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„The Europeanisation of foreign language education – influences of the Council of Europe’s concepts, values and initiatives on Austria’s foreign language teaching“

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I confirm to have conceived and written this paper in English all by myself. Quotations from other authors, any ideas borrowed and/or passages paraphrased from the works of other authors are all clearly marked within the text and acknowledged in the bibliographical references.

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List of abbreviations

BMBWK	Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Kultur (Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture)
BMUKK	Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur (Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture)
BMWF	Bundesministerium für Wissenschaft und Forschung (Austrian Federal Ministry for Science and Research)
CEBS	Center für berufsbezogene Sprachen (Centre for vocationally-oriented language education)
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
cf.	confer (compare)
CoE	Council of Europe
et al.	et alii (and others)
ECML	European Centre for Modern Languages
EFSZ	Europäisches Fremdsprachenzentrum (ECML)
ELP	European Language Portfolio
ESIS	Europäisches Spracheninnovationssiegel (European Language Label)
ESP	Europäisches Sprachenportfolio (ELP)
EYL	European Year of Languages
ibid.	ibidem (see previous reference)
i.e.	id est (that is to say)
LEPP	Language Education Policy Profile
L1/L2(s)	first/second language(s)
ÖSKO	Österreichisches Sprachenkomitee (Austrian Language Committee)
ÖSZ	Österreichisches Sprachen-Kompetenz-Zentrum (Austrian Centre for Language Competence)
SaZS	Zentrum für Sprachlehrforschung (Center for Multilingual Learning and Teaching Research)
SPIN	SprachenInnovationsNetzwerk

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1. Introduction

Intergovernmental organisations such as the European Union, the seemingly never-ending improvement of communication technologies, world-wide trade and tourism have put globalisation on the agenda and have made it a widely discussed issue of our (daily) life. The discourse on globalisation is not only to be found in the fields of economy and tourism, but is equally present in educational developments and research. Making educational systems, examinations and vocational as well as academic qualifications internationally comparable had been an issue long before the public was encouraged to use European tools such as the European Commission's so-called *Europass*, designed to enhance European mobility. Careful consideration of recent developments in education reveals that many of those developments do not originate at global level, but are initiated by the Council of Europe's efforts to encourage the development of Europe's common cultural identity and diversity by reforming language education. On a large scale, migration challenges many European societies to deal with their members' plurilingualism and consequently, teachers are confronted with various first and second languages in their classrooms on a small scale. The Council of Europe has set numerous activities aiming at bringing together, respecting and valuing this linguistic and cultural diversity and Austria, as one of its member states, has not only participated in many of them, but has also put a large part of its theory into practice, has realised many of its concepts and has implemented practical material as well as followed guidelines and principles enhancing the Council of Europe's values.

This paper grew out of the felt necessity to raise awareness of the concepts and values underlying Austria's current curricula, language education material and language teaching and learning practices that are being promoted at present. Gábor Boldizsár (2003: 7) argues that language teachers "are the most important participants in the implementation of the language policy of a country". He furthermore states that they "must undoubtedly be aware of the essence of this policy" (*ibid.*). Whether or not this is the case within the field of Austria's foreign language education remains to be seen and shall not be discussed within the framework of the present paper. Rather, focus shall be put on the role of foreign language teaching and learning as conceptualised by the Council of Europe. This focal point will allow not only to investigate important Council of Europe initiatives, but also to discuss to what extent those projects and their underlying values have been incorporated into Austria's foreign language education.

The present thesis will thus be guided by the following question: What concept of foreign language learning and teaching provides the basis for the Council of Europe's research into and initiatives within foreign language education and how have those activities and their underlying values influenced Austria's foreign language teaching and learning? An extensive study of primary and secondary literature will attempt to answer this question within the framework of the present paper. In order to be able to do so, the scope needs to be restricted and will be limited to foreign language learning and teaching at secondary level. References to primary school level and adult education will be made whenever necessary to provide a comprehensible account of current developments. Relevant publications within the field of interest will be consulted and will contribute to the critical discussion of the Europeanisation of language education in view of the research question.

The present diploma thesis will guide its reader through the research field by discussing three major Council of Europe initiatives and their influence on Austria's foreign language education. First of all though, an introductory chapter, namely chapter 2, will be included to discuss key concepts and terms that will be encountered throughout the paper. It will provide the Council of Europe's definitions and explanations permitting in-depth analyses of the Council of Europe's projects and detailed considerations of approaches to language teaching and learning at later points of this paper.

Chapter 3 will lay the basis for discussions of current developments and projects within the field of Austria's foreign language education by tracing Austria's participation in the Council of Europe's Language Education Policy Profile (LEPP) process and by discussing its results, namely Austria's language education policy. In this context the opportunity to portray the Council of Europe's priorities in language education and their suggested realisations will be seized. This chapter will therefore be the first step in approaching the research question by highlighting the Council of Europe's fundamental language education policy principles and demonstrating to what extent Austria has adopted them for its national language education policy. It will furthermore look at the measures Austria has taken to ensure that these principles form the basis of all kinds of national action within the field of foreign language education.

The fourth chapter will provide the context of the, according to Neus Figueras (2012: 477), "unquestionable influence" of the *Common European Framework of Reference*

for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR). The chapter's invaluable contribution to the attempt to answer the research question arises from the CEFR's position as

[...] basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses and curriculum guidelines, the design of teaching and learning materials, and the assessment of foreign language proficiency [...] (CEFR online)

as well as from its widespread use in Europe and beyond. The quotation implies that the Council of Europe's fundamental principles are included in the CEFR which makes the latter an essential document in this thesis' attempt to investigate the Council of Europe's concepts and intentions within the field of foreign language learning and teaching. The extent to which the CEFR is referred to in Austria's educational discourse and foreign language education material will reveal the influence of the Council of Europe's fundamental principles, publications and research on Austria's foreign language teaching and learning. Chapter 4 therefore aims at providing insights into the CEFR's origins and principles, highlighting the potentials and challenges of influential and widely discussed document and exhaustively investigating its influence in Austria and beyond.

In order to integrate the CEFR into classroom learning the Council of Europe initiated the development of the European Language Portfolio (ELP), a tool that is closely linked to the CEFR. Its origins, structure, functions and aims will be discussed in the fifth chapter of this paper. Again, specific emphasis will be placed on its dissemination, implementation and influence in Austria. The choice to make the ELP the third focal point in this paper's attempt to answer its research question originates firstly in the fact that the ELP and the CEFR are inseparably linked; the CEFR has been shown to be an integral part of the present discussion which leads to the necessary consideration of the ELP, which can be seen as the CEFR's implementation tool, aimed at learners. Secondly, Austria has put lots of efforts into the development, dissemination and implementation of the ELP and encourages its use which realises the Council of Europe's values, concepts and principles in the foreign language classroom. It is thus that the present diploma thesis shows a development from a theoretical, administrative language education policy level via concrete guidelines for foreign language teaching and learning to their realisation in the (foreign) language classroom.

The concluding chapter will provide space to review the research and findings which have been discussed throughout the paper. It will discuss the insights in light of the research question and will contribute to the clarification of the complex relationship between the Council of Europe's efforts to orientate language education towards European values and principles and the foreign language teaching and learning situation in Austria.

2. Definition of terms

2.1. The Council of Europe

The Council of Europe is an intergovernmental organisation comprising Europe's 47 independent countries and thus virtually covering the entire European continent. Founded by ten countries in 1949, the Council of Europe aims at agreeing on minimum legal standards and developing and following common democratic principles based on, among others, the European Convention on Human Rights. Although it shares the same fundamental values as the European Union, namely human rights, democracy and the rule of law, the two organisations are independent and perform different roles. Both however are convinced that their fundamental values and a co-operative approach to realise their aims form the basis of a democratic society which ensures stability, economic growth and social cohesion throughout the European continent. The Council of Europe's objectives, as stated on its website are the following:

- *to protect human rights, pluralist democracy and the rule of law;*
- *to promote awareness and encourage the development of Europe's cultural identity and diversity;*
- *to find common solutions to the challenges facing European society [and]*
- *to consolidate democratic stability in Europe by backing political, legislative and constitutional reform. (The Council of Europe's objectives online)*

Whereas, at first sight, one could ask why those seemingly purely political objectives are discussed at the beginning of a paper claiming to investigate Europe-wide developments in the field of language education, careful consideration of the objectives reveals that each one's realisation must necessarily involve communication and thus language and language education. Whereas the beginnings of the Council of Europe's involvement into language projects were motivated by increasing opportunities for mobility and interaction within Europe, another important aspect highlighting the need for successful communication skills has been added in the past years: globalisation and internationalisation pose new challenges to European societies as regards social cohesion and integration and make language competence a necessary basis of active participation in social and political processes which are a crucial part of democratic citizenship in today's multilingual societies. The consequently increasing focus of the Council of Europe on language education reflects the priority it accords to education for plurilingual and intercultural European citizens being able to participate in an intercultural dialogue not only across geographic and political borders, but also across linguistic and cultural ones. (cf. *Council of Europe Language Education Policy* online)

These intergovernmental co-operation programmes have been within the responsibility of the Language Policy Unit, formerly Language Policy Division, since 1957. Its mission is to design and implement initiatives focusing on the development and analysis of language education policies promoting linguistic diversity and plurilingualism. The Language Policy Unit's programmes cover all languages, including first, second and foreign languages, and the instruments that are developed within their framework are disseminated throughout Europe and beyond. (cf. *Education and Languages, Language Policy* online) Its language education policies as well as any other efforts within the field of languages promote plurilingualism, linguistic diversity, mutual understanding, democratic citizenship and social cohesion, which will be taken up in chapter 2.3. "Multilingualism – plurilingualism" of this paper (cf. *Council of Europe Language Education Policy* online).

2.1.1. The European Centre for Modern Languages

Whereas the Language Policy Unit's activities are set within its primary responsibilities, namely the elaboration of policies, reference instruments and guidelines for promoting plurilingualism and linguistic diversity, the role of the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) is "to encourage excellence and innovation in language teaching and to help Europeans learn languages more efficiently" (*A Centre to promote Language Education in Europe* online). The ECML's mission is thus to help its member states implementing the language teaching policies that have been developed by the Language Policy Unit by focusing on the practice of language learning and teaching, providing a platform ensuring communication among experts and teachers, training multipliers, and supporting research and implementation projects. Its work within this field is based on the Council of Europe's underlying values which have been outlined in the previous chapter. (cf. *ibid.*)

The ECML defines its own role as that of a catalyst, co-operating with the Council of Europe and the Language Policy Division and thus bringing language education policies and practices in its member states together. Based in Graz in Austria, the ECML carries out four-year programmes, so called medium-term programmes, focusing on key issues within the field of language education. (cf. *Structure of the ECML* online) It thus serves as reference point for anyone interested in reforms in and new approaches to language teaching and learning since it was established in 1994. Eight countries, namely Austria,

France, Greece, Liechtenstein, Malta, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Switzerland, founded the ECML as an “Enlarged Partial Agreement” of the Council of Europe. At present, it comprises 32 member states. Being set up as a partial agreement, the participating countries are allowed to pursue activities in their field of interest, but are not entitled to any (financial) support by Council of Europe member states that do not wish to participate. Resolution (94) 10 established the ECML on a trial basis until December 1997. Its unexpected success and convincing performance resulted in its permanent establishment in July 1998 through Resolution (98) 11 which states, among other fundamental principles of the ECML, also its mission and objectives. The former is defined as “the implementation of language policies” (Resolution (98) 11: Appendix Article 1) and “the promotion of innovative approaches to the learning and teaching of modern languages” (ibid.). The latter are subdivided into strategic objectives, including the focus on the practice of the learning and teaching, the promotion of dialogue and exchange and the support of innovative programmes, and operational objectives which include the collection of examples of good practice, the organisation of meetings and workshops, and the dissemination of follow-up activities. (cf. ibid.)

Those activities are promoted in the member states by so called *ECML National Contact Points*, national networks in language education that are designed to disseminate information and documentation on the ECML’s work on a national level (cf. *Structure of the ECML* online). In Austria, this national contact point is the ÖSZ, which will briefly be portrayed in the following chapter.

