

## **Politics, Origins and Futures of the CEFR**

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# Politics, Origins and Futures of the CEFR

## Abstract

The CEFR was conceived as part of the Council of Europe's project 'Language Learning for European Citizenship'. The social and political context out of which this project grew has often been lost from view. This is perhaps due to the success of the CEFR not only within Europe but also worldwide. That success is largely due to the quality of the scaling of competences in the CEFR, based on thorough research and many years of reflection and consultation. The CEFR is used as an instrument of great merit for planning and evaluating curricula, certifications, examinations, textbooks and so on. There is however little explicit attention to the wider political context of its past and the possible scenarios of its future.

In this article, I locate the CEFR in its political context and purpose, and analyse and interpret some of the educational ideas which underpinned its origins. I then argue that, although time has passed and historical change has occurred, the contemporary socio-political situation in Europe is such that we need to pay attention to the educational philosophy at the origin of the CEFR and consider how it and the new volume accompanying it, can be part of the response of language teaching to the demands of our time, not least as part of a *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture*.

Finally, I demonstrate how language teaching can take a proactive role in, and have a much closer relationship with, (active) citizenship and a European, internationalist education for citizenship.

Key words: internationalism, Common European Framework of Reference for Languages; Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture; active citizenship

## Introduction

Among language teaching professionals - be they teachers, teacher trainers, textbook writers or curriculum designers - the acronym CEFR<sup>1</sup> needs no explanation. It is known throughout the world, although pronounced in different ways in different countries and continents. Among language learners - and there are millions of them - on the other hand, it is known only indirectly, through the use of the designations of levels, A1 to C2, a development which has undoubtedly had positive effects for learners. At the same time, and this is indicative of one of the problems discussed below, namely that the technical quality of the CEFR, in particular the scales and levels, has unbalanced its reception and use.

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<sup>1</sup> It is noteworthy that in the text itself the abbreviation CEF is used in the opening pages (e.g. Council of Europe, 2001: 2), but in the mid-2000s, a deliberate and successful emphasis on the 'reference' dimension was created through the change to CEFR in further documents and the website ([coe.int/lang](http://coe.int/lang)).

One purpose of this article is to help correct the imbalance. This will be done by exploring the origins of the CEFR in an organisation, the Council of Europe, which has political principles and purposes of a highly explicit nature. Unfortunately, it may be argued, these did not become sufficiently apparent in the CEFR, but could and should be pursued as a contribution to the Council of Europe's response to increasingly chauvinistic social changes in Europe, and beyond. Language teaching can and should play a part in counter-acting chauvinism with internationalism.

An analysis of the concept of internationalism will be the first section of this article, to establish a point of departure to which we shall return in a later section. The second section will analyse the origins of the CEFR in its historical context, and the ideas which shaped the hopes and intentions of the group which created it.

The third part relates the CEFR to more recent work on language policy at the Council of Europe and then discusses the more recent *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture*, and then shows how language teaching can make a substantial contribution to the ideas and ambitions of this document.

### **Internationalism and antecedents of the Council of Europe**

The Council of Europe is a pan-European organisation of 47 member States (with a number of Observer States) and is as such 'international', although the term 'inter-statal' might be more accurate if it were coined, and 'intergovernmental' is the usual term. In a sense it is apolitical in that it has little regulatory power, but is nonetheless highly influential through the recommendations made by its Committee of Ministers who represent the member States<sup>2</sup>.

A key word search of its website ([www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int)) reveals not surprisingly hundreds of thousands of uses of 'international' in its seven decade history. On the other hand, there are only a few hundred instances of 'internationalism', with relatively few substantial discussions of its significance, and many of these are from the more distant past. In recent years, the term has been used on several occasions by a Secretary General to refer to the end of the Second World War as a time when a move took place from nationalism to internationalism, for example:

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<sup>2</sup> The fundamental functioning of the Council of Europe lies in the obligation to ratify adherence to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) and to respect its judgements. Other conventions are moral commitments rather than obligations to act although there are processes of monitoring adherence to conventions which the ECHR can draw upon in its work, including monitoring of implementations of the European Social Charter which complements the political rights which are inherent in the work of the ECHR.

After the horrific wars on this continent, the world had to move away from nationalism towards internationalism. The sovereignty of the nation state and the power of the majority inside nation States had to be restrained and subordinated to some basic human rights.

(Meeting with His Holiness Pope Francis) ([https://www.coe.int/en/web/secretary-general/speeches-2014/-/asset\\_publisher/gFMv10SKOUrv/content/meeting-with-his-holiness-pope-francis](https://www.coe.int/en/web/secretary-general/speeches-2014/-/asset_publisher/gFMv10SKOUrv/content/meeting-with-his-holiness-pope-francis))

In this formulation, the Secretary General at that time locates himself and the Council of Europe within a stream of thought and action, ‘internationalism’, which began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Lyons, 1963; Jahn, 2013). This is a phenomenon which merits further analysis, albeit with some difficulty for, as Kuehl (2009) points out, internationalism has not been much treated in historiography, and Sluga and Clavin say that it was only ‘a whisper in the narratives of the past’ (2016: 3).

