

2024 Symposium in Ghent
Introducing the ECSPM
By Bessie Dendrinis, ECSPM President

Greetings once again, dear colleagues, friends.

Before giving you a synopsis of our achievements at ECSPM, I'd like to begin by expressing special thanks to the Director of the "Centre for Learning and Diversity" (CDL), Prof. Wendelien Vantieghem, and the members of the Ghent team who aided us to structure the programme and plan the event as a whole – who also invited our two keynote speakers, Prof. Jürgen Jaspers and Prof. Elma Blom.

But our greatest heartfelt thanks go to Prof. Piet Van Avermaet, Director of the CDL until his recent retirement. It was Piet, as the Centre's representative on ECSPM, who made a case for us to have our symposium in this prestigious institution, in the lovely city of Ghent. For this reason, along with **onze grote dank**, Piet, I would like to express my sincere hope that your retirement this year will mean even greater involvement with the wider educational community and with our ECSPM alliance. We all hope that you will continue to offer your expertise and vision in the areas of language policy and practice linked to multilingualism, poverty, social inequality, discrimination, diversity and inclusion in education. Piet, you – who have always been concerned with linguistic and social justice in education, and not only – we owe this symposium to you.

It is a scholarly event which promises to have social and pedagogical implications for our language-education communities, thanks to all of you who are with us today and tomorrow, onsite or online participants – a chance that ECSPM is providing, *free of charge*. Not having to pay fees is an intentional ideological choice on our part: to reach out to a community of language professionals, activists, researchers and scholars, creating opportunities for constructive dialogue.

Of course, none of this would have been possible without you, our eminent speakers and panellists. You have travelled from different parts of Europe and the USA, *at your own expense*, to share with us your views, theories, research findings and products. As such, the ECSPM and the Ghent team want to express to you our deepest appreciation.

This is the 8th symposium that the ECSPM has organised since 2016, when it became an NGO, independent from the DG EAC of the European Commission, which had launched the Civil Society Platform to promote multilingualism in 2009. Our mandate then was to participate in a structured dialogue concerning multilingualism in practice and to develop a coherent framework for multilingual policy in the EU, 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.'

Today, though we function independently of the European Commission, as a *Civil Society* organisation, as well as a *social and academic platform*, we are enrolled in the European Commission Transparency Registry, and we make the fruitions of our work available to all who wish to benefit from it and to those who are ready to connect with us, as we honour our mission which is: *to disseminate research and practices based on the view that multilingualism is an asset for European economic, social, cultural development, as well as a facilitator for intellectual growth, social, and personal development.*

Just a couple of years after establishing ourselves as a non-governmental and non-profit organisation, operating under Danish law, a unique alliance was developed within our organisation: the CURUM – an acronym for **C**luster of **U**niversity **R**esearch **U**nits for **M**ultilingualism.

The CURUM is a communal space for research, the results of which can contribute to the development of the European Education Area, and along with other ECSPM member organisations takes forward:

- the European Council's directive to cultivate respect for linguistic diversity across the EU, and to put this respect into practice
- the European Parliament's multilingual language policy, which regards all EU languages as equally important (including regional and minority languages) and views language learning and the use of individuals' varied semiotic resources of pivotal significance for European citizenry
- the Council of Europe's 2022 recommendation on "The importance of plurilingual and intercultural education for democratic culture" – a recommendation adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, and ratified by the ECSPM at our 2023 symposium, which was carried out under the patronage of the Council of Europe.

As such we were privileged by an address to the participants Prime Minister of Iceland, on occasion of Icelandic Presidency of the Council of Europe. Katrín Jakobsdóttir gave an inspiring talk on "Higher Education and Democracy", related to the theme of this symposium, entitled "The social role of HE for impacting policies of multilingualism in educational contexts, and generously hosted by the University of Strasbourg.

Actually, this was the third of a series of symposia which dealt with issues of multi- and plurilingualism in HE – the previous two having been hosted by the Università per Stranieri di Siena and the University of Konstanz, Germany. All three brought together eminent speakers from Europe and other continents:

- to critique and propose alternatives to the continuing monolingualism in HE
- to analyse causes for the increasing Englishization of university knowledge
- to discuss the multilingual challenge for the production and communication of scientific knowledge.