2.1.2. Österreichisches Sprachen-Kompetenz-Zentrum

Functioning as National Contact Point, the *Österreichisches Sprachen-Kompetenz-Zentrum* (ÖSZ) ensures that information on the ECML’s activities reaches national educational institutions, organises national and regional dissemination events, and supports the implementation of the ECML’s developments (cf. *Austria - National Contact Point* online). The dissemination within Austria is based on regional multipliers from various educational levels on the one hand and on national projects on the other hand. The latter comprise various activities such as forwarding information on ECML publications, events and recent developments, supporting Austrian experts if they wish to participate in an ECML programme, and enhancing exchange among persons

interested in the field of language learning and teaching. (cf. *EFMZ Dissemination in Österreich* online)

Apart from its dissemination services, however, the ÖSZ has many more areas of activity. Its close co-operation with not only the ECML, but also the Council of Europe, the European Union and national language institutes ensures its contribution to international developments as well as to the national implementation of international measures. Equally, the ÖSZ has an important supporting function when it comes to creating new concepts of teaching and learning within the language classroom and provides a platform for networking between schools, teachers and experts. (cf. ÖSZ 2008: 2)

2.2. Being European – more than a geographical term

The previous subchapter, namely chapter 2.1. “The Council of Europe” and its sections, has tried to exemplify the Council of Europe’s concern to develop common and democratic principles throughout Europe. It has also discussed the basis of the Council of Europe’s activities within the field of language education, i.e. its aim of creating “a feeling of belonging to Europe in the context of democratic citizenship.” (Language Policy Division 2007a: 31) Europe must thus be much more than a geographical term used to refer to several nation states at once. The concepts of a common European language policy, a European identity, European heritage, common European reference documents and instruments as well as common perspectives on language teaching and learning within Europe will reoccur throughout this paper and everyone interested in recent developments in language education will inevitably be confronted with common European values within this field. This is why this chapter aims at approaching the characterisation of “European” in the context of language education as it is understood by the Council of Europe.

According to the Language Policy Division (2007a: 31), European language education and their policies can be defined along a continuum that is based on various interpretations of European cohesion which can be seen to arise from economic, cultural, social, political and anthropological links. It is important to highlight that Europe is not a political entity like nation-states are. Rather, it is “a fundamentally novel grouping, a plural space” (ibid.) for which it is insufficient, if not impossible, to derive a form of identity from one language. Hence, in order to define principles for European

language education, another basis than the link between belonging to the same political unit and the language(s) spoken by this entity's group has to be found. The Council of Europe is convinced that Europe's identity can and must be created in its diversity and the recognition of otherness:

As a result, Europe could be identified, not by the languages spoken there, whether or not they are indigenous languages, but by adherence to principles that define a "common relationship with languages". (Language Policy Division 2007a: 32-33)

A European approach to language education is thus neither restricted to national programmes nor to the official languages of the Council of Europe's member states. It does not support the dominance of one or a few languages, but encourages cultural diversity and the use of numerous linguistic varieties. Being European is therefore not characterised by any kind of political, linguistic or cultural borders, but by the acceptance of shared values and by the nations' common efforts to "promote mutual understanding and tolerance, respect for identities and cultural diversity through more effective international communication" (Council of Europe 2001: 3). (cf. Language Policy Division 2007a: 31-33)

2.3. Multilingualism – plurilingualism

The Council of Europe's efforts to establish a common language policy throughout Europe is, among others, based on the principle of plurilingualism. This principle has grown in importance in the Council of Europe's approach to language learning in the past two decades and has become a goal in language teaching aiming at encouraging better communication among Europeans and a deeper understanding of Europe's linguistic diversity. (cf. Language Policy Division 2007a: 37) The *Guide for the development of language education policies in Europe* defines the concept of plurilingualism as "the potential and/or actual ability to use several languages to varying levels of proficiency and for different purposes" (ibid.: 10). More precisely, the Council of Europe refers to plurilingual and pluricultural competence as

[...] the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social agent has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures. (Council of Europe 2001: 168)

Both quotes above stress the fact that language competences of varying levels of competence contribute to a speaker's plurilingual repertoire. His/her partial competence in a given language might concern domain specific tasks or involve receptive language

activities only, but even limited language competence enriches the learner's plurilingual competence despite his/her language proficiency's imperfection at a given moment. (cf. Council of Europe 2001: 135)

Besides the importance of partial competences, the nature of plurilingual competence needs to be highlighted at this point. Plurilingualism is not a juxtaposition or even superposition of various languages, but a complex, multiple, uneven and changing competence encompassing the full range of languages available to a speaker. (cf. *ibid.*: 168, 133) The linguistic and cultural competences that he/she has acquired throughout his/her learning process are modified by his/her knowledge of other languages. This modification process and its resulting plurilingual and pluricultural competence enable the individual to develop an enriched personality, openness to new experiences, the capacity for lifelong learning and the ability to mediate between two speakers who do not share a common language. (cf. *ibid.*: 43) In short, plurilingual skills enable the language user "to interact effectively and appropriately with other European citizens" (Language Policy Division 2007a: 36) and thus to take part in Europe's political and public life. Plurilingual competence hence becomes a component of democratic behaviour and a necessary condition ensuring the respect for the linguistic and cultural diversity of individuals. (cf. *ibid.*)

This leads to the distinction between plurilingualism and multilingualism in the Council of Europe's discourse. Whereas the former focuses on the speaker's competence, the latter refers to the presence of several languages within a specific geographical area (cf. *ibid.*: 10). Multilingualism, i.e. according to the Council of Europe (2001: 4) "the co-existence of different languages in a given society", can be encouraged by providing the possibility of learning more languages at school or in an educational system than has previously been possible. One might also simply promote different languages at school, or decrease the use of English in international communication in order to attain multilingualism. The plurilingual approach, as defined by the Council of Europe, goes farther. It highlights the cultural dimension in language learning and emphasises that the languages an individual learns or has learned are not kept separate, but interact and allow their speaker to build up "a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact" (*ibid.*). The aim of language education is thus shifted from the achievement of complete

mastery of one or more languages to the development of a linguistic, a plurilingual repertoire. (cf. Council of Europe 2001: 4-5) The Council of Europe has taken the value of plurilingualism into account by not only basing language education policies on this fundamental concept (see chapter 3. “Language policies – Language education policies” of this paper), but also by developing instruments and tools, such as the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (see chapter 4. “Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment” of this paper) and the *European Language Portfolio* (see chapter 5. “The European Language portfolio and its realisation in Austria” of this paper), which allow for the acknowledgement of all linguistic and cultural experiences from early childhood onwards (cf. Language Policy Division 2007a: 40).

In conclusion, the Council of Europe’s stated purpose of plurilingual education is to develop the learner’s linguistic repertoire at various levels of proficiency. The responsibility of all European educational systems to make learners aware of their inherent ability to use different languages appropriately in given situations secures communication in Europe and, even more important, respect for and acceptance of linguistic diversity. Plurilingualism is thus to be seen as a shared goal that serves as a precondition for maintaining the multilingualism of communities. (cf. *ibid.*: 10, 38)

2.4. Intercultural competence

The acquisition of one or more language(s) in the process of socialisation is a fundamental element of the development of the feeling of belonging to a certain social and cultural group. According to the Council of Europe, “[t]he acquisition of language thus involves the acquisition of cultural competence” (Language Policy Division 2007a: 35). This close link between language and culture adds to the importance of a speaker’s plurilingual repertoire as he/she does not only further develop his/her linguistic competences throughout life, but also the awareness of other cultures and cultural groups enabling individuals to understand the values and traditions of other groups. Intercultural competence goes beyond mere linguistic understanding of different groups. According to the Council of Europe, intercultural competence refers to the individual’s “capacity to interpret another way of life and to explain it to those who live another” (*ibid.*: 36). (cf. *ibid.*: 35-36) Speaking of regional and religious *diversity* in this context does however not only refer to distinctive differences, but also to similarities between

the speaker's culture and that of the target community. Both have to be known and understood by both sides in order to speak of mutual understanding. Awareness of more cultures than solely the two (or more) cultures involved in a certain situation helps to place these two (or more) cultures in context and highlights different perspectives of the other. (cf. Council of Europe 2001: 103) Based on this view, the Council of Europe assigns a mediating role to teachers, travel guides, and diplomats. They are encouraged to act as intercultural mediators and encourage the development of intercultural competence which is thus to be seen as one of the potential goals of language teaching according to the Council of Europe. (cf. *ibid.*: 36)

3. Language policies – Language education policies

The Council of Europe's initiatives within the field of foreign language education are characterised by its concepts of and approaches to languages in general and foreign language learning and teaching in particular. This chapter therefore aims at discussing the Council of Europe's fundamental values and convictions regarding European foreign language education. It will present different types of language policies, highlight the Council of Europe's position in their context, and refer to the Council of Europe's founding texts to elaborate on its approach to all of Europe's languages. It will then focus on the Language Education Policy Profile (LEPP) process, on Austria's participation in this initiative, and finally discuss its consequences on Austria's foreign language education.

3.1. Approaching language policies

3.1.1. Language policy – language planning

Language policy and language planning might easily be seen as two terms that refer to the same action, one that involves some kind of intervention in a group's language use by an authority. The fact that both language policy and language planning might be abbreviated by the same acronym, namely *LP*, does not exactly encourage their distinction. However, although one can merge into the other along a continuum, language policy and language planning are two distinct aspects. Language planning refers to processes initiated by organised communities with the aim of “[...] consciously attempt[ing] to influence the language(s) their members use [or] the languages used in education [...]” (Ager 2001: 5).

Language policy, however, is a set of principles, “[...] language practices, beliefs and management decisions of a community or polity.” (Spolsky 2004: 9) As Dennis Ager (2001: 5, 177) points out, these official plans regarding language behaviour are developed by a political authority, thus sometimes showing similarities to other forms of public policies and aiming at the ideal of stability, the internal unity of the territories, as well as that of the whole state in order to guarantee social cohesion. The basic idea of stability in connection with language policies is also stressed by Elana Shohamy's (2006: 47) straight-forward formulation of the goals of language policies: “LP attempts to make order in society in terms of language use [...]”. Here, the concept of order is to be seen as opposed to conflicts that language policies could settle by dealing with the

question which language(s) should get status and priority in the society and by assisting in the protection, promotion or revival of marginalized languages. (cf. Shohamy 2006: 47) These definitions of and approaches to the term *language policy* are in line with that given by the Council of Europe in the *Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe*:

[...] language policy is a conscious official or militant action that seeks to intervene in language of whatever type (national, regional, minority, foreign, etc.) with respect to their forms (the writing system, for example), social functions (choice of language as official language) or their place in education. (Language Policy Division 2007a: 17)

The Council of Europe further stresses the importance of recognising that action on languages takes place in certain (social) contexts and is based on principles, such as national identity and economic or democratic issues, which give language policies a certain meaning. (cf. Language Policy Division 2007a: 17)

Thus, whereas language planning refers to conscious attempts aiming at influencing the language use of a certain community's members, language policy is less interventionist and is mostly concerned with principles regarding language use. A language policy might for example state how many languages should be learned or used officially, or might assign linguistic rights to certain groups, but rarely goes into detail on how these measures should be implemented. However, as mentioned above, the boundaries between language planning and language policy are not always clear cut. Shohamy (2006: 49) draws attention to the fact that especially language education policies, i.e. language policies concerning language teaching, often include a detailed account of the languages students are required to learn, the number of lessons per week, the teaching methods and learning targets, which makes it difficult to draw a distinct line between language policy and language planning.

3.1.2. Types of language policies

In an attempt to place the Council of Europe's language policy within the broad context of different types of language policies Gábor Boldizsár (2003) and his team working on the first medium term programme of the ECML refer to Juan Cobarrubias (1983: 63) who argues that every intervention into language behaviour is based on language ideologies. These reflect the treatment of one language group with respect to another and usually involve value judgements. Language ideologies are also closely connected to an ideal social group the formation of which is aimed at by the adaption of the

ideology. Cobarrubias (1983: 63-65) has identified four typical language ideologies motivating language reforms: linguistic assimilation, linguistic pluralism, vernacularisation and internationalism. The first two concepts deal with the relationship between two or more languages or language varieties within one state in order to decide which one(s) to recognise officially, whereas the latter two ideologies refer to the source of the standard, i.e. the area from which the standard is chosen.