Kuehl (2009) shows that the lack of historiographical interest has led to a lack of clarity in the definitions. As a starting point we can take a suggestion of an uncontroversial definition by an educationist, Lionel Elvin:

What I mean by internationalism is a readiness to act on the assumption that mankind as a whole is the proper society to have in mind for matters that cannot with safety or with such good effect be left exclusively within the domain of smaller social groups such as nations. I think it will be agreed that this is not an extravagant definition. (1960, 16)

This definition immediately indicates that internationalism not only in its etymology but also in its nature cannot be considered except in relation to nationalism, which is indeed a logically if not historically prior concept<sup>3</sup>. Malkki (1994, 61) considers nationalism and internationalism to be neither analytically separable nor antagonistic for ‘internationalism does not contradict or subvert nationalism, on the contrary it reinforces, legitimates and naturalises it’. It is also important to note that Elvin emphasizes ‘readiness to act’ as, later in this article, I will explain how this can be realised in practice in language teaching and across the curriculum.

The complexity of the different analytical types of internationalism and its connotations, which change over time, are, as Halliday (1988, p.188) says, best caught in the notion of the ‘cluster concept’ where there is no single core meaning. Within the cluster there are several types, some of them related to the typologies suggested by more than one scholar,

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<sup>3</sup> According to Halliday, the term ‘internationalism’ was coined as a consequence of Marx’s focus on proletarian unity:

it was Marx’s promotion of the International Workingmen’s Association, the First International, in 1864 that led to the coining of the word ‘internationalism’, the first recorded usage of which in English dates from 1877. (1988, 189)

However, Vincent (2002: 192) argues ‘internationalism was coined by Jeremy Bentham in the 1780s to name a part of his legal theory which was concerned with the ‘law of nations’’

and some particular to one typology. For the purposes of this article, however, I shall focus on 'liberal internationalism' which is closest to the discourse of the Council of Europe.

'Liberal internationalism' is described by Halliday (1988, 192) as:

a generally optimistic approach based upon the belief that independent societies and autonomous individuals can through greater interaction and co-operation evolve towards common purposes, chief among these being peace and prosperity.

Holbraad (2003) too links liberal internationalism with 'confidence in the rational and moral qualities of human beings' and 'faith in progress towards more orderly social relations' (p.39), but internationalism of this kind does not necessarily imply that the progress is inevitable. It requires encouragement, and education is one of the locations where encouragement can be provided.

From an historiographical perspective, Kuehl (2009) argues that liberal internationalism is a phrase, often employed without definition, that is associated with periods both pre- and post- 1914-1918 and, as also indicated by Halliday (1988), was associated with peace movements before World War I and peace settlement after it. The Council of Europe Secretary General's use of 'internationalism', referred to above, is analogous to this, although he refers to World War II.

In his more wide-ranging analysis - including for example 'socialist internationalism', and its variations, and 'conservative internationalism', Halliday (1988) suggests that all types of internationalism share three characteristics. First, there is a recognition that there is an internationalisation of the world i.e. a binding together through communications and trade, begun in the 19th century with the invention of railways and steamships. The second common characteristic is the management of the impact of economic internationalisation on political processes. Whether governments or unions or feminists or opponents of nuclear power or capitalism, all cooperate more closely as a consequence of the phenomenon of economic globalisation.

The third characteristic is of a different nature. It is the normative assertion that the first two are a good thing since they promote understanding, peace, prosperity 'or whatever the particular advocate holds to be most dear' (Halliday, 1988, 188). The state and nationalism, in this view, are only legitimate within internationalism if they promote certain moral values. However, although this characteristic may be common for the types of internationalism Halliday and others cited above identify, it is not tenable within conservative nationalism, where the existence and survival of the state and/or nation is the prime and perhaps sole value pursued.

A fourth general feature of internationalism is the association with democracy. Jones (1998, 148) makes this point in his description of internationalist thinking:

It is a peaceful and cooperative interstate system which defines international order, despite the inevitable tensions between respecting sovereign independence while applying democratic principles at the international level (Goldmann, 1994, 54). Invoking both Immanuel Kant and Woodrow Wilson, Goldmann (1994) acknowledged the ways in which internationalist

agendas go hand in hand with democratic change at the domestic level: '[It is part of] the tradition of internationalist thinking to consider law, organization, exchange, and communication to be more likely to lead to peace and security if states are democratic than if they are authoritarian' (p.54).

This chimes well with the principles of the Council of Europe which is founded on the 'three pillars' of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, highlighted in the website banner ([www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int)), often complemented by reference to a fourth principle of respect for the dignity of all.