The CURUM's special concern with language issues in HE was one of the main incentives for ECSPM signing the Agreement produced by CoARA, (an acronym for a global Coalition of research funding and or performing organisations including universities, national and regional assessment authorities and agencies, as well as associations of the above organisations).

All signatories have pledged to work together to enable systemic reform in research assessment practices – including practices of multilingualism so that local languages, not just English (which internationalisation in academia has given an even greater push forward), have a place in scholarly communication and publishing.

Such reform entails that universities (despite their internationalisation policies):

- 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 three points just mentioned are included in the “general statement” of the “ECSPM Declaration for Multilingualism” (translated in more than 20 languages):

The screenshot shows the ECSPM website with a navigation menu at the top: HOME, WHO WE ARE, ORGANISATION, NEWS, EVENTS, POSITION PAPERS, MEMBERSHIP, LINKS, CONTACT. The main content area features a paragraph about the declaration and a list of 20 languages with globe icons for translation options:

- asturianu/Asturian
- Български/Bulgarian
- català/Catalan
- Deutsch/German
- ελληνικά/Greek
- eesti keel/Estonian
- English
- español/Spanish
- Esperanto
- euskara/Basque
- français/French
- frysk/Frisian
- galego/Galician
- gjuha shqipje/Albanian
- hrvatski/Croatian
- islenska/Icelandic
- italiano/Italian
- latviešu/Latvian
- lietuvių/Lithuanian
- Luxembourgish
- magyar nyelv/Hungarian
- Nederlands/Dutch
- polski/Polish
- português/Portuguese
- slovenščina/Slovenian
- svenska/Swedish
- українська мова/Ukrainian

As such, it has been uploaded as a petition on “change.org”. This petition which has so far been signed by more than 1,500 scholars from Europe and beyond:

The screenshot shows the change.org petition page. The title is "Help make Higher Education Institutions multilingual spaces". The petition has 1,453 signatures, with a next goal of 1,500. It was started on June 2, 2023. The page includes a sign-up form with fields for First name, Last name, and Email. Below the form, there are two radio button options: "Yes! Tell me if this petition wins, and how I can help other relevant petitions" and "No. I don't want to hear about this petition's".

This petition is addressed to the Education Department of the Council of Europe, the Higher Education Unit of the European Commission, the European University Association, and to Higher Education Institutions across Europe. Of course, you, the participants of this symposium can also sign it, if you read and agree with it. The more the signatures we have the stronger our case to officials responsible for the drafting of language policies and monitoring their implementation.

Since 2018, when the CURUM was inaugurated with just a few members, it has been expanding as the first such alliance in Europe. Today, it brings together 20 academic units (see [here](#)), researching bi-/multilingualism – one of them being a community of organisations with over 30 branches in Europe, Asia and North America.

And we continue to grow. Annually, we have new applications from interested research units, wishing to join us. This year is no exception. We have new membership applications from the Sapienza University in Rome, the Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences and most likely from the University of Hamburg.

One of our 20 CURUM members is the MIRCo Research Centre (Multilingüismo, Discurso y Comunicación) of the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (UAM) and I'm pleased to announce that it will be hosting our 2025 ECSPM Symposium on MULTILINGUALISM FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE IN EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS. It will be held in the Cultural Centre of UAM on 22-23 May.

Of course, the CURUM community is only part of ECSPM's 'story'. Our organisation includes five European and international networks, and specifically:

- ALTE [Association of Language Testers in Europe]
- EDiLiC [Éducation et Diversité Linguistique et Culturelle]
- ICC [International Certificate Conference - Languages Association]
- FIPLV [Fédération Internationale des Professeurs de Langues Vivantes], and
- LEND [Lingua e Nuova Didattica]

All the above networks number hundreds language professionals as members, aiming at the improved quality of modern language teaching, learning, assessment and testing. I am confident that that these organisations will be valuable allies when we submit a proposal for the 2025 ERASMUS+ call for European Teachers Academies, whose objective is to support teachers at the beginning of their career and strengthen their professional development, encouraging language learning and awareness, plurilingual and pluricultural development. Moreover, Teachers Academies are meant to incite transnational cooperation between teacher training institutions in Europe.