The policy of assimilation demands that every member of a speech community should be able to use the dominant language. This assigns superiority to one linguistic variety and disregards non-dominant ones. Instances of linguistic assimilation can be found throughout the history of colonization, immigration, migration and nation-state-building. (cf. Cobarrubias 1983: 63-64) In contrast, a pluralist policy ensures the coexistence of different language groups and grants rights to linguistic minorities, as for example the right to maintain and cultivate their language. Linguistic pluralism can range from mere toleration of minority and regional languages, whereby their function can be restricted to certain functions and areas, such as education or religion, to official support of the languages under consideration. (cf. Cobarrubias 1983: 65) Cobarrubias (1983: 66) also elaborates on the vernacular ideology, which supports the restoration, revival or standardisation of a vernacular language used in a certain region and briefly describes internationalism, which involves the introduction of a universal language, for example English for the purposes of external and/or internal communication.

Denise Daoust (1997) includes these four principal ideologies into her discussion of language planning goals, and, in addition, describes a fifth one, namely purism. Being close to the ideology of linguistic assimilation it establishes an ideal form of a language, usually in its written form and set apart from the use of everyday language. This ideal form of language is supported by social institutions such as the education system, it is associated with specific aesthetic values and its mastery ensures social prestige. (cf. Daoust 1997: 443)

The Council of Europe distances itself from this and similar approaches by supporting the idea that linguistic pluralism should become dominant in Europe. It clearly defines the basis of its actions taken within the field of languages as one that relates

[l]anguage policies, language education policies and the linguistic ideologies which underpin them [...] to plurilingualism, [...] a fundamental principle of

Council of Europe language education policies. (Language Policy Division 2007a: 17)

It is on this basis that language policies and linguistic ideologies within Europe are examined by the Council of Europe. The Council of Europe critically points out that language policies currently often include a European dimension, but this latter does not always take the form of plurilingual education. The idea that state, nation and language are coterminous is still well represented in Europe. The national language(s) is/are seen as a crucial part of the definition of citizenship and its/their position is reinforced by the state's exclusive use of this one linguistic variety or several clearly defined varieties. Questions of pronunciation as a marker of social differentiation or as the source of the norm may seem essential problems from a national point of view, but are not relevant to the future of Europe as a whole. The theory that a nation is defined by the community who speaks a certain language – the so called model of the nation-state – does not reflect Europe's reality as political, linguistic and cultural frontiers are not identical (cf. Chapter 2.2. "Being European – more than a geographical term" of this paper). The Council of Europe notes and criticises that although the presence of varieties other than the national variety/varieties is/are sometimes recognised, this toleration originates in the felt necessity of the varieties' recognition in order to assure social harmony. They are mostly not encouraged for the sake of plurilingualism. The Council of Europe further warns that mere toleration of the coexistence of several linguistic varieties may only reproduce the problem of monolingual policies at local level. (cf. Language Policy Division 2007a: 18-22)

3.2. Language policy and language education policy at a European level

The Council of Europe clearly distances itself from linguistic principles used in nation-states by emphasising Europe's plural character and its characteristic as an area where numerous linguistic varieties are used and no single one can be defined as the one language of affiliation for all Europeans. It is not only economic needs that Europe must meet linguistically; it equally needs to take into account further interpretations of European cohesion, including cultural, social and political terms, as well as community identity issues. It is thus evident that although the choice of one or more official language(s) would serve economic purposes, as for example ensuring the free movement of goods and persons, it would at the same time have little effect on Europe's

cultural cohesion. The Council of Europe therefore stresses the importance of common linguistic principles rather than foregrounding common languages. (cf. Language Policy Division 2007a: 31)

These principles are the foundation of convergent language and language education policies making linguistic diversity and communication, as well as democratic citizenship within Europe compatible. It is therefore evident that the Council of Europe places language policies in the immediate context of social policies, having regard to national, regional, minority and foreign languages and their acquisition in order to ensure the development of competences for working life and social cohesion alike. The Language Policy Division (2009: 2-3) takes a step further when stating that

[...] it is clear [...] that language education policy is a dimension of social and economic policy at local, regional, national and European levels and must take into account questions of social inclusion and equity in general, and policies of education for democratic citizenship in particular.

Ideally, the feeling of belonging to Europe would thus evolve from a common European relationship with languages and people would no longer feel attached only to the one group speaking their mother tongue. (cf. Language Policy Division 2007a: 32-33)

At the centre of the Council of Europe's concept of language policy is the notion of plurilingualism (cf. Chapter 2.3. "Multilingualism - plurilingualism" of this paper) which is not only connected to the development of individuals' language competences, but also to the protection of minority groups, the creation of a common identity on the basis of democratic citizenship and the preservation of Europe's linguistic heritage by strengthening linguistic diversity and language rights. (cf. Language Policy Division 2007a: 31) Education in the spirit of democratic citizenship, social cohesion and intercultural dialogue must thus, according to the Language Policy Division (2006: 5), prioritise the capability of interacting in various languages across cultural and linguistic boundaries. The importance of these values has put language and language education policies increasingly into focus in the Council of Europe's work which has resulted in several projects and programmes aiming at introducing the Council of Europe's values into the national educational practices. Two of its main projects, namely the CEFR and the ELP, will be discussed at later points of the present paper. (cf. Chapters 4. "Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment" and 5. "The European Language Portfolio and its realisation in Austria")

3.2.1. Framing European language policies: the founding texts

The activities undertaken in order to guarantee the plurilingual foundation of Europe's society are carried out within the framework of numerous official Council of Europe documents. The conventions that will be reviewed in the following paragraphs provide a basis for language education policies by clearly stating the Council of Europe's fundamental attitude towards the linguistic situation within Europe. They also include concerns about education in general and language learning in specific as will be demonstrated.

Signed by the Council of Europe in Paris on 19 December 1954, the *European Cultural Convention* is the oldest document relevant in this context. The treaty provides the basis for developing mutual understanding within Europe and reciprocal appreciation of its cultural diversity. Language learning within the field of education is referred to in article 2, committing the parties to encourage the study of the other parties' languages and cultures:

Each Contracting Party shall, insofar as may be possible:

- a. encourage the study by its own nationals of the languages, history and civilisation of the other Contracting Parties and grant facilities to those Parties to promote such studies in its territory; and*
- b. endeavour to promote the study of its language or languages, history and civilisation in the territory of the other Contracting Parties and grant facilities to the nationals of those Parties to pursue such studies in its territory. (European Cultural Convention 1954: Article 2)*

The *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*, a convention signed in Strasbourg on 5 November 1992, protects and promotes regional and minority languages and thus constitutes an essential foundation for plurilingualism. Languages that are different from a state's official language(s) and spoken by a group of citizens within this state are to be respected, recognised, encouraged to be used in public and private life as well as in spoken and written interaction and promoted at universities. Furthermore, the parties commit themselves to eliminate unjustified distinction and promote mutual understanding between the speakers of the recognised languages. Areas in which the use of the regional or minority languages are to be promoted include, besides judicial and administrative authorities, media, cultural activities, economic and social life, and cross-border exchanges as well as education. The latter is elaborated on in article 8, which encourages the parties to make pre-school, primary, secondary, technical and vocational, higher and adult education, partly or totally available in the

language(s) under consideration and promotes the teaching of its/their history and culture. (cf. *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*)

Three years later, in 1995, the member states of the Council of Europe elaborate on the important role of minority languages in the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*. The convention, protecting national minorities and aiming at their equality, commits the parties

[...] to promote the conditions necessary for persons belonging to national minorities to maintain and develop their culture, and to preserve the essential elements of their identity, namely their religion, language, traditions and cultural heritage. (Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities 1995: Section II, Article 5, 1.)

It further stresses the right of each person belonging to a national minority to use and learn his/her minority language without any restrictions and encourages measures in the field of education, as well as intercultural dialogue, mutual respect and understanding among individuals, with no distinctions being made on the basis of someone's ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious identity. (cf. Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities 1995: Section II, Articles 6, 10, 12, 13, 14)

The growing awareness of the need for convergent language education policies within Europe has led to several Resolutions and Recommendations dealing specifically with language teaching. Unlike Conventions, these documents do not bind Member States who have ratified them and thus can only invite the governments of Member States to prioritise not only language learning, but linguistic diversity in their education systems and develop resources for lifelong language learning. (cf. Language Policy Division 2007a: 34-35) As early as January 1969, Resolution (69) 2 recommends an “INTENSIFIED MODERN LANGUAGE TEACHING PROGRAMME FOR EUROPE” (Resolution (69) 2: 7) putting emphasis on “modern” language courses based on contemporary and authentic teaching material, study visits, adult education and teacher training in recent developments of teaching methods. (cf. *ibid.*: 8-9)

With regard to this Resolution as well as to the European Cultural Convention, the Committee of Ministers adopted a recommendation concerning modern languages in 1982, Recommendation R (82) 18, to ensure that all members of a state have access to foreign language learning and their acquired skills help them to fulfil communicative needs. Furthermore, language teaching is recommended to be based on the learners’

needs and it is suggested that adequate facilities for migrants to learn the language of the host community are provided. At the same time, the recommendation (R (82) 18: D.10.2) stresses the promotion of the development of “their mother tongues both as educational and cultural instruments” and international cooperation concerning language learning and teaching. (cf. *ibid.*: A.1-2, D.10, F.14)

Although all of the above documents state the position of the Council of Europe on language education policy, Recommendation R (98) 6 may be one of the most relevant as it introduces the up-to-date terminology. The Governments of Member States are invited to “[p]romote widespread plurilingualism” (Recommendation R (98) 6: Appendix A.2) by encouraging the acquisition of communicative competence in several languages, the use of foreign languages to teach non-linguistic subjects, exchanges with other countries and lifelong language learning. (cf. *ibid.* A.2.1-2.7) It also includes further measures to be implemented concerning language learning and teaching, as for example raising awareness of Europe’s linguistic diversity from an early age onwards (*Ibid.* B.3), developing learning objectives (*ibid.* G.25) and making the study of more than one foreign language possible (*ibid.* C.9) to name only a few.

The idea of linguistic diversification, which is visible in this recommendation, is the main aspect of a further document, namely Recommendation R 1383 dating from 1998. Its devotion to linguistic diversification is based on the conviction that Europe’s diversity is a precious cultural asset that must be preserved:

Beyond the cultural and practical dimensions, a command of foreign languages is a decisive factor in understanding between peoples, tolerance of other communities, be they indigenous or foreign, and peace between nations, as well as being an effective barrier against the return of barbarity in its various guises. (Recommendation 1383 (1998): Article 2)

It draws the attention to the fact that a vast majority of pupils learn English at school, while other (European) languages with millions of speakers are only given a minor place in school curricula (cf. Recommendation 1383 (1998): Article 3) and also to the aim to “promote[s] knowledge by students of at least two foreign languages by the time they leave school” (*Ibid.*: 7.ii) which is frequently known as “mother tongue plus two”.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe recalls its own Recommendation 1383 three years later, in Recommendation 1539 on the European Year of Languages. Its objectives are “to raise public awareness of the need to protect and promote Europe’s

rich linguistic heritage” (Recommendation 1539 (2001): Article 2) and to raise awareness of the importance of “the development of plurilingualism, which should be understood as a certain ability to communicate in several languages, and not necessarily as perfect mastery of them.” (ibid.: Article 4) Based on these fundamental issues, the Parliamentary Assembly recommends they should aim “to maintain and develop further the Council of Europe’s language policy initiatives for promoting plurilingualism” (ibid.: 11.i) and “to develop [...] language policies, so as to ensure the quality of language teaching and learning and improve international co-ordination” (ibid.: 11.iii) on the basis of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR).

The use of the Council of Europe’s CEFR as well as the promotion of plurilingualism are recommended in a document of its own, namely Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)7, adopted on 2 July 2008. The CEFR is not only encouraged to be used to ensure “coherent, transparent and effective plurilingual education” (Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)7, Appendix 1 A.1.), but also as a “a reference tool for the development and implementation of coherent and transparent language education policies” (ibid. B.4.).

The above account of the most important documents expressing the Council of Europe’s fundamental position concerning Europe’s linguistic diversity is at the same time a brief history of developments, slightly changing terminology and foci within the field. Early programmes of international co-operation focused on the right of each person to speak his/her mother tongue and the importance of respecting Europe’s diverse cultural and linguistic heritage in order to assure social cohesion. These have been linked to and elaborated by specific emphasis on language education from very early onwards. Member states were encouraged to put learners’ needs and communicative competences in the foreground, assure teacher training on the basis of recent developments and design language learning and teaching in the context of international communication and exchange. While these ideas are continuously promoted, more recent documents and projects have stressed the political dimension of language learning by encouraging the development of convergent language education policies as well as teaching for democratic citizenship, the construction of a common European identity and aiming at a pluricultural and plurilingual Europe.