### **The CEFR - origins**

Although, as we have seen, internationalism has a much longer history, the Council of Europe was established in the wake of the Second World War, like the United Nations, in the spirit of internationalism and rejection of extreme nationalism or chauvinism, and the current Secretary General has renewed reference to this. The United Nations was to some extent the successor of the League of Nations, which had been established in much the same spirit after World War I. The establishment of the Council of Europe might be seen as the response to the fact that World War II had begun as a European war, the Council of Europe having ambitions for Europe, where the UN had ambitions for the world. The rejection of chauvinism is still relevant if not more so today, although as we shall see the Council of Europe does not reject all nationalism.

The European Cultural Convention (ECC) appeared in 1954 ([www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage/european-cultural-convention](http://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage/european-cultural-convention)) and was a major declaration in the evolution of the Council of Europe. In its first article, the ECC refers to countries taking 'appropriate measures to safeguard and encourage the development of the national contribution to the common cultural heritage of Europe'. The preamble defines the aim of the Council of Europe as 'to achieve a greater unity between its members for the purpose, among others, of safeguarding and realising the ideals and principles which are their common heritage'. It also says this aim would be best achieved 'by a greater understanding of one another among the peoples of Europe.'

This is clearly the starting point for an emphasis on language learning, as Trim (2007) pointed out. I would add that it is a starting point for language *and culture* learning. It is after all a *cultural* convention and the summary of the document refers to 'the study of languages, history and civilisation of other countries' ([www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/018](http://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/018)) where, curiously, it is implied that other countries each have more than one language but only one history and only one civilisation.

The fact that language learning and teaching did not become a focus until a decade later is a matter for more careful historical analysis than there is space for here, but it is chronicled by Trim (2007) in some detail. Trim also gives a detailed account of the evolution of several projects and programmes from the 1960s onwards, but the crucial moment for my purposes here is 1990 when a new project was launched with the title 'Language Learning for

European Citizenship'. For it was in this programme that the CEFR was conceived, albeit based on much work in previous decades. It is important to remember however that the programme served as an umbrella for many activities in addition to the CEFR, responding to the political changes in 1989 and 1990 throughout Europe<sup>4</sup>, and the programme included the establishment of the European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz in 1996.

The programme was in other words a response to political change and the political perspectives of those involved already in earlier Council of Europe language projects are described by Trim. He says of the project group set up in the 1970s that they agreed that:

as a Council of Europe project, [the group's] aim was to promote language learning not as an end in itself – though for many learners, especially perhaps the more gifted ones, that might be sufficient motivation – but rather as a contribution to the over-arching political aims of the Council. It should serve to improve international understanding and cooperation, promote methods that strengthen democratic practices and develop the learner's independence of thought and action combined with social responsibility. (2012, 23)

The reference to democratic practices and social responsibility is prescient of the recent work at the Council of Europe, on the *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture*, as will be seen below.

The spirit of what Trim says is also reflected in another important source for understanding the thinking, i.e. the writing of Jan van Ek and in particular his *Objectives for foreign language learning. Volume 1 Scope* (1986). van Ek locates work on aims and objectives for language teaching in wider educational aims. He argues that all education is focused on two elements: the development of the learner as individual, and the development of the learner as social being<sup>5</sup>. He then links these two aims to the Council of Europe's Modern Language Projects and says:

Our educational aim is to give our pupils the fullest possible scope for fulfilling their potential as unique individuals in a society which is, ultimately, of their own making. (12)

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<sup>4</sup> The wider picture included many activities in Central and Eastern Europe developing intergovernmental cooperation e.g. on citizenship in the Baltic countries, or minority rights in CIS States, often with other organizations such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the United Nations Development Programme or the European Union. These were active implementations of the Council of Europe's 'pillars' of values.

<sup>5</sup> It is possible that van Ek had in mind here the notion of *Bildung*, which was referred to more explicitly in later documents especially in the project on 'Languages of Schooling', e.g. in 'Language as Subject':

This rich notion of *Bildung* is essential to the conception of language as subject. The learner's development in the field of language is a key to this aim, (...) offering opportunities for education in this broad sense is central to language as subject. Aiming at *Bildung* balances the more functional aims of the subject that are also focused upon and provides a frame that surpasses the limits of an instrumental perception of language as subject. (2009, 6)  
(<https://www.coe.int/en/web/platform-plurilingual-intercultural-language-education/language-as-a-subject#%7B%2228070356%22%3A0%7D>)

He argues that in the contemporary world the presence of subjects in a curriculum can only be justified by their contribution to these general educational aims, and in discussing the justification for language teaching he quotes John Trim's work in the UK and argues that in a period of increasing internationalisation:

Next to the community of those we regularly associate with in our daily lives, and next to the recognition of our 'national' community, we are developing a sense of belonging to, and functioning in, even larger communities. (12)

There is more than a hint of internationalist thinking in this statement.

van Ek (1986) goes on to make criticisms which are still relevant today. He says for example that descriptions of objectives are confined to specification of learning content and that many curriculum documents 'consist of a few pages proclaiming lofty educational ideals followed by long and detailed lists of words, structures and facts that the learners are required to 'master'' (p.27) We may have moved away from lists of structures etc. but his statement that 'the relation between the first few pages and all the rest is, in most cases, far from transparent' (p.27) is still pertinent, as is the question whether the CEFR has stimulated an approach to curricula and methodology which overcomes these criticisms.

