of academic units and other social bodies actively involved with languages in education.*

**Internationalisation** policies, which are of interest to an increasing number of higher education institutions (HEIs), as well as to national and supranational policy agencies, aim – or so they claim – at **enhancing higher education quality**, in an increasingly interconnected world. In the case of the **EU**, internationalisation policy initiatives are meant to achieve **greater equity among higher educational systems** in the context of the ‘European Education Area’, **promoting transnational cooperation**, partnerships among HEIs and collaboration among EU Member States to succeed in **creating “inclusive national education and training systems”**. However, internationalisation has increasingly led to the use of **English as a ‘lingua academica’**, to English Medium Instruction (EMI) and to the ‘**Englishisation**’ of HE. Despite the mounting evidence regarding the drawbacks of the exclusive use of English in teaching, research, academic publishing, and networking, it is increasingly supported by national authorities and policy makers presuming that English is a means to economic development, modernization, and global communication. However, the use of English at the expense of the official/national language(s), as well as regional or minority languages, may lead to domain-specific abandonment and the repudiation of linguistic rights. Moreover, the use of English at the expense of other languages with or without significant cultural capital has consequences for linguistic and cultural diversity, leading to impoverishment of social and epistemological knowledge.

---

The signatories of the “Declaration for Multilingualism in Higher Education”, drafted by the European Civil Society Platform for Multilingualism (ECSPM), support the basic principles of the “Helsinki Initiative on Multilingualism in Scholarly Communication”, and commit to contributing to policy-making decisions and practices which:

- safeguard and support the use of several languages, in addition to the official language(s) of HEIs in governance, research and publications, teaching-learning, and communication
- secure and fortify plurilingualism particularly in teaching and learning, transnational research collaboration and
- rely on the use of language technology tools for services for teaching and learning that facilitate the use of different languages.

The signatories of the ECSPM Declaration for Multilingualism in Higher Education **commit to contribute to raising their university authorities' awareness, as well as the cognizance of those responsible for language policies, linguistic management and curricula development, directors of research units, scholars, researchers, students, teaching and administrative staff, as civil society that:**

- 1) **Being proficient in one's official/national language, home/heritage or any other language learnt does not secure epistemological literacy in that language, which entails very different discourse practices than vernacular literacies. However, both are important for the construction of meaning in educational contexts, by both students and teachers.**
- 2) **When teaching or learning in a language other than one's own, they cannot/should not be expected to produce a nativized variety of this language.**
- 3) **It is important for university students and staff to be encouraged to make use of all the languages and language varieties they have in their repertoires for meaningful communication in different contexts of their academic life.**



The ECSPM Declaration for Multilingualism in Higher Education signatories make the following **recommendations** to be adopted by policy makers, transnational, national or state organisations, agencies, universities, research institutions, research funders and researchers:

1. **Provide opportunities for different languages (not just English)** to be the **medium of instruction** in programmes, courses, modules, alongside the official language of the institution.
2. There are many **“unseen” languages** in all educational institutions and there should be **room for those languages to become visible** and to come to be recognised.
3. Provide **preconditions for language selection** to ensure quality of education.
4. **Make sure that instructors** offering courses in languages other than the official language(s) of the institution **have epistemological proficiency** in those languages.
5. **International students** should be helped to integrate into the academic community and therefore **offered opportunities** for support and **intensive language classes**.
6. **Avoid exclusively monolingual/monocultural** educational experiences (e.g. provide bibliography, language technology tools, videos in different languages).
7. **Research groups** across universities should be encouraged to **decide on the language(s) they will be using** at different times (during interaction, dissemination of research outcomes, publication of results).
8. **Encourage translation** and parallel use of languages and invest in language technology tools.





# Importance for the ECSPM

- The ECSPM to fight against a suboptimal development: Exclusive use of English in teaching, research, academic publishing, and networking: a growing concern
- Declaration crucial for ECSPM to effectively promote linguistic and cultural diversity in Higher Education Institutions → to take action

- Declaration to encourage the use of several languages in addition to official language(s) of Higher Education Institutions
- Defend the 'rights' of other languages, big or small, to exist besides English

- Recognising the importance of awareness-raising among university authorities, by those responsible for language policies, and other decision-makers
- There is more to internationalisation than just English

- Highlighting the significance of language proficiency, epistemological literacy, and the use of different languages in academic contexts
- Publishing in other language should also lead to a high impact



- Specific recommendations made for policy makers, organizations, universities, research institutions, funders, and researchers
- These are the important agents to be convinced

## Importance for the ECSPM

- Providing practical opportunities for different languages to be the medium of instruction – in most every lecture hall and classroom
- Encouraging the visibility and recognition of ‘unseen’ languages in all educational institutions (French, German???)

- Following the ECSPM's mission means to advocate for epistemological proficiency of instructors and to support the integration of international students

- Investing in language technology tools and empowering research groups to decide on language(s) used on different occasions

- The ECSPM Declaration for Multilingualism in Higher Education – vital for promoting linguistic and cultural diversity and contributing to policy development.



# Personal Standpoint

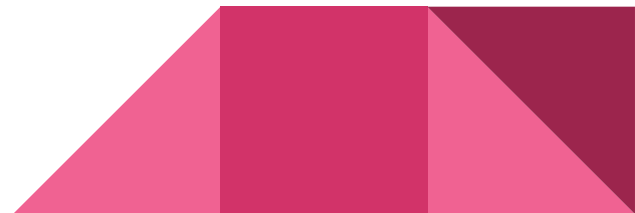
(as a linguist, foreign language methodologist and president of a not-too-different, but much smaller institution, the Language Council of Saarland)



- Strongly support the ECSPM Declaration
- Appreciate effort to promote multilingualism and recognition of linguistic diversity
- Agree with the need for explicit institutional language policies

- Concerned about the feasibility of mandating multilingualism in all areas of higher education
- Educational institutions and language teachers should regard the Declaration as an opportunity – a huge chance to make multilingualism happen – not a 'must' or moral obligation

- Declaration – definitely a step in the right direction
- The potential challenges associated with multilingualism need to be addressed



Support the Declaration and hope  
for a large number of signatories





# Further Steps to Take

## Further Steps to Take

- The ECSPM has recognized the need to address multilingualism in higher education institutions across Europe → ensuring internationalization

- Launching an online petition to campaign for the legitimization of multilingualism through explicit institutional language policies → necessary step towards the road to success

- Petition to be addressed to key organizations and institutions:
  - the Education Department of the Council of Europe
  - the Higher Education Unit of the European Commission
  - the European University Association
  - Higher education institutions across Europe

- Aim of the petition:

Generate awareness and mobilize support for explicit language policies that promote and facilitate the use of multiple languages in teaching and learning, research and publishing, governance, and communication

## Further Steps to Take

Such policies are essential for promoting linguistic diversity, cultural exchange, and knowledge transfer, and for preparing students for a globalized world

## Further Steps to Take

The ECSPM is committed to taking concrete steps to promote multilingualism in higher education institutions across Europe.

The launch of this petition is an important part of this effort.



The ECSPM hopes to generate broad support for its campaign from individuals, organizations, and institutions across Europe



### Short Discussion:

Any suggestions or amendments?

Practical strategies to promote the Declaration and make as many Higher Education Institutions sign it as possible?