3.2.2. Aiming at plurilingualism - a competence and a fundamental principle

Numerous *Recommendations* of the Council of Europe have identified plurilingualism as a principle and an aim of language education policies. Plurilingual competence is however not only a necessary prerequisite for active participation in Europe's political and public life, but it also contributes to democratic behaviour by making aware and leading to acceptance of Europe's linguistic diversity. Education for democratic citizenship is, according to the Council of Europe, closely connected with language education policies as language teaching enables the experience of intercultural contact. Making the capacity for intercultural mediation as well as intercultural competence one of the aims of language education, the Council of Europe emphasises the position of the capacity to interpret another way of life, i.e. intercultural competence, as one that goes beyond mere cultural competence, the ability to live within one or more social group(s) acquired in the process of socialisation starting at birth. (cf. Language Policy Division 2007a: 35-36)

European (cf. Chapter 2.2. "Being European – more than a geographical term" of this paper) education systems need to facilitate the lifelong development of each individual's plurilingual repertoire, making sure that all languages are taken into account and that their acquisition or learning processes are interwoven. Furthermore, it has to be acknowledged that plurilingual competence does not mean perfect mastery of all the languages the speaker has access to, but his/her linguistic competences may vary in accordance with his/her needs. (cf. Language Policy Division 2006: 5) Plurilingualism is to be seen as an ability that all speakers have and it is the task of plurilingual (language) education to make everyone aware of the value of this linguistic and cultural repertoire and develop it either in formal educational settings or through autonomous acquisition. (cf. Language Policy Division 2007a: 39)

Although plurilingualism is a concept that puts the individual with its language repertoire in the foreground, measures to assure its appreciation have to be set on national and international levels. The Council of Europe attempts to bring these two perspectives together in its Language Education Policy Profile initiative that will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

3.3. Language education policy profiles

The Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe offers its member states assistance in the analysis of and reflection on their respective current linguistic situation. This activity, referred to as ‘language education policy profiles’, is designed to support states, regions and cities who wish to evaluate their policies with view to the Council of Europe’s fundamental principles. Including all languages in education, i.e. languages of instruction, modern languages and minority languages, the profile aims at the formulation of possible future developments. Their identification, however, is not based on an external evaluation by the Council of Europe, but is designed to be the result of a dialogue between the country’s, region’s or city’s authorities and a Council of Europe expert group. The role of the Expert Group is described to be that of a catalyst adding individual experiences and expertise, as well as the Council of Europe’s perspective, including policies, programmes and conventions, to the process of self-evaluation. This allows for the development of language education policies which are at the same time based on the specific needs and unique situation of each member state and set within the wider European context. This approach stresses the Council of Europe’s conviction that language education policies are inseparably linked to social policies and need to include local, regional, national and European dimensions. (cf. Language Policy Division 2009: 2; Language Policy Division 2007b)

In 2002-03 Hungary carried out the first of this kind of projects. Since then, 16 Profiles have been completed, 13 of them being Country Profiles (Hungary, Norway, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Lithuania, Poland, Ireland, Slovak Republic, Austria, Armenia, Estonia, and Ukraine in chronological order of completion), two of them being concerned with specific regions of member states (Aosta Valley in north-western Italy and Lombardy in northern Italy) and one dealing with the linguistic situation of a city, namely Sheffield in England. No Profile is underway at the moment. (cf. *Language Education Policy Profiles* online)

3.3.1. Procedures

3.3.1.1. Preparatory visit and composition of the Expert Group

The authorities of countries, regions or cities interested in a critical reflection of the role and status of different languages in their educational system are invited to contact the Language Policy Division by submitting an application to the Steering Committee for

Education. A correspondent/representative, ideally a member of the ministry or someone in a similar position, of the country/region/city is then appointed. His/her task is the co-ordination of the process and the mediation between the Council of Europe and the national/regional/local authorities. He/she will take on the role of the authorities' representative and thus contribute actively to the process by ensuring that all relevant information is at disposition, by arranging meetings, organising discussions and by accompanying the Council of Europe's Expert Group later in the process. Furthermore, he/she welcomes the Secretariat and Rapporteur of the Expert Group on their preparatory visit at the centre of which is the preliminary discussion between the authorities, the Correspondent, the author(s) of the Country Report and any other persons or institutions involved in the process. This discussion aims at an agreement on the outline of the Country Report, the timetable of the whole process and the composition of the Expert Group. (cf. Language Policy Division 2004a: 5-6)

The latter is decided upon based on the experts' knowledge and their experience concerning the education system of the country under consideration, as well as the needs and priorities and the language policy development of the country. The group consists of four experts from other Council of Europe member states (of whom one is appointed to be the rapporteur), one member of the Language Policy Division and, if necessary, one expert selected by the authorities. The fact that the language education policy profile is an activity foregrounding reflection and self-evaluation implies that the role of the Expert Group is one of a catalyst for discussion of issues that have been identified by the national, regional or local authorities. While the experts do not evaluate the linguistic situation of a country/region/city, they might give advice and identify areas that the authorities might want to investigate further. Concretely, their tasks are to study the Country Report, meet the authorities and participate in discussions, write the Experts' Report and draft the Language Policy Profile in co-operation with the authorities. (cf. *ibid.*: 7)

3.3.1.2. Country/Regional/City Report

Within six months after the preparatory phase the authorities have to approve and send their Country Report to the Council of Europe. This short report describing the current language education policy might be written either by one individual or by a team and follows general guidelines. These provide the authorities with an outline of what to

include to make sure the experts have all the relevant information they need and the account is both complete and comprehensible. (cf. Language Policy Division 2004a: 2)

Appendix 1 of the document “Language Education Policy Profiles: *Guidelines and Procedures*” (Language Policy Division 2004b: online) includes detailed suggestions for the structure of a Country Report and recommends that it be subdivided into three parts. The first section should provide the Expert Group with a factual description of the country, the second should focus on the country’s response to the Council of Europe’s language education policies and finally, the report should explicitly address issues upon the country wants the process to focus. Although the structure, as presented here, suggests that only the concluding section focuses on the country’s specific needs, the guidelines stress that only areas that the country considers to be priorities for the activity should be dealt with in detail, while other areas should only be given an overview. (cf. Language Policy Division 2004a: 2)

In detail, section 1 should present the context of language teaching including basic demographic data, an overview of all languages present in the country, i.e. official language(s), regional and minority languages, as well as foreign languages, and their respective status and role within the society. It should also elaborate on the organisation of formal language teaching by giving an overview on the structure of the education system and discussing obligatory and optional languages within this system. Furthermore and if possible, it is desirable to give a brief account of informal language learning and include statistics on the number of learners of various languages at different levels and their achieved levels of competence at the end of secondary school as well as details on teacher availability, education and methodological approaches predominating language teaching. (cf. Language Policy Division 2004b: Appendix 1 online)

Section 2 puts emphasis on the national realisation of Council of Europe policies with a particular focus on issues concerning the diversity of language learning and plurilingualism. The country is invited to analyse how Council of Europe projects and reference documents in the field of languages are implemented. Based on the insights of the previous sections, section 3 should be devoted to the country’s priority issues which are to be addressed during the language education policy activity. This final part may draw attention to discussions on future policy developments. (cf. *ibid.*)

The Country Report is then, during the following month, studied by the Council of Europe's Expert Group and further information, if necessary, is added. The authorities, the authors of the Country Report and the Expert Group interact closely at this time and finalise the plan for the visit of the Expert Group to the country.

3.3.1.3. Visits by the Council of Europe's experts and Experts' Report

The study of the Country Report is followed by a visit of the Council of Europe's Expert Group to the country. This five-day-visit is carefully planned in advance and comprises meetings of the experts and the authors of the report, discussions with people involved into language education and language policy, as well as visits to institutions. An oral summary of the first reactions is given at the end of the visit and a written report on the impressions of the Expert Group is drafted within the following five months. (cf. Language Policy Division 2004a: 6) This Experts' Report of about 40 pages is sent to the country's authorities who circulate it to relevant stakeholders. It is not made public, which means that it cannot be accessed on the Language Policy Division website whereas the Country Report and the following Profile can be. Like the latter, Expert's Reports introduce the profile process, analyse the current situation and refer to possible future developments. However, they are, unlike the Profiles, written by the Council of Europe's Expert Group and therefore strongly reflect their perspective. In order to discuss the results of the first visit, usually all the people that were involved in the first visit are invited to a Roundtable or forum for which the experts return to visit the country a second time. (cf. Language Policy Division 2009: 2, 14)

3.3.1.4. Language Education Policy Profile

Approximately six months after the Roundtable the Council of Europe's experts produce the so-called Language Education Policy Profile in close co-operation with the national authorities. Its structure is usually very similar to that of the Expert's Report, thus including an executive summary, and an explanation of the process and its aims, an analysis of the current situation as well as one of possible future developments and appendices referring to further information on the Council of Europe's documents and policies, its Expert Group, the national experts and the programme of visits. Although the Expert Group drafts the report, it is finalised in consultation with the national authorities who consider and approve the Profile. It is then made public on the website of the Language Policy Division and must be seen in close connection to the Country

Report, as both documents in combination represent the result of the Language Education Policy Profile process. Whether or not the Profile is published within the country in question, is a decision taken by its national authorities. It is also a matter for the country to translate the document from English or French into the language of the country. (cf. Language Policy Division 2009: 15)

As the whole process is one of self-evaluation and the Council of Europe defines its role as one of a catalyst and determinately distances itself from the one of an external evaluator, the Profiles cannot include recommendations to the country. However, the profiles can and do identify possible future directions and priorities that the country might want to discuss in order to implement Council of Europe concepts and policies. These issues often include the lack of an overall perspective on the direction the country's language education policy should take, the neglect of the potential of local educational institutions and their staff as policy makers and the need for a focus on teacher education, as well as on curricula. Although these issues cannot be classified as formal recommendations, the section dealing with tasks for the future is, in practice, used to make suggestions that reflect the Council of Europe's position. (cf. Language Policy Division 2009: 13, 15)

3.3.2. Austria's Language Education Policy Profile Process

3.3.2.1. Country Report

Austria started working on its Country Profile in 2006, under the overall co-ordination of what was then the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (*Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Kultur*, BMBWK). In March 2007, the Ministry was subdivided into the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture (*Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur*, BMUKK) and the Austrian Federal Ministry for Science and Research (*Bundesministerium für Wissenschaft und Forschung*, BMWF) leading to their close co-operation and a joint co-ordination of Austria's Language Education Policy Process, in which also the Austrian Centre for Language Competence (*Österreichisches Sprachen-Kompetenz-Zentrum*, ÖSZ) was involved. Both ministries approved the Country Profile on 28th February, 2007 and published it in 2008. Following a recommendation by the Council of Europe, an addendum on German as a mother tongue was officially added on 31st October, 2007. (cf. BMUKK, BMWF 2008a: 2)

As suggested by the guidelines of the Council of Europe (cf. Chapter 3.3.1.2 “Country/Regional/City Report” of this paper) Austria’s Country Report consists of three parts, the first one giving an account of the current language education situation, the second one analysing the implementation of Council of Europe concepts, documents and programmes and the third one focusing on three issues that have been identified as priorities and areas in particular need of action. Having made use of the Council of Europe’s offer to assist in the development of a language education policy, Austria succeeded at developing a basic overall concept of language learning and teaching, enhancing co-operation of various language related institutions, linking various activities and programmes, and raising the public awareness of the importance of languages and improving their status. (cf. BMUKK, BMWF 2008a: 10)

The context of language teaching in Austria

The first part of Austria’s Country Report comprises seven chapters and is designed not only to give the Council of Europe’s expert team an overview of Austria’s situation concerning the languages spoken and taught, but was also welcomed within Austria as an account that could help to improve language learning and teaching independently from the LEPP process (cf. BMUKK, BMWF 2008a: 9). To provide a solid basis for (language policy) developments in the following years Austria compiled information on its population and their languages spoken and described its educational system as well as its language policy and the legal basis of the languages spoken within the national boundaries. A further major chapter deals with language learning within the educational system and gives insights into the choice of languages the pupils have in each type of school which is illustrated by studies documenting which languages were chosen to be learned in various areas in the academic year 2004/05. Austria’s account of its current language education situation is concluded by a discussion of innovations in foreign language learning and measurements that have been taken to create a language-friendly environment. (cf. *ibid.*: 12-67)

This part of Austria’s self-evaluation, however, will not be elaborated on any further here in order to maintain the focus of this work. All of the information can easily be accessed in the Country Report.