A full answer to that question would need careful data collection and analysis, and suggests a basis for a potential programme of research; a start was made in a survey of the use of the CEFR within Europe and beyond (Byram and Parmenter, 2012). An alternative approach to the same question is to ask whether the CEFR itself embodies the vision van Ek presents and which he sums up in three components: the promotion of autonomy; the development of critical powers; and the development of communication ability (24). He points out that the first two are political concepts or, perhaps better, they can be the basis for political acts.

The term 'political' is one which has to be used carefully and it is worth a minor digression to consider the meanings and how we shall use it in this article. The Oxford English Dictionary ([www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com)) has several meanings for both politics and political. The 5<sup>th</sup> meaning for political is 'Relating to or concerned with public life and affairs as involving questions of authority and government; relating to or concerned with the theory or practice of politics.' The 4<sup>th</sup> meaning of 'politics' is 'The political ideas, beliefs, or commitments of a particular individual, organization, etc.' Combining these two, I shall in this article use 'political' to refer to learners being or becoming political, i.e. to mean that they develop their own ideas, beliefs and commitments and that, on that basis, they become involved in public life, 'practice politics' and challenge authority. This can be at any level from the family to the school to the sports club to national and international government.

van Ek's concepts of autonomy and critical powers are therefore closely related to the notion of being political, but does the CEFR embody these? The CEFR addresses the third element of van Ek's vision the 'development of communication ability' but little is said about autonomy and critical powers. Autonomy is referred to in a few places in the text but only with reference to 'autonomous learning' and 'learning to learn' in language learning. Yet van Ek says that autonomy – a translation of *Selbstständigkeit* – 'may, rightly or



wrongly, be construed as proclaiming political bias (p 25), as is also the case for ‘critical powers’. There are a few uses of the term ‘critical’ in the CEFR but only with reference to ‘critical appreciation of proposals or literary works’ (Council of Europe, 2001, 62). This can be contrasted with the use of ‘critical’ in another Council of Europe framework to be described and discussed below, where ‘criticality’ is a much more powerful, and political concept.

van Ek’s political and educational vision is thus present only minimally in the CEFR. One interesting passage is in Chapter 5, where there is a discussion of learners’ intercultural awareness, of their understanding of similarities and differences between the learners’ world and others. There is also some reference to ‘awareness of how each community appears from the perspective of the other, often in the form of national stereotypes’ (Council of Europe, 2001, 103). There is however no reference to van Ek’s ‘critical powers’, to the capacity to critique these perspectives, similar to what I called ‘critical cultural awareness’ (Byram, 1997).

## **Contemporary developments**

Turning to a more contemporary contextualisation, after this historical review, there are three issues to consider: the new *Companion Volume* to the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2017), the work on ‘Languages of Schooling’, and the *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture* (RFCDC) , inspired by the success of the CEFR.

The CEFR was published in its best known version in 2001. Earlier versions had been circulated in the mid-1990s for consultation. Around the moment of publication, in 2001, the Language Policy section in Strasbourg began to consider a wider and more complex view of ‘plurilingualism’. That complex notion was presented at the beginning of the CEFR and again in Chapters 6 and 8 but was not developed to its full potential. In the new *Companion Volume* (Council of Europe 2017), the notion of plurilingualism is discussed in more detail, where the original document is explained and the following assertion made: ‘the fundamental point is that plurilinguals have a *single*, inter-related, repertoire that they combine with their general competences and various strategies in order to accomplish tasks (CEFR Section 6.1.3.2)’ (Council of Europe, 2017, 28). Plurilingualism is contrasted with multilingualism which, in the individual, is ‘the coexistence of different languages’ (ibid). In the further development of descriptors and levels of plurilingualism in the *Companion Volume*, the emphasis is placed upon how that single, interrelated repertoire is used:

Key concepts operationalized in the scale include the following:

