

The academic profile of the ECSPM

Bonsoir à tous ceux qui sont ici avec nous, physiquement ou en ligne, pour cet événement spécial, le septième symposium de la ECSPM, pour lequel nous sommes reconnaissants à l'Université de Strasbourg de l'accueillir - en particulier au GEO (Groupe d'études orientales, slaves et néo-helléniques) et au Bureau des relations internationales de l'Université de Strasbourg. Nous remercions tout particulièrement la vice-présidente, le professeur Irini Tsamadou-Jacobberger, et sa merveilleuse équipe universitaire, qui a rendu possible ce splendide événement.

Nous sommes également extrêmement reconnaissants au Secrétaire Général du Conseil de l'Europe, Marija Pejčinović Burić pour son patronage et pour le parrainage offert par le Département de l'Education, Direction de la Participation Démocratique du Conseil de l'Europe.

And now, switching to English, just a few words about the ECSPM, that one can find information about on our website: our history, mission and a chronicle of actions and activities.

The “Civil Society Platform to Promote Multilingualism” was launched by the European Commission to participate in structured dialogue regarding ‘multilingualism in practice’, as part of a larger political agenda for “bringing Europe closer to its citizens and strengthening a pan-European identity in harmony with national and regional identities”. It was composed of 23 European associations, networks, organisations concerned with languages, education, culture, publishing, translation, the media, and other civil society sectors. A very diverse group of people – the representatives of these 23 networks – with different interests and agendas, we carried out the European Commission’s first mandate and developed a coherent framework for multilingual policy in the EU, delivering recommendations in the form of a written report.

In 2012, the ‘Platform’ (as we used to be called then) was officially relaunched with a second mandate to provide feedback on the Erasmus+ programme, and the Rethinking Education Strategy, with an emphasis on language learning for professional growth and mobility in order “to enhance the social inclusion of citizens with disadvantaged backgrounds, as well as to promote linguistic diversity and intercultural dialogue.”

With the 2014 organisational changes in the Commission itself, which meant that its Multilingualism Unit that had mandated the ‘Platform’ had been

suspended as an autonomous unit of the DG Education and Culture, a small committee of what had been the 'Platform' decided to change the course of action and tread on the past build a new institution, with a new mission and function.

With our new name "European Civil Society Platform for Multilingualism", under the acronym ECSPM, we reconsidered our role finding our voice as a genuine civil society organisation, not mandated by the Commission, or any other supra-national or governmental body nor driven by free enterprise or any profit-making operation.

From 2015-2016 few of us in the ECSPM worked hard to become an NGO –with our own rules, priorities related to multilingualism issues and ways of operating. We developed the new organisation's mission statement and the statutes, became a legal entity, operating under Danish law and we enlisted in the European Transparency Registry. With no funding from any international, national or private organisation, using the meagre financial resources from minimal membership fees, the ECSPM logo was designed and the first version of the ECSPM website was developed.

Having started out with only a few members, our membership has grown every year from 2017 onwards. 2017 was in fact the year we held our first General Assembly and carried out our first symposium:

2017 **Beyond Language Barriers**, hosted and supported by the Hellenic Open University and the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (my own alma matter).

Since then, we have held symposia on an annual basis:

2018 **Paradigm Shift in Language Education**, hosted by the Technical University of Darmstadt

2019 **Multilingual challenges: Mediating images, languages, and language pedagogies**, hosted by the Centre of Literacy and Multilingualism (CeLM) of the University of Reading

2020 **Linguistic and Cultural (Super)Diversity at Work: From theory and policy to action and (digital) practices**, hosted by the Babylon Center for the Study of Superdiversity, Tilburg University

2021 **Multilingualism in Higher Education in Europe**, hosted by the Department of Linguistics and the Centre for Multilingualism of the University of Konstanz

2022 **Language(s) and the construction of knowledge in European HE**, hosted by the Centre of Excellence–Permanent Linguistic Observatory for Italian

abroad and the languages of Immigrants of the University for Foreigners in Siena.

One of ECSPM most important achievements was the foundation of the CURUM Constituency – a Cluster of University Research Units for Multilingualism – which has been consistently growing since it was first founded, in 2018-2019, and which numbers 18 research units today. Information about the CURUM members, such as their mission, research projects, activities, and publications, can be traced in the CURUM Booklet that one can find in the ECSPM website renewed and updated in 2021. It is to be noted that, already in 2020, the CURUM project of was nominated and submitted its candidacy for the “The Jean Monnet Prize for European Integration”.

Our second significant achievement as of late was the ECSPM’s involvement in the project proposal submitted in response to the EU call LANGEQ-2020, aimed at “Developing a strategic research, innovation and implementation agenda, as well as a roadmap for achieving full digital language equality in Europe by 2030” – a project, rooted in the META-NET (a Network of Excellence dedicated to fostering the technological foundations of a multilingual European Information Society) and strongly aligned with the European Language Grid.

From 2021 to 2022, the ECSPM fulfilled its role as a partner in the European Language Equality (ELE) – a flagship project of the European Union – and worked with an all-encompassing consortium consisting of 52 partners covering all European countries, research organisations, industry, and major pan-European initiatives. Specifically, the ECSPM collected information on 15 MRLUs (Minority, Regional and Lesser Used Languages) spoken in Europe, i.e. the number of speakers, where these languages are spoken, the existence of digital resources for these languages and more. Upon completion, a 39-page deliverable was submitted, documenting the problems these languages face as they are at serious risk of digital extinction.

The projects the ECSPM is currently involved in are:

- 1) The project already mentioned by Professor Irini Jacobberger in her welcoming address, entitled “Dynamic Multilingualism, a breeding ground for inclusive excellence in higher education” (MUDExI). ECSPM is responsible for Action 2, which is a Case Study on linguistic cross-linguistic and intra-linguistic mediation in HE, and we are shortly starting to work with colleagues from the universities collaborating with the University of Strasbourg on this project – The University of San Paolo in Brazil, University of Ngaoundéré in Cameroun, University of Sofia in Bulgaria,

and Babes Bolyai University in Romania.

- 2) The second project concerns the ECSPM Declaration for Multilingualism in Higher Education, translated already in about 20 languages. In connection with this project, we have signed the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment and joined the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) – a global coalition of research funding and performing organisations, national/regional assessment authorities and agencies, as well as associations of the above organisations, learned societies and other relevant organisations. Once amendments have been made, after discussion at this symposium and the Declaration is finalised, it will be uploaded on a petition platform, requesting 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.
- 3) Finally, the ECSPM has been invited by Bloomsbury Academic to submit a proposal for an edited collection, a two-volume series on multilingualism and HE. Members of the CURUM, Monica Barni from Siena, Theodoros Marinis from Konstanz, and Massimiliano Spotti from Tilburg, have been working with me on this project.

For news on the ECSPM activities and projects are reported in News bulletins that you can find on our website which is updated as often as possible, thanks to the invaluable help of our General Secretary Guðrún Gísladóttir, who also did an excellent job on the ELE project. Our future depends on the commitment of members, partners, and friends of the ECSPM who have been offering generously to our cause. THANK YOU, MERCI, GRAZIE, OBRIGADA!