Austria's reactions to European language initiatives

Part 2 of the Country Profile comprises chapters 8 and 9 which focus on the effects of European measures and programmes on Austria and their implementation. The document underlines Austria's consistent contribution to international language related projects. It equally stresses its commitment to topics and measures suggested by the Council of Europe by claiming that "practically each of the innovative programmes of the Council of Europe has left its mark on the Austrian system of education" (BMUKK, BMWF 2008b: 72). In this context, the influence of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* on Austrian curricula and learning material, as well as the development of Language Portfolios and national standards have to be mentioned and elaborated on at a later point in this paper (cf. Chapters 4.4.2. "The CEFR in Austria" and 5. "The European Language Portfolio and its realisation in Austria"). (cf. BMUKK, BMWF 2008a: 70)

One of Austria's major contributions to international language work is the foundation of the **European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML)** in Graz in 1994. As has been mentioned in chapter 2.1.1. "The European Centre for Modern Languages", Austria was one of eight states (Austria, France, the Netherlands, Malta, Greece, Slovenia, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein) that, between 1990 and 1993, set activities preparing the founding of a European centre for foreign languages within the framework of an Enlarged Partial Agreement of the Council of Europe meaning that both, member states as well as non-member states of the Council of Europe can join if they wish to do so. (cf. BMUKK, BMWF 2008a: 25) Today, 31 states cooperate in the Graz centre and thus assure its stability and influence alike as one of the three parts of the Council of Europe's Department of Language Education and Policy (cf. *ECML in the Council of Europe* online). Closely linked to the ECML and also presented in Austria's Country Report is the **Austrian Centre for Language Competence** (*Österreichisches Sprachen-Kompetenz-Zentrum, ÖSZ*) which will not be discussed again at this point of the present paper. Rather, reference to its description in Chapter 2.1.2. "Österreichisches Sprachen-Kompetenz-Zentrum" shall be made.

The Country Report (BMUKK, BMWF 2008a: 71) however stresses that Austria is not only actively involved in language-related initiatives by the Council of Europe, but participates equally in those initiated by the European Union, as for example the

European Language Label that Austria has supported since it was set up in 1997. The European Label, in Austria referred to as *Europäisches Spracheninnovationssiegel* (ESIS), is awarded each year to the most innovative language learning programme of each of the – at present - 31 participating countries. Designed to encourage new learning and teaching techniques, promote language learning and raise standards of language teaching across Europe, the Label is managed by the individual states that may add specific criteria to the ones of the European Commission. (cf. *European Language Label* online; *Europäisches Spracheninnovationssiegel ESIS* online)

A joint realisation of the European Union and the Council of Europe was the **European Year of Languages (EYL)** in 2001 which was not only an international success, but equally influenced Austria's perception of and approaches to languages. According to the report (BMUKK, BMWF 2008a: 71) 500 activities dealing with over 70 languages were set in the course of this special year in Austria and numerous links between various institutions, including ministries, the world of business, the media, towns and communities, were created. In order to pursue these activities, the European Day of Languages has been held on 26th September each year since 2002. Until present, 829 activities to mark the European Day of Languages have been recorded in Austria¹, 110 of which took place only in 2012. Austria's numerous events on the European Day of Languages form about a fifth of all activities set in Europe on the occasion of 26th September².

The **Austrian Language Committee** (*Österreichisches Sprachengremium, ÖSKO*) was founded in December 2003 in order to assure that the networks created during the European Year of Languages are still strong and widespread. It is a forum based on the co-operation of organizations and experts within the field of languages and plurilingualism who aim at the successful implementation of language education policies by involving a maximum of stakeholders from a variety of educational sectors and business. (cf. ÖSZ 2011: 1)

Issues for discussions from an Austrian perspective

Austria wished to address three areas in need of special attention in its language education policy profile process, namely early language learning, the problem of contact

¹ Cf. http://www.oesz.at/sub_main.php?page=bereich.php?bereich=5-tree=21 → ETS-Veranstaltungen → Veranstaltungsübersicht [25/10/2012]

² Cf. <http://www.oesz.at/ets-videowettbewerb> [25/10/2012]

points between various educational stages and pre-service as well as in-service training of teachers. (cf. BMUKK, BMWF 2008a: 80) As stated in the Country Report, early language learning refers to pre-school language education and language learning in primary schools. Both stages clearly need an all-Austrian framework assuring transparency and quality in early language education. This national co-ordination must aim at plurilingualism as an educational opportunity and needs to take into account that kindergarten and primary school teachers are a very important link between parents and educational institutions. They need support in their work with parents and need training in cultural awareness, intercultural competence and language awareness in order to deal with and facilitate plurilingualism. Whereas Austria is aware of the need to react to these issues, the open questions ask how all this should be realised. (cf. BMUKK, BMWF 2008a: 83-88)

Pre-service and in-service teacher training not only in the early years of education is an issue that Austria wants to make one of its priorities in the language education policy profile process. Language awareness and plurilingual competence have to be facilitated in all educational institutions and at all stages of language learning. However, teacher training and education in Austria is taken care of by several institutions that do not sufficiently co-operate. Besides criticism of this fact, the Country Report raises the question of how this institutional isolation could be avoided. Furthermore, Austria expressed its wish to address the concept and design of plurilingual didactics for any kind of initial teacher training and expresses the wish for a mandatory module helping future teachers dealing with plurilingualism as well as with German as a second language. (cf. *ibid.*: 97, 101)

Institutional isolation in Austria is taken up again in the context of the third area of national emphasis, namely what is referred to as contact points, i.e. stages of change from one school or educational institution to another. As relevant institutions are not legally bound to co-operate, continuity in language learning is often neglected and pre-knowledge of languages is ignored or falsely appraised. This gap between various educational institutions is even larger because of the fact that teacher education in Austria is dispersed over several institutions. (cf. *ibid.*: 93-94) In its analysis of trends and issues of language education policy profiles the Language Policy Division (2009: 10-11) briefly mentions that collaboration between teachers of all languages as well as

between educational institutions is largely under-developed in practice. Whereas it is usually the Expert Group who raises this issue in the context of the Council of Europe's holistic vision of language education, the Council acknowledges that Austria was already concerned about coherence and continuity at the beginning of its language education policy profile process.

3.3.2.2. *Country Profile*

Following the Council of Europe Expert group's study of the Country Report and their visit in May 2007, a roundtable-event was organised in the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture in March 2008. The experts presented and discussed their impressions of Austria's language education policy with the national stakeholders who were invited to provide feedback on the report. The Country Profile, together with the Country Report, was published at the end Austria's language education policy profile process in 2008. (cf. Language Policy Division et al. 2008: 82) The Profile takes up the three issues that Austria identified as priorities in its Report, i.e. early language learning, teacher education and training and continuity in language learning, and devotes a chapter to each of them. Furthermore, bilingual education, neighbouring languages and special support for children with first languages other than German are dealt with. These issues originate in the Minister of Education's speech at the beginning of the language education policy profile process in which Dr. Claudia Schmied referred to three areas that she wished the Profile to address. (Language Policy Division et al. 2008: 90)

The Council of Europe complements Austria on its numerous examples of good practice within the field of language learning and teaching and its innovative initiatives alike. It stresses Austria's active participation in international projects, underlines its position as host-country of the ECML in Graz, foregrounds its pioneering role in working with the CEFR and the ESP, and refers to the existence of the institutions ÖSKO, ÖSZ and CEBS (*Center für berufbezogene Sprachen*) which show Austria's commitment to language education. Despite the praise, the Council of Europe points out some areas of criticism within the key issues of the present educational situation in Austria. The dominance of English as the foreign language being taught at schools is one of them. Another is the lack of a strong tradition of research into language learning and teaching which does not only need to be established at universities, but its results also need to be

made available to other educational institutions responsible for teacher training. (cf. Language Policy Division et al. 2008: 87-88, 100-101)

More in-depth and large-scale statistical data is also required in the field of **early language learning**. The Council of Europe argues that empirical information describing different programmes, approaches and their results would provide the foundations for an overall concept of early language learning and teaching. If adopting a competence-oriented approach, Austria needs to devote more time to language teaching in school and needs to make sure the pupils' linguistic pre-knowledge is included in language learning processes at any level. Furthermore, it has to look at achievements at the end of primary school. (cf. Language Policy Division et al. 2008: 91, 94) Barbara Buchholz's study (2007: 136) evaluated English as a foreign language education at Austria's primary schools and showed that 50% of the pupils were not capable of communicating orally at an A1 level when they left primary school. She ascribes this fact to the lack of language competence in primary school teachers, and their insufficient knowledge of language didactics and language pedagogy. Child-focused assessment, including portfolio elements, might help to diagnose and individualise learning and teaching processes in order to improve the adequacy of pre-school and primary school language teaching, define and meet nationwide standards, and set framework conditions. (cf. Language Policy Division et al. 2008: 91, 95)

The Council of Europe continues to discuss the language learning and teaching situation in kindergarten and primary schools in the following chapter, but sets the focus on **education and training of teachers** at various educational institutions. It suggests, among other things, to consider an overall concept of language and cultural awareness as part of basic teacher training, as well as one of plurilingual didactics for all types of initial teacher training. Again, the lack of co-operation between different institutions is criticised and the development of research focused on language learning and teaching is strongly recommended. (cf. *ibid.*: 2008: 101-103)

The third area that Austria wanted to pay special attention to in its language education policy process is **continuity**. The Council of Europe supports Austria's endeavour to develop educational standards and link them to the CEFR in order to ensure coherence and transparency alike. Although these efforts and the development of the standardized school leaving exam (*standardisierte Reifeprüfung*) (cf. Chapter 4.4.2.3.

“Standardisierte Reifeprüfung” of this paper) are certainly a step towards a more competence-based approach, the ELP (cf. Chapter 5. “The European Language Portfolio and its realisation in Austria” of this paper) must not be ignored in this context and has to be considered as one part of the solution to the problem of discontinuity. The numerous portfolio models might help in planning local language education policies and track their implementation as well as assist in promoting the learners’ individual plurilingual competence. Besides the development of educational standards and the active use of the ELP, the Council suggests considering a thorough revision of language curricula and enhancing effective communication between the different educational levels as well as between teachers of the same school. (cf. Language Policy Division et al. 2008: 104-107)

In the following, the Council of Europe recalls that the LEPP-process should include all languages of education, not solely minority and foreign languages. Although Austria added an addendum on the role of German in its educational system to the Country Report, it was neither part of the original version of the report nor was it considered an issue that required special attention in the discussions following the LEPP-process. However, the Country Profile clearly states that all languages of education, “including support for German L1 and L2 learners and migrant L1s” (Language Policy Division et al. 2008: 108) need to be considered to ensure access to education and thus full participation in society as well as social cohesion. (cf. *ibid.*)

The Council of Europe thus strongly supports the suggestion made in the Country Report (BMUKK, BMWF 2008a: 115), namely to include German as mother tongue in the ÖSKO’s field of action. The ÖSKO’s central role in finding answers to the questions raised in the policy process is undisputed, but the Council indicates that careful thought needs to be given to its relationship with the ministries. In conclusion, the Profile refers to some of the short-term measures resulting from the LEPP process: enhancing intercultural training and developing skills and knowledge within the field of German as a second language in teacher education, increasing language competence of future primary school teachers, and supporting programmes dealing with German as both second language and mother tongue. Central importance needs also to be attached to language education research, interdisciplinary co-operation, teacher education and training and curricula. (cf. Language Policy Division et al. 2008: 120-121)

3.3.2.3. Conference

The content of the Country Profile as well as the proceedings and further results of Austria's LEPP process were presented at the conference "Unsere Gesellschaft ist mehrsprachig – unsere Bildung auch? Maßnahmen für ein Gesamtkonzept sprachlicher Bildung in Österreich", which took place in Graz on 4th and 5th December 2008. The meeting was however not only a recapitulation, but also the first step towards the realisation of the overall concept of language education in Austria. More than 200 experts in the fields of language and education participated and discussed measures to improve Austria's language education. (cf. ÖSZ 2009: 7)

Ideas were developed in various workshops that followed the opening remarks and speeches, among others one was led by one of the members of the Council of Europe's Expert Group, David Little. Their topics were set according to the fields of action identified during the LEPP process: facilitation of language learning in the pre-school and school sector, development of research into language learning and teaching, (initial) teacher training, and encouragement of bilingual education. (cf. *ibid.*: 5) The results of the workshops, often discussions of the status quo, aims and open questions, were summarised in the conference report and form the basis for future developments in these fields.