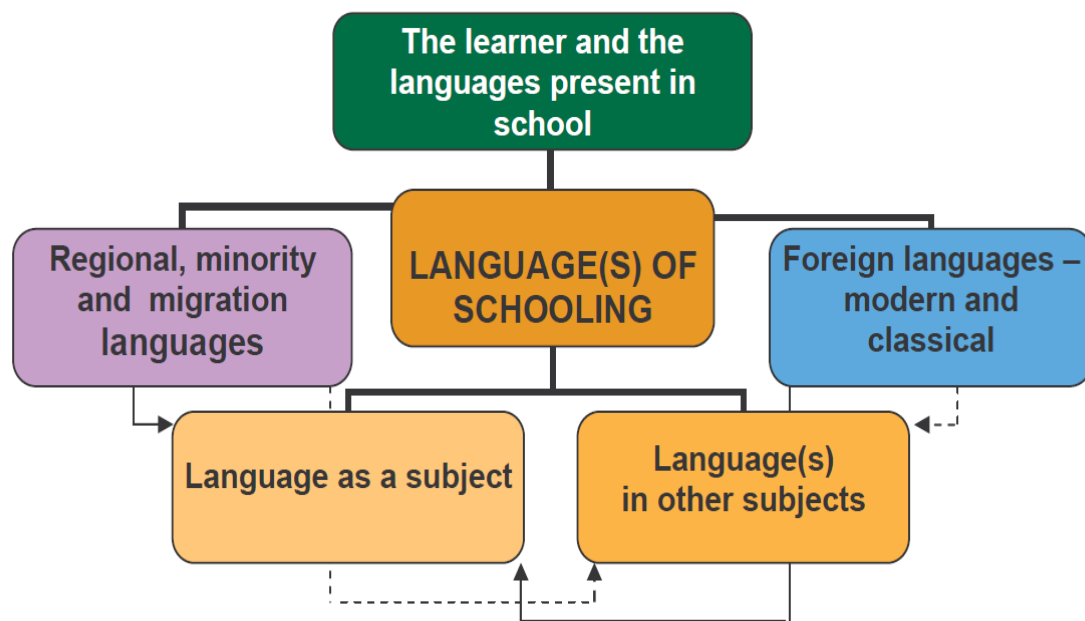
- flexible adaptation to the situation;
- anticipation when and to what extent the use of several languages is useful and appropriate;
- adjusting language according to the linguistic skills of interlocutors;
- blending and alternating between languages where necessary;
- explaining and clarifying in different languages;

- encouraging people to use different languages by giving an example.  
(Council of Europe, 2017, 147)

In the 2000s, as ideas developed - and before the developments in defining plurilingualism just cited - the view was taken that plurilingualism includes languages other than those usually referred to as 'foreign' or 'modern' or 'langues vivantes', which had been the focus of the CEFR. Therefore 'mother tongues', 'minority languages' and other designations of languages and language varieties had to be taken into account when a new project on 'Languages of Schooling' was planned. At approximately the same time there was a growing concern at the Council of Europe, as in many other institutions and countries, about the quality of education. In European countries, the struggle for universal education, begun in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is - with exceptions - achieved, but the quality of the education offered is not assured. Language plays a significant role in quality assurance since most learning takes place through language.

This is not a new insight, and the term 'language across the curriculum' was used already in 1975 in a report on English in English education (HMSO, 1975). Research has been carried out since the 1960s on the significance of language in learning, and in more recent times there has been a combination of interest in foreign language learning and the language of learning in the form of 'Content and Language Integrated Learning'. There is adequate research, summarised by Beacco et al. (2016) to demonstrate that, without adequate competence in the language used in schooling, learners do not succeed. Understanding subjects such as physics or geography for example depends on language competence. This insight had come originally from work with monolingual learners from disadvantaged backgrounds who do not acquire the language of schooling at home and have a significant linguistic hurdle to overcome (e.g. Atkinson, 1985). It also came from research with the bilingual children of migration who might have a superficial command of the language of schooling but not of the complexity needed for learning (Cummins, 2011). Cummins' (1979; 2012) notion of Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills contrasting with Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (BICS and CALP) was a crucial part of this.

There was a need, we thought, for a document like the CEFR focused on the 'language(s) of schooling', i.e. languages which might sometimes be the 'national' language(s) but not always. The designation 'language of schooling' can be used whatever the context and whatever the status of the language. Simultaneously it was necessary to locate the language of schooling within a vision of plurilingualism, the complex competences in two or more languages and language varieties which learners possess, and secondly in the context of the multilingualism of educational institutions, the range of languages and varieties present in an institution whether acknowledged or not. The languages present in a school include therefore, those which are used in the curriculum for teaching and also taught as subjects, and those present through the languages which learners bring from home, as part of their plurilingualism, even though not visible in the curriculum. This view was represented in a platform in which the different languages – and to some extent the Council of Europe's different language projects – are placed:



It is evident from the diagram (<https://www.coe.int/en/web/platform-plurilingual-intercultural-language-education/the-founding-principles-of-plurilingual-and-intercultural-education>) that the language(s) of schooling are symbolically and in practice central to language education. The use of the possible plural in ‘language(s) of schooling’ reminds us that in some schools and countries, more than one language is used for teaching.

This was a major shift of focus from foreign languages, and was eventually encapsulated in a Recommendation of the Council of Ministers where it was linked to the question of quality and equity in education:

1. Education authorities in member States are encouraged, when reviewing their educational policies, to draw on the following principles:

*a. linguistic competences and equal opportunities*

Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)13 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on ensuring quality education highlights the responsibility of education systems in ensuring equal opportunities for learners. This includes the responsibility to guarantee the command of the languages used and taught, going beyond competences for ordinary communication.