ECSPM also contains four European organisations which act as advocates for the promotion and support of European national as well as regional and minority languages, seeking to influence public policy and working to sustain linguistic diversity Europe. Among our members are:

- EFNIL [European Federation of National Institutions for Language] supporting the European member states' *national* or official languages through policy, status and corpus planning
- SLC (Saarland Language Council] which supports multilingualism for learners at all levels of education.
- FUEN [Federal Union of European Nationalities] which represents the interests of the European minorities – on regional, national and European level

- NPLD [Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity] which addresses issues of language policy and planning for Constitutional, Regional and Small-State Languages across Europe.

Another organization which is focused on regional and minority languages in Europe is the Mercator European Research Centre for multilingualism and language learning. Hosted by the Fryske Academy, in Fryslân, this institution is a member of our CURUM constituency, and it concentrates on the research and study, dissemination and application of knowledge in the field of language learning at school, at home and through cultural participation.

In addition to our other members, which also include organisations related to the arts, (specifically, to literary translation and the rights of visual artists), we have signed a partnership with ECML [European Centre of Modern Languages], a Council of Europe institution situated at the interface between policy, research, teacher education and practice.

As an active member of the ECML's Professional Network Forum, ECSPM offers expert advice and support for the planning and execution of ECML projects. The most recent ECML project in which pedagogical council and theoretical substantiation was provided deals with "Linguistic Mediation in Teaching and Assessment" – linguistic mediation being a topic that has raised significant interest in both the language education community. In 2019 it was the focus of our symposium, which had been hosted by the University of Reading in England, while more recently it was the object of a research action, which investigated the mediation practices of students across five European universities, in the context of a project in which ECSPM was a partner. This project, which was entitled «Le multi-/plurilinguisme dynamique, terreau de l'excellence inclusive dans l'enseignement supérieur» and which involved HEIs from Europe, Africa and South America, was funded by the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF) and coordinated by the University of Strasbourg.

The findings of this study have not been included in a book on linguistic mediation, which I myself edited, bringing together voices of colleagues from different European countries. The book is being published as we speak, in the Routledge Research in Education series under the title *Mediation as Negotiation of Meanings, Plurilingualism and Language Education*.

Back to our ECSPM collaborations, I'd like to mention our affiliation with 'Cracker', a federation of European projects and organisations working on language technologies for a multilingual Europe. It was on account of our association with this federation that we became involved as partners in the European Language Equality (ELE) project, which involved the development of a strategic agenda and roadmap to develop full digital language equality in Europe by 2030. Based on a European Parliament resolution concerning "Language equality in the digital age", ELE partners worked systematically to record the striking imbalances between the digital support that all languages spoken in Europe have – the lack of substantial digital support in some languages creating barriers that hamper communication and the free flow of information across the EU and to showing how such imbalance can be remedied. The findings were inserted into the roadmap that was created while they also now collaborate with the European Language

Grid (ELG), a *single* Platform for all European Language Technologies — tools & services, language resources, and organisations.

As I must now round up this brief introduction to ECSPM, whose purpose is to support the languages of Europe and their use in all social domains, but also to support those who speak them, who are learning them, or developing academic literacies in or through them. ECSPM is concerned with speakers' rich and varied linguistic repertoires; that is speakers who are legitimated and being offered opportunities to use their languages (and other semiotic resources) to plurilanguage, as well as speakers who have not yet developed the competence to do so they need to use effectively all the resources they have in their repertoire.

In fact, the concepts of plurilingualism and plurilinguaging are at the core of plurilingual pedagogies which are central in work being carried out by many of our colleagues. The purpose of this year's symposium is to present views and practices linked to education that legitimates plurilingual practices and develops plurilingual and pluricultural competence.