3.4. Immediate consequences of the LEPP process in Austria

3.4.1. ÖSKO neu

One of the demands of the LEPP process was met on 14 June 2011 with the opening event of the *ÖSKO neu*, an initiative of the BMUKK in co-operation with the ÖSZ and contributions from the BMWF. However, not only these two ministries are devoted to plurilingualism by supporting the initiative, but also 36 partner organisations from the fields of education and business stress the importance of plurilingualism by contributing to the *ÖSKO neu*. The aim of all of them is to develop and sustain interinstitutional co-operation, strengthen the status of languages in society and mobilise the resources of a plurilingual community to create benefit for education and business. (cf. *Auftaktveranstaltung am 14.Juni 2011* online)

These efforts are made within the framework of working programmes over several years, which do not solely commit to plurilingualism as an important resource, but ground their work on a mission statement based on the necessity of discussions on

current developments concerning language education policy, their monitoring and making the population aware of the importance of languages and plurilingualism. (cf. *ÖSKO - Mehrsprachigkeit fördern* online) A first focus is the discussion and implementation of issues addressed in Austria's LEPP process. The Country profile, one of the results of the initiative, offers various stimuli for national follow-up activities that are to be specified and designed in the first working programme (2011-2013) of the *ÖSKO neu*. In the months leading up to June 2011, priority fields of action were defined and initial ideas on possible measures collected. After their presentation and specification at a conference on 1 June 2011 the stakeholders were free to choose on which issues they wished to work in detail. These teams are not only responsible for the development of specific measures, but also for their implementation. The *ÖSZ* monitors the process and brings together their results, which will be presented and discussed at a conference dealing with the national implementation of the LEPP in autumn 2013. (cf. *ÖSZ 2011: 1*)

One of the three fields of action of this programme is initial and in-service teacher training and education for which the suggestions of the Council of Europe address both the content and quality-issues. In this context, the latter refers to the need for teachers to be competent in their handling of plurilingualism, which implies a reinforced awareness of plurilingualism and language education for all teachers. Changes in the curricula of initial teacher training are as necessary as the support of the teachers' plurilingual repertoire and their plurilingual competences in order to assure the facilitation of language and cultural education of learners. (cf. *ÖSZ 2011: 1*) One of the numerous inputs and possibilities of improvement was elaborated and entitled "Maßnahme A1 'Mehrsprachigkeit in der PädagogInnenbildung NEU'". Its aim is to encourage co-operation between the institutions responsible for teacher training and ensure that languages and plurilingualism are at the core of their curricula. (cf. *ÖSZ 2011: 6*)

The definition of *Handlungsfeld B*, the second field of action, reacts to the Council of Europe's repeated criticism that Austria lacks tradition of research into language learning and teaching. Entitled "Gelingensbedingungen für die Förderung von Mehrsprachigkeit an Institutionen/in Regionen", it aims at the development of curricula based on a holistic concept focusing on plurilingualism, diversification and intercultural competence. The research on prerequisites of successful promotion of plurilingualism is

equally fundamental for approaching the problem of a lack of cohesion between educational stages. (cf. ÖSZ 2011: 8) The measure taken in this field, referred to as measure B1, is a survey of research into language learning and teaching as well as into plurilingualism. It aims at presenting and visualising the complex relations between questions within society and findings of scientific research, problems and their solutions, linguistics and didactics as well as between universities. Its findings, an overview of Austria's research position, will be accessible online on a platform (www.sprachenlandkarte.at) and will provide its users with target-oriented knowledge to put the theory into practice. (vgl. *Sprachenlandkarte* online)

The third field of action is devoted to monitoring and raising awareness. The measures taken in this area are initiatives investigating the implementation of the results of the LEPP process (measures C1 and C3) and at the same time aim at improving the presence of the ÖSKO and its work (measure C2) in the public arena. (cf. ÖSZ 2011: 11) Whereas measure C1, initiated by parent representatives within the ÖSKO, analyses the implementation of the LEPP process in schools, measure C2 deals with the public awareness of plurilingualism and aims at the development of ideas to highlight the potential of plurilingualism. At the end of the ÖSKO working programme 2011-2013, the ÖSZ, the BMUKK, the BMWF and further partners of the ÖSKO will organise a conference, entitled "LEPP-Umsetzungskonferenz 2013", presenting the results of all of the above programmes and thus focusing on the implementation of the results of the LEPP process. (cf. *ibid.*: 11-14)

3.4.2. Curriculum Mehrsprachigkeit

Alongside the ÖSKO neu Rudolf de Cillia and Michaela Haller (2012: 26) mention the *Curriculum Mehrsprachigkeit* as immediately resulting from the LEPP process. Its development, commissioned by the Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture, meets the Council of Europe's demand to develop an overall concept of language education. Supported by the ÖSZ, the curriculum was developed by Prof. Hans-Jürgen Krumm (University of Vienna) and Prof. Hans H. Reich (University of Konstanz) between 2009 and 2011. It defines interdisciplinary learning targets designed to enhance the development of each individual learner's plurilingual competence and raise awareness of the fact that plurilingualism can be supported in language and non-language classes alike. (cf. *Curriculum Mehrsprachigkeit* online)

The curriculum sees itself as one building block in the process of the LEPP results' implementation with the emphasis being upon

[...] valuing and developing the ability of all individuals to learn and use several languages, to broaden this competence through appropriate teaching and through plurilingual education, the purpose of which is the creation of linguistic sensitivity and cultural understanding, as a basis for democratic citizenship. (Language Policy Division et al. 2008: 83)

As such it sets specific aims based on the overall aims identified throughout the LEPP process and attempts to bring language learning in schools and the concept of lifelong learning together. Furthermore, it constitutes a collection of and overview on teaching and learning aims that are currently scattered in numerous documents, such as various curricula and their analyses. (cf. Krumm, Reich 2011a: 4)

The *Curriculum Mehrsprachigkeit* suggests dedicating one to two lessons per week to plurilingualism, which is considered to be an important component of general education. It is therefore not to be seen as an additional competence that only some pupils need to acquire, but may be integrated into the teaching of various subjects, may be taught as part of one subject and as part of another subject in the following year or may be established as an independent subject. (cf. *ibid.*: 10-11) The curriculum's content is organised according to Austria's educational system and respects the child's development of his/her language awareness. Whereas the pupils at primary level should be encouraged to reflect upon their experiences with languages in their environment, plurilingual education at secondary level takes more and more the form of systematic learning. It includes comparative language analysis, techniques and autonomy in language learning, critical thinking and includes geographical, cultural and personal factors. (cf. *ibid.*: 7) This allows for plurilingual classes to build a common basis for all kinds of language learning within a school and enables the pupils to deal with plurilingual situations without ignoring social and cultural contexts. (cf. *ibid.*: 8-9)

Krumm and Reich (2011b: 1) draw attention to the problem of teachers' lacking competence to assist their pupils in developing their individual plurilingual repertoires and suggest taking the current discussions on the reorganisation of initial teacher education (cf. Chapter 3.4.3. "PädagogInnenbildung neu" of this paper) as an opportunity to make this qualification accessible to all teachers. Their proposition of how these general competences could be developed and integrated into teacher education and training at university level follows the Council of Europe's

recommendation to consider a mandatory “general concept of language and cultural awareness” (Language Policy Division et al. 2008: 101) within the framework of initial teacher training. Krumm and Reich also address the following question which was raised in the Country Report and included in the Country Profile as recommended for consideration: “What might a concept of plurilingual didactics look like, for all types of initial teacher training?” (ibid.). This “concept of plurilingual didactics” takes a more specific form than the above mentioned “general concept” and is addressed as “specific competences” (“spezifische Kompetenzen” (Krumm, Reich 2011b: 1)) in Krumm and Reich’s proposal of implementation of the *Curriculum Mehrsprachigkeit*. Whereas the Council of Europe recommends integrating this more specific concept into all types of initial teacher training, Krumm and Reich argue that specific competences need to be developed by all language teachers (“spezifische Kompetenzen, über die alle in sprachlichen Fächern tätigen Lehrkräfte verfügen sollten” (ibid.: 1)). Non-language teachers do not need to develop these specific competences, but must nevertheless be familiar with the basic concepts of their pupils’ development of plurilingual competences. The teachers thus need to develop general competences (“Grundqualifikation für alle Lehrkräfte unabhängig vom jeweiligen Unterrichtsfach“ (ibid.)) that raise their awareness of the fact that language education as well as non-language education build on the learners’ language competences and contribute to their plurilingual competences (cf. Krumm, Reich 2011a: 3). Krumm and Reich (2011b: 2) repeatedly stress the need for compulsory modules within the framework of teacher education and training which enable future teachers to acknowledge the role and value of plurilingualism within the school. However, they restrict the need for methodological knowledge to language teachers:

[...] so dass sichergestellt ist, dass alle angehenden Lehrkräfte die Bedeutung der sprachlichen Bildung und die Rolle der Mehrsprachigkeit in einer Schule der Chancengerechtigkeit reflektiert haben und alle Sprachlehrenden im muttersprachlichen, im Zweitsprachen- ebenso wie im Fremdsprachenunterricht über das dafür erforderliche Grundlagenwissen und ein methodisches Instrumentarium verfügen. (ibid.)

This methodological knowledge includes, among others, the application of language comparison techniques, the ability to analyse multilingual situations, and the competence to encourage learners in their use of language portfolios (cf. ibid.)

Based on the distinction between general competences (that need to be developed by all teachers) and specific competences (that need to be developed by language teachers) they suggest two modules, one being mandatory for all future teachers and one that only language teachers have to complete. The former is designed to illustrate the role of languages in learning processes, to raise awareness of the learners' linguistically and culturally heterogeneous backgrounds, their importance to the individual child's development and their potential in classrooms. It also aims at encouraging teachers to include the cultural and linguistic diversity within the classroom into their teaching and use it as a resource as opposed to seeing it as a problem. The second module focuses on practical activities for language teachers in linguistically heterogeneous groups. They should be encouraged to develop the above mentioned methodological knowledge which enables them to analyse multi- and plurilingual situations, compare languages and supervise the use of language portfolios. (cf. Krumm, Reich 2011b: 2-3) A third module that is based on the previously mentioned two aims at a specific qualification enabling teachers who wish to do so, to give lessons focusing on plurilingualism: "eine spezielle Fachqualifikation für die Erteilung des Mehrsprachigkeitsunterrichts bzw. die Wahrnehmung spezifischer sprachbezogener Funktionen" (ibid.: 1). These competences include counselling of learners, parents and colleagues, analysing an individual's linguistic competence, and applying the *Curriculum Mehrsprachigkeit* to the institution's situation and needs. (cf. ibid.: 3)

Based on Krumm and Reich's *Curriculum Mehrsprachigkeit*, the ÖSZ - in co-operation with experts in the field of teacher education and training - aims at developing a first module in the years 2012/2013, which can be integrated into initial teacher training and education. (cf. *Curriculum Mehrsprachigkeit* online)

3.4.3. PädagogInnenbildung neu

The re-organisation of teacher training and education at university level is based on various recent processes and projects as for example the efforts to implement the Bologna structure at Austria's universities, the growing public interest in better-quality initial teacher training and new organisational approaches in Austria's educational system (cf. *LehrerInnenbildung NEU* online). Although the results of the LEPP process cannot be claimed to have triggered the present developments in university teacher training and education, some of the Council of Europe's issues for discussion can be

found in recent documents on the envisaged changes, as the processes partly took place simultaneously and discussions are still in progress. This chapter will therefore consider to what extent the Council of Europe's recommendations have been followed in the discussions and whether they have been integrated into the *PädagogInnenbildung Neu*.