(Recommendation CM/Rec(2014)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the importance of competences in the language(s) of schooling for equity and quality in education and for educational success)

Here we note the reference to ‘responsibility to guarantee’ and the importance of Cummins’ (2012) CALP implied in the phrase ‘going beyond competences for ordinary

communication'. There are then two elements: quality and equity on the one hand, and success in education on the other.

With respect to equity and quality, it is important to note the inclusion of 'critical thinking' in the Recommendation on quality in education:

For the purposes of this recommendation, 'quality education' is understood as education which:

(...)

e. enables pupils and students to develop appropriate competences, self-confidence and critical thinking to help them become responsible citizens and improve their employability;

(Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)13 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on ensuring quality education)

Here for the first time, criticality was included and, significantly, it was linked to responsible citizenship and employability. The vision presented by Jan van Ek is gradually being realised.

At the same time, in the group working on the languages of schooling, there was discussion about the obligation of education systems to ensure all learners have a right to a minimum level of a competence in academic language. This was further stimulated by requests from Norway to stipulate what would be the level of linguistic competence in Norwegian at which the children of migration could be deemed to be ready to move out of special classes into mainstream schooling. There was discussion of the possibility of specifying a minimal competence, which would state the competence required for success in schooling at two points: at the end of primary and again at the end of lower secondary education. Education systems might be expected to guarantee - the term quoted above from the recommendation on the quality<sup>6</sup> of schooling - that learners would reach this minimum. They would have the right to reach these levels to ensure that they could be free of language impediments in the next stage of schooling. This specification has not been pursued further but remains a powerful idea.

Furthermore, as well as applying to the 'normal' case of the language of schooling, the idea might also be applied to the use of foreign languages in the teaching of other subjects, or CLIL. Should there be a specified minimal level of competence in a foreign language which learners should have if they are to profit from CLIL? Should such a level be specified not only in terms of BICS but also of CALP? These are potential future directions.

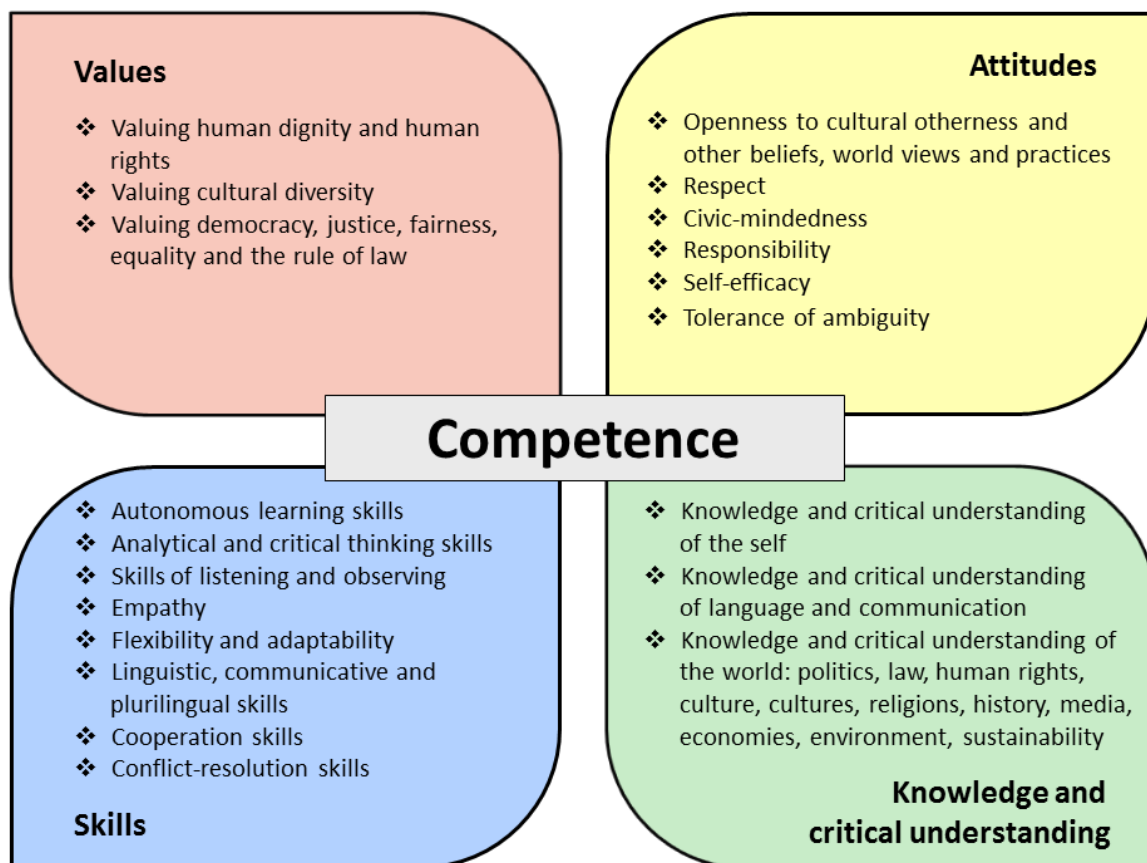
## Possible Futures

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<sup>6</sup> It is noteworthy that reference to quality of education first appeared in a Recommendation (CM Recommendation (2008)7) on the use of the CEFR and the promotion of plurilingualism. From that point on, it became a regular feature of Recommendations (e.g. CM Recommendation (2012/13) on ensuring quality education; CM Recommendation (2014/5) on the importance of competence in the language(s) of schooling for equity and quality in education and for educational success.