Since 2009, the BMUKK and BMWF have worked on a new organisation of teacher training and education, aiming at improving its quality, providing a framework for all types of teacher education, developing a mandatory aptitude test and conforming Austrian teacher education to international standards. At the end of February 2012 the two ministries established the *Entwicklungsrat*, an expert group assigned to develop the curricular structure of the new teacher education programme. Its most recent proposition (Entwicklungsrat 2012) suggests bachelor's and master's degree programmes for future teachers at all types of schools. In addition to the two degrees, the education programme includes a third part, which requires the students, after they have obtained their BA, to complete one or two years of mentored on the job training. The bachelor's degree programme – as it is currently planned to be implemented in the academic year 2014/2015 – is going to offer the opportunity to focus on a specific pedagogical field, as for example bilingual or inclusive education or media pedagogy. This possibility certainly enhances the diversification of curricula that the Council of Europe invited universities to consider “[...] so that graduates are better equipped to respond to the challenges of new language-related management tasks” (Language Policy Division et al 2008: 103). The consideration of this issue is also clearly visible in the plans for the organisation of the master's degree programme, which puts “certain additional pedagogical and administrative functions” (“zusätzlich bestimmte pädagogische oder administrative Funktionsaufgaben” (Schnider et al. 2011: 8)) at the centre of attention and enables the students to specialise in certain areas of education.

The suggested curriculum draft also tries to realise a phase of “common (initial) foundation training” (Language Policy Division et al. 2008: 101) by devoting a quarter of the workload that has to be completed within the bachelor's degree programme to courses that have to be attended by future teachers of all types of schools. Half of these courses, which are going to comprise 60 ECTS, are identical for all students, the other half focuses on the particularities of the educational institution the students wish to teach in. This new organisation of teacher education and training complies with the

Bologna-structure (Bachelor - Master - PhD) and this facilitates mobility and internationalisation. It equally disburdens people wishing to change careers by facilitating their start at university. According to the BMUKK (*Pressekonferenz "Pädagog/innenbildung NEU"* online), the new teacher education meets the demands that teachers are confronted with at present by putting competence orientation at its core. The development of the following competences is considered to be necessary: general and specific pedagogical competences, subject knowledge and didactic competence, inclusive and intercultural competences, social skills, advisory skills, and professionalism. (cf. *ibid.*)

Finally, the re-organisation of teacher training and education also envisages enforcing inter-institutional co-operation (cf. *Entwicklungsrat für PädagogInnenbildung 2012: 3*). However, in their written comment, the *Fachdidaktisches Zentrum - Sprachlehr- und -lernforschung*, an expert team of the Faculty of Philological and Cultural Studies at the University of Vienna, has already stated that the co-operation between universities and tertiary colleges of education (*Pädagogischen Hochschulen*) has shown to be difficult in the past and the universities' principal role in research must be maintained. Fearing degradation rather than the desired improvement in the quality of teacher training and education, they reject the concept in its current form. (cf. *Fachdidaktisches Zentrum Sprachlehr- und -lernforschung 2012 online*)

The envisaged changes of the curricula will be made autonomously by the universities, whereas the tertiary colleges of education will follow a graduated scheme. First programmes aimed at career changers will be realised in 2013/14 and teacher education following the new curricula will start in 2014/15. According to the BMUKK the new organisation of primary teacher education will have been implemented in 2015/16, and that of secondary level teacher education in 2016/17. Pursuing a master's degrees will be possible from 2019/20 onwards at the latest. (cf. *Pressekonferenz "Pädagog/innenbildung NEU"* online)

3.4.4. Salzburger Zentrum für Sprachlehrforschung

In their foreword to the written report of the closing conference of Austria's LEPP process the ministers Dr. Claudia Schmied and Dr. Johannes Hahn proudly presented the - at the time of the report's publication on-going - plan to establish a centre for language teaching research at the University of Salzburg. This follows the Council of

Europe's recommendation to invite universities to develop a research culture in the field of language learning and teaching. This research should comprise excellence research as well as small-scale studies designed to meet local needs and should equally ensure long-term stable research structure by developing a project-based approach and establishing various programmes in language education research at different institutions. (cf. Language Policy Division et al. 2008: 103)

The Center for Multilingual Learning and Teaching Research (*Zentrum für Sprachlehrforschung SaZS*) is thus an immediate consequence of Austria's participation in the LEPP initiative, which is also clearly stated on its website. The centre started its operations on 1st October 2009 and has since then concerned itself with the aim of connecting findings originating from linguistics and research into language teaching in order to improve the acquisition of language competences and raise awareness of the importance and value of plurilingualism. In close connection to its projects the SaZS also develops a specific university calendar for all students of languages as well as measures to improve teacher training. The fact that its co-ordination team is set up by experts from various departments stresses the focus on collaboration between institutions as well as the communication among researchers acting in the fields of different languages. (cf. *SaZS Profil* online, Universität Salzburg 2009 online)

4. Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment

4.1. Origins: the Council of Europe's involvement in language teaching and learning

The Council of Europe's involvement in language teaching and learning has, according to Little (2006: 174), always been politically, culturally and educationally motivated. Its educational efforts have aimed at the promotion of its fundamental values: defending human rights and parliamentary democracy, guiding political, legislative and constitutional reforms to face European challenges and promoting awareness of a common European identity (cf. *The Council of Europe's objectives* online). Language teaching and learning has played an important role in these efforts and still does at present as language learning is seen as the key to mutual understanding, cultural exchange, and mobility within Europe. The early 1970s were characterised by two concerns resulting from the idea of learning a language for communicative purposes: to analyse learners' needs and to describe what a learner needs to be able to do in order to fulfil those needs. The felt need for a unit/credit scheme for adult language learners resulted in developments within the field of foreign language learning focusing on the analysis of learners' needs, the elaboration and promotion of the concept of autonomy in foreign language learning and the definition of a 'threshold level' which was designed to meet the needs of adult learners of English. *The Threshold Level* and its successors however, shall not be elaborated on in this context as this would go beyond the scope of the present paper. What is important to note at this point is the fact that *The Threshold Level*, as an instrument of needs analysis, followed the model of communicative competence and adopted an action-oriented and learner-centred approach. It is thus in direct line with *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment* (CEFR), the Council of Europe's most recent descriptive document designed to set a framework for foreign language education. (cf. Little 2006: 174-177)

The CEFR was published in two draft versions in 1996. The feedback received formed the basis of the following revision and the document was finally commercially

published in English and French in 2001³, the European Year of Languages. A German version followed in the same year and at the time of writing (February 2013) (cf. Little 2006: 167) the Language Policy Division (2013 online) refers to 38 language versions of the CEFR on its website, including Arabic, Albanian, Armenian, Basque, Bulgarian, Catalan, Chinese, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Esperanto, Estonian, Finnish, French, Friulian, Galician, Georgian, German, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Lithuanian, Moldovan, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Serbian (Iekavian version), Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish and Ukrainian. Two more, namely Macedonian and Romanian are in translation and the adaptation of certain parts of the CEFR to the French sign language⁴ is mentioned separately as a use of the CEFR in a “specific context” (CEFR online).

Given the fact that educational matters responsibility lies with the Council of Europe member states, it is the task of the relevant national authorities and publishers to promote the respective language version(s) of the CEFR. The Committee of Ministers adopted a Recommendation on “the use of the Council of Europe’s Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the promotion of plurilingualism” (Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)7) in 2008 which invites, but does not oblige, the member states to “create and/or maintain conditions favourable to the use of the CEFR” (Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)7, Appendix 1 A.1.) as a reference tool and to encourage everyone, persons as well as authorities, involved into the educational system or language learning in general to follow the principles the CEFR is based on. (cf. Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)7, Appendix 1 A.2.4., B.4.)

4.2. What is the CEFR?

4.2.1. Principles and purposes

Whereas the Council of Europe has made its wish for the adoption of the CEFR very obvious, it stresses that the document “is exactly what its title says it is: a framework of reference” (CEFR online), thus underlining its descriptive character. Rather than prescribing practitioners what to do, or how to do it, the Council of Europe clearly states

³ Council of Europe. 2001a. *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Council of Europe. 2001b. *Cadre européen commun de référence pour les langues : apprendre, enseigner, évaluer*. Paris: Didier.

⁴ Ministère de l’Education nationale. 2002. *Langue des signes française : Adaptation de certaines parties du CECR (version française) pour la langue des signes française (LSF)*.

that the function of the CEFR is to raise questions, not to give answers or define objectives that need to be pursued and methods that should be employed (cf. Council of Europe 2001: xi). Keith Morrow (2004: 7) describes the fact that the CEFR is descriptive rather than prescriptive as its most important characteristic. He argues that this has already been implicit in the original aim of the CEFR project, which was to facilitate “mutual recognition of qualifications, and communication concerning objectives and achievement standards [...] according to agreed common reference standards, purely descriptive in nature” (Trim 2001: 5 quoted in Morrow 2004: 6). However, the CEFR has shown to go beyond this original aim. According to Morrow it addresses teachers, course designers, curriculum developers, and examination boards and invites them to reflect on their current practice. (cf. Morrow 2004: 6-8) In the Council of Europe’s words the document is intended to

[...] provide[s] a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe. (Council of Europe 2001: 1)

Based on the Council of Europe’s conviction that language learning should be organised based on the learners’ needs, motivations, characteristics and resources, the CEFR describes what language learners need to learn to be able to use a language to communicate and what knowledge and skills they have to develop to act effectively in a foreign language situation. This latter aspect also raises the issue of the cultural context which is inseparably linked to language. (cf. *ibid*) In spite of this wide description included in the CEFR, its best known and most frequently used parts are, as Little (2006: 167) argues, the common reference levels. They allow to measure the learners’ language proficiency at various stages of learning as well as to monitor their development on a life-long basis.

By providing a common basis for the description of language competence the CEFR intends to facilitate mutual recognition of qualifications and thus encourage job mobility within Europe while facilitating communication among language professionals by offering a common reference despite the numerous different national educational systems. Desirable consequences of this international communication are national reflection on current practices and, if necessary, re-orientation towards the learner, as well as international co-operation in the field of modern languages and enhancement of transparency of courses and syllabuses. (cf. Council of Europe 2001: 1)

4.2.2. The CEFR in the context of the Council of Europe's policy

Little (2006: 169) stresses that it is important to note that although the Council of Europe emphasises the CEFR's descriptive nature, the document is nevertheless bracketed by the Council of Europe's policy and the Council's efforts to achieve the aims and objectives pursued by its policy. By providing the common basis for international co-operation, the elaboration of language curricula, teaching and learning materials and examinations alike, the CEFR "serve[s] the Council of Europe's political, cultural and educational agenda" (ibid.) and despite denying that is prescriptive, it is "far from neutral" as Frank Heyworth (2008: 13) states. The use of the verb to serve is also highlighted by Michael Byram and Lynne Parmenter (2012: 3) who argue that the fact that the CEFR, "serves the overall aim of the Council of Europe" (Council of Europe 2001: 2) as it is stated at the beginning of the document, implies that it must be an instrument of policy.

Byram and Parmenter (2012: 3) point out that it is only at first sight that the CEFR seems not to impose particular approaches and methods. They find that this impression is created by the CEFR's numerous invitations to readers to review and form their own view on what has been presented. This is done by the formula "Users of the Framework may wish to consider and where appropriate state [...]" (Council of Europe 2001: 40, 42, 46 and many more) followed by some questions relating to what the reader has read previously. In their "Executive Summary of results of a survey on the use of the CEFR at national level in the Council of Europe Member States" Waldemar Martyniuk and José Noijons (2007: 7) found that the CEFR is often used as an "exclusive neutral reference" (ibid.). This suggests, according to Byram and Parmenter (2012: 3), that many users of the CEFR are neither aware of the values attached to the CEFR nor of its consequential function as a policy document. The latter is made obvious by the Council of Europe's clear emphasis on – and obvious allocation of value to – plurilingualism, the "rich heritage of diverse languages" as a common resource, the promotion of "European mobility, mutual understanding and co-operation" as well as to the importance of developing national policies aiming at "greater convergence at the European level" (Recommendation R (82) 18. 1982 quoted in Council of Europe 2001: 2). In the course of the Intergovernmental Language Policy Forum in 2007 the CEFR was defined as a

[...] descriptive rather than a standard-setting document [that] allows all users to analyse their own situation and to make the choices which they deem most appropriate to their circumstances, while adhering to certain key values. (Council of Europe 2007: 7)

Hence Byram and Parmenter (2012: 4) conclude that “[t]he CEFR is clearly a policy document bearing values and intentions” and name it as one example of recent policy documents, namely an “extra-national policy” (Ibid.: 263) (cf. Byram, Parmenter 2012: 4, 262-263). This view is confirmed by Neil Jones and Nick Saville (2009: 53) who refer to it as an “instrument of policy”, developed by the Council of Europe and adopted by the EU.