Other future directions and possibilities are the focus of this last section which begins with an explanation of the framework of ‘Competences for Democratic Culture’ (*Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture* [RFCDC]) and then discusses how foreign language teaching might be linked to this framework.

In 2013, it was decided that the success of the CEFR could be a model for developing a framework for ‘Competences for Democratic Culture and Intercultural Dialogue’, which became known as ‘Competences for Democratic Culture’, but was originally referred to as ‘intercultural and democratic competence’. A model of 20 competences was produced and became a central project of the Council of Europe with high visibility ([www.coe.int/en/web/education/competences-for-democratic-culture](http://www.coe.int/en/web/education/competences-for-democratic-culture)). This model is at the heart of the project but the project includes several documents which present the model and explain how it can be used in curriculum design, in pedagogy, in a whole school approach, in teacher education, and in assessment procedures.



One of the 20 competences included in the model is ‘linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills’. The CEFR is the basis for clarifying what this means. That is one new context for the CEFR.

The second context is that, in the explanation of the RFCDC model, it is stated that the learning of democratic competence, like most other learning, is dependent on language competence, competence in the language(s) of schooling:

The acquisition of CDC is also dependent on language competences. It may take place as a specified part of a curriculum or through organising an educational institution to encourage participation by learners. In either case, language competence is crucial and needs to be the focus of attention of teachers. Learners also become increasingly aware of language and the significance of their language competences in exercising their democratic and intercultural competences.

(Council of Europe, 2018, 17)

In these two places the work of the CEFR and the language of schooling will be carried forward.

The list of competences includes knowledge and within this group of competences there is ‘knowledge and critical understanding of language and communication’. There is here a strong potential for further clarification in the *CEFR Companion Volume* (Council of Europe, 2017) especially through the analysis of the concept of ‘mediation’:

In mediation, the user/learner acts as a social agent who creates bridges and helps to construct or convey meaning, sometimes within the same language, sometimes from one language to another (cross-linguistic mediation). The focus is on the role of language in processes like creating the space and conditions for communicating and/or learning, collaborating to construct new meaning, encouraging others to construct or understand new meaning, and passing on new information in an appropriate form. The context can be social, pedagogic, cultural, linguistic or professional.

(Council of Europe, 2017, 99)

Although this is just one competence, and although it is described in indicators which put the emphasis on skills, i.e. the ability to carry out mediation at different levels, it might be surmised that such skills are enhanced by declarative knowledge as included among the different kinds of ‘Knowledge and critical understanding’ of the RFCDC. Furthermore, that learners should acquire declarative knowledge and language and communication, is one of the aims of teaching of ‘awareness of language’ and ‘*éveil aux langues*’, and in some approaches to these there is a focus on ‘criticality’, on learners’ acquiring insight into how language and communication are imbued with power and power differentials (e.g. Males, 2000).

For foreign language teachers, this is an invitation to include van Ek’s educational aims and objectives, to urge and provide opportunities for their learners to use their linguistic and intercultural competences to be active in the world, to be what I call ‘intercultural citizens’ (Byram et al., 2017). This means activity in their own immediate community and in the international or supra-national communities to which they belong, an activity which is critical. Language teaching should be explicitly and overtly political and the CEFR should be

used in the spirit of the originators but used to respond to our current and future political and social needs.

## **Language teaching for internationalism and CDC**

In this final section, I will demonstrate how language teaching can meet some of the challenges of the RFCDC since in recent years some language teachers have begun to work in this direction. Such work combines internationalism with active citizenship drawing upon analysis of the complementarity of objectives for language teaching and citizenship education (Byram, 2008). This combination is encapsulated in the definition used by teachers in the planning of ‘intercultural citizenship’ projects:

- a good intercultural citizenship project will ideally have the following characteristics:
- create a sense of international identification with learners in the international project;
  - challenge the ‘common sense’ of each national group within the international project;
  - develop a new ‘international’ way of thinking and acting (a new way which may be either a modification of what is usually done OR a radically new way);
  - apply that new way to ‘knowledge’, to ‘self’ and to ‘the world’.
- (Byram et al., 2017, xxviii)

This educational philosophy has been pursued by a network of language teachers in schools and universities. They have taken full advantage of modern technology to create innovative projects. Here I present one example but others can be found in Byram et al. (2017) and Wagner et al. (2018).