4.2.3. Structure and content

The Council of Europe is eager to stress that the adherence to its values does not interfere with the creation of an open and neutral framework. Emphasising that “the Council of Europe is not in any way retreating from the principles” (Council of Europe 2001: 18) the document sets out the aims, objectives and functions of the CEFR in light of the Council of Europe’s overall language policy in its first chapter. It furthermore defines the criteria such a document is supposed to satisfy.

The second chapter serves the explanation of the approach adopted. This approach is “generally speaking, [...] an action-oriented one in so far as it views users and learners of a language primarily as ‘social agents’ [...] who have tasks [...] in a given set of circumstances [...]” (ibid.: 9). This implies a close connection of language and its situational use: acts of speech occur within language activities and language activities form part of a social context which gives them their full meaning. Language is thus used to accomplish tasks and achieve a given result by the speaker’s intentional use of his/her competences which might be of linguistic nature, but are not restricted to language resources. Cognitive, emotional and volitional resources, which the speaker as a social agent has at his/her disposal, are equally taken into account by the action-based approach. (cf. ibid.) However, the action-based approach is not the only approach the CEFR promotes for foreign language education. It equally stresses learner-centeredness and the importance of the development of a plurilingual repertoire (cf. ibid.: 4-5; Chapters 2.3. “Multilingualism - plurilingualism” and 3.2.2 “Aiming at plurilingualism – a competence and a fundamental principle” of this paper). Besides outlining the CEFR’s action-based approach, the framework’s second chapter deals with important

terms and concepts the CEFR is based on. Its synopsis anticipates them and thus gives a very informative first approach to the document's content: The CEFR is based on analysis of

[...] language use in terms of the strategies used by learners to activate general and communicative competences in order to carry out the activities and processes involved in the production and reception of texts and the construction of discourse dealing with particular themes, which enable them to fulfil the tasks facing them under the given conditions and constraints in the situations which arise in the various domains of social existence. (Council of Europe 2001: XV emphasis in the original)

The words that are highlighted form the basis of the CEFR's description of language use and the learners' abilities to use language. They are taken up in the form of headings especially in chapter 4, which, similarly to chapter 5, is devoted to presenting the scheme of categories for the description of language use, including the context (referring to questions of domains, situations, conditions and constraints and mental contexts of the learner/user as well as of the interlocutor/s), communication themes, communicative tasks and purposes, communicative language activities and strategies (see Table 1 for the CEFR's subdivision of language activities), communicative language processes (including planning, execution and monitoring) and texts, dealing with different media and possible text types that could be encountered by a language learner/user. (cf. *ibid.*: 43-100)

Productive activities		Receptive activities			Interactive activities	
Oral production (Speaking)	Written production (Writing)	Aural reception (Listening)	Visual reception (Reading)	Audio-visual reception	Spoken	Written interaction
Mediating activities: oral and written mediation						

Table 1 Communicative language activities (cf. Council of Europe 2001: 57-87)

In the following, chapter 6 relates to the purposes of language learning, asks how language teachers, authorities, textbook writers and assessors can facilitate the development of necessary abilities and addresses methodological options for language learning and teaching. The latter is further developed by an elaboration on the role of tasks in chapter 7. Chapter 8 examines the implications of linguistic diversification for curriculum design and, in this context, discusses issues such as plurilingual competence and life-long language learning. The final chapter, chapter 9, considers the role and purposes of assessment and outlines ways the CEFR can be used within this broad field.

Despite the wide variety of concepts addressed, the core of the CEFR is undoubtedly (cf. Little 2006: 169; Morrow 2008: 8; Heyworth 2008: 16) its best known part, namely the scales of descriptors of language proficiency, especially the Common Scale of Reference, often referred to as the global scale. The global scale (Council of Europe 2001: 24) is a description of what a language learner can do at six levels ranging from ‘basic user’ (A1, A2) through ‘independent user’ (B1, B2) to ‘proficient user’. The ‘can do’ descriptors of the global scale function as a reference point for descriptions of levels and achievement as well as for definitions of objectives, as Morrow (2008: 8) points out. In contrast to the scales that are presented later in the CEFR, the global scale does not explicitly distinguish between the different learner’s competences but provides an overview of what he/she can understand and do. Whereas traditionally, language proficiency has been described in terms of the four skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening), the CEFR’s classification is threefold, distinguishing between writing, understanding and speaking. Understanding is subdivided into listening and reading and speaking is subdivided into spoken interaction and spoken production. This subdivision leads to the five skills that are distinguished by the Council of Europe. The classification of the competences is visualised in the self-assessment grid (Council of Europe 2001: 26-27) which is based on the global scale (cf. Heyworth 2008: 16). Making use of the first-person point of view, it describes what a learner/user of a language can do at a specific level, within a specific language activity. It does not, however, include mediation and audio-visual reception (despite their definition as communicative language activities – cf. Table 1 of this paper) and, while distinguishing between spoken interaction and spoken production, it does not maintain the distinction between written interaction and written production. These two activities are summarised by the term ‘writing’.

The CEFR provides more detailed descriptors in illustrative scales in the following chapter, chapter 4. These scales are referred to as “additional more specialised scales” by Heyworth (2008: 17) who furthermore states that they complement the global Common Reference Scale by providing instruments for targeted teaching of communication skills by describing not only communicative activities, but also communicative strategies and communicative language competences (cf. *ibid.*: 17-18). Little (2006: 169) points out that, whereas the scales describing communicative behaviour are user- or learner-oriented (because they describe in a positive wording

what the learner can do in his/her target language (cf. Council of Europe 2001: 37)), the scales of competences and strategies are designed for teachers and assessors, aimed at diagnosis and assessment and focus on aspects of quality of the performance that is expected (cf. *ibid.*: 38). The learner's communicative language competences and strategies, as well as contexts of language use, as domains, situations, conditions and constraints, mental contexts, themes and communicative tasks, and purposes are referred to as horizontal dimension of the CEFR's descriptive scheme. (cf. Little 2006: 168-169) However, "much more attention has been paid to the 'vertical' than to the 'horizontal' dimension of language learning", as Little (*ibid.*: 184) remarks. The vertical dimension uses 'can do' descriptors based on empirical research in order to define the CEFR's six levels of communicative proficiency. Nevertheless, Little (*ibid.*: 169) stresses that the scales are multidimensional and despite the present focus on the global scale, the self-assessment grid, and the illustrative scales for the language activities, it must not be forgotten that these scales should be read together with the scales of linguistic competence/language quality⁵ and the strategic scales⁶. The levels, according to the Council of Europe (2001: 17) "can take only limited account of the fact that learning a language is a matter of horizontal as well as vertical progress". The CEFR stresses that progress in learning a language is not merely a question of moving up a vertical scale of proficiency, but must equally take into account that the learner acquires the competence to act in a wider range of communicative activities and activate skills to fulfil the demands of a particular communicative situation by the means of strategies. (cf. *ibid.*)

4.3. Potentials and challenges

The approach taken by the CEFR is based on the conviction that learning a language involves more than grammar and vocabulary, namely sociolinguistic and intercultural competences as well as different strategies to act within a communicative situation. Heyworth (2008: 14) argues that such an approach runs the risk of assuming that knowing a language is equal to understanding and respect and that language proficiency

⁵ For the qualitative aspects of spoken language use see CEFR/Table (Council of Europe 2001: 28-29); for scales dealing with communicative language competences (general linguistic range, vocabulary range, vocabulary control, grammatical accuracy, phonological control, orthographic control, sociolinguistic appropriateness, flexibility, turntaking, thematic development, coherence and cohesion, spoken fluency, and propositional precision) see CEFR/Chapter 5.2. (Council of Europe 2001: 108-130)

⁶ For scales dealing with planning, compensating and monitoring and repair see CoE 2001: 64-65; for the scale dealing with identifying clues and inferring (spoken and written) see CoE 2001: 72; for scales dealing with turntaking, co-operating and asking for clarification see CoE 2001: 86-87

excludes the language user from intercultural prejudice. However, he equally points out that this objection to the CEFR misses the point as “the common reference levels, and the emphasis on a broad range of competences, is to provide resources to make this approach to language education feasible.” (Heyworth 2008: 14)

Criticism of the CEFR has come from different sides. The issue of reader-friendliness and the efforts needed to mediate its content and concepts to users are pointed out by Martyniuk and Noijons (2007: 8) as well as by Figueras (2012: 482) and Julia Starr Kedde (2008: 52). In addition to criticising that the document is not an easy read, Figueras (2012: 483) refers to the findings of the Dutch CEFR Construct Project the purpose of which was to describe the construct of reading and listening for English, French, and German by applying the open and flexible CEFR to a certain situation and making adaptations for it. The findings of the projects were intended to form the basis of test items and whole tests. (cf. Alderson et al. 2006: 4-5) The intensive work of the project team on the wording of the descriptors highlighted problems of four types. Firstly, inconsistencies were revealed. These refer to features that are mentioned at one level but not at another or, in contrast, similar descriptions that are found at different levels. (cf. *ibid.*: 9-10) Secondly, J. Charles Alderson et al. (*ibid.*: 10-11) identified terminology problems, i.e. the use of different words which have the same meaning but are not clearly identified as synonyms which raises the question whether the CEFR intended a synonymic use or a slight distinction. This links to the third problematic issue, namely the lack of definitions of frequently used and important words, such as *simple*, *very simple*, *frequent*, *predictable*, *highly colloquial* and *specialised* to name only a few (cf. *ibid.*: 12). Similarly, Martyniuk and Noijons (2007: 8) identify a “need for general clarification” concerning theoretical concepts, examples and specific contexts and suggest the development of a bilingual terminology glossary for each country to ensure a clear and consistent use of the CEFR’s terminology. Finally, the Construct Project made aware of gaps within the document. These were identified when a concept is mentioned in general terms but is not distinguished according to the six levels and incorporated into the scales, as for example the lacking discussion of how tasks can be distinguished by level (cf. Alderson et al. 2006: 12-13). Although the Dutch CEFR Construct Project succeeded in developing a framework for analysing and developing language test items and examinations based on the CEFR, the authors conclude that “the CEFR does not provide sufficient guidance to enable item writers to

develop tests at specific levels of the CEFR.” (Alderson et al. 2006: 21) They stress that the CEFR is clearly more user-oriented than constructor-oriented despite its claim of being targeted at language users, assessors and constructors alike. (cf. Council of Europe 2001: 37-39; Alderson et al. 2006: 21)

Inconsistencies within the CEFR – although at another level than those identified by Alderson et al. (2006) - have also been discovered by Starr Keddle (2008: 49). She points out that the CEFR challenges language curricula that delay working with past tenses by stressing the communicative yield of grammatical categories. However, whereas the concept of past is referred to at level A2 (e.g. “describe [...] past activities” (Council of Europe 2001: 34, 59), “basic descriptions of events, past activities” (ibid.: 62), “answer questions about [...] past activities” (ibid.: 81)), the concept of future is not included in the scales, except in the descriptor of level A2 “make arrangements to meet” (ibid.: 33, 77). Starr Keddle (2008: 49) finds that “[t]hese omissions strangely contradict the principles of the authors of the CEF” and goes even further arguing that there is no consistent approach to grammar by pointing out that the descriptors are not linked to concept areas which makes it hard to link grammar and performance. (cf. ibid.)

However, the move away from grammar work originating in the focus on learner language contributes to a communicative language practice (cf. Chapter 4.2.3. “Structure and content” of this paper), as Starr Keddle (ibid.: 43) points out. The CEFR stresses the importance of measuring a learner’s performance in terms of what they can be expected to achieve and not against the proficiency of a native speaker. The descriptors allow an imperfect use of language by defining what is appropriate for a learner at a certain level without referring to competences he/she has not yet developed as features that are lacking in his/her performance. Moving away from grammar and towards competences also makes comparison between performances in different language easier as there is no need to find equivalencies in grammar any more