The project is from the lower secondary age range. There were learners aged 10-12, in Argentina and in Denmark, both groups learning English and using it in the project as a lingua franca as they worked together over the internet, using email, a wiki and sometimes skype.

The teachers had two kinds of aims, ‘thinking’ and ‘acting’ which correspond to the two steps of ‘seeing’ and ‘taking action’ used above:

### **THINKING**

encouraging children

- to explore and reflect on environmental issues - globally and locally
- to understand environmental issues and how to recognize them in their own surroundings,
- to challenge taken-for-granted representations of the environment,

### **ACTING**

- to engage in trash sorting and recycling practices,
- to contribute to improving the environment in their local communities = action in the community

There were four major stages in the project, which took place over several weeks:

#### STAGE 1 – DISCOVER ABOUT ‘US’ AND PREPARE FOR ‘THEM’

- Learners identified ‘green crimes’ (such as not switching off a computer when not in use) in their schools, families and communities, and drew pictures or made video-tapes of these crimes.
- Learners carried out a ‘trash analysis’: listing, classifying and sorting trash in waste bins in schools

#### STAGE 2 – PRESENT ‘US’ TO ‘THEM’ AND COMPARE

- Using a wiki, each group presented their findings to the other and the groups then compared the ‘crimes’ and attitudes to recycling in their respective environments
- Each group carried out a survey among family members, friends, etc. about their environmental habits and again compared their findings on the wiki
- They each analyzed media images and texts on environmentalism, as produced in Argentina and in Denmark, and again compared.

#### STAGE 3 – WORK TOGETHER – IN ‘US AND THEM’ GROUP

- Mixed sub-groups of Argentinean and Danish learners worked collaboratively online using skype and wiki; they designed posters to raise awareness of environmental issues

#### STAGE 4 – FOCUS AGAIN ON ‘US’ AND ACTING

Both groups return in this stage to their own community and take ‘action’ they have decided on as a consequence of the previous stage. For example, the Argentinean learners:

- created videos and songs and shared on Facebook
- were interviewed by a local journalist and had the collaborative posters published in local newspaper,
- designed a banner and hung it in the school street.





The RFCDC enjoins teachers in different subjects in schools to work together. The origins of this project were in cross-curricular work on education about the environment which was subsequently taken up by language teachers and then extended to the trans-national and trans-Atlantic project outlined briefly here (for a more detailed account see Porto et al., 2017). There are numerous realisations of the competences listed in the RFCDC in the activities learners engage in: for example, to focus on the more evident ones, ‘civic-mindedness’ and ‘responsibility’ in terms of ‘Attitudes’; ‘analytical and critical thinking skills’ and ‘cooperation skills’ in ‘Skills’; ‘knowledge and critical understanding of the environment and of language and communication’; and ‘valuing cultural diversity and justice’ in ‘Values’. The project also anticipated the recommendations for pedagogy of the RFCDC (Council of Europe, 2018 Volume 3: 28-29) that teachers plan so that learners have opportunities for ‘experience’, ‘comparison’, ‘analysis’, ‘reflection’ and ‘action’. Here however, the action is quite explicitly ‘political’. At the same time, this project demonstrates that foreign language teaching can realise its fundamental but oft-ignored internationalist character, as the students see the significance of trans-national cooperation on issues which, as Elvin quoted earlier said, are too important for nations to consider alone. It encapsulates the hopes that van Ek had for language teaching and the CEFR, showing how foreign language teaching makes a major and unique contribution to young people’s education even as it provides them with tools for communication.

## **Conclusion**

‘Globalization’ and ‘internationalization’ are frequently (over-)used words in contemporary times and academic discourse, but in this article I have focused on the notion of ‘internationalism’ as a context for analysing the purposes of the CEFR and subsequent work at the Council of Europe. I have argued that internationalism is inherent though not explicit in the CEFR and can be introduced into teaching which is based on the CEFR and the RFCDC. I have also demonstrated with a brief example that language teachers can introduce internationalist thinking into their work with learners in practical and theoretically well-founded ways.

That the CEFR and its many associated documents, including the *Companion Volume* (Council of Europe, 2017), have political potential is not a new insight, but one which has been lost from view. Trim and van Ek were aware of this, as shown above. That the visibility of the levels of competence has distorted understanding of the CEFR, was also evident to the Council of Europe<sup>7</sup>. It is however clear that, in an age of educational testing, the need to remember the aims of language education which cannot be tested is constant, and is likely to remain so.

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<sup>7</sup> For example in 2007 a conference was held in Strasbourg entitled ‘Intergovernmental Policy Forum: The ‘Common European Framework of Reference for languages’ (CEFR) and the development of language policies: challenges and responsibilities’. Its ‘objective was to offer member states a forum for discussion and debate on a number of policy issues raised by the very speedy adoption of the CEFR in Europe and the increasingly widespread use of its scales of proficiency levels’ (<https://www.coe.int/en/web/language-policy/events>). The underlying purpose was to bring attention (back) to the CEFR as a whole and not just its scales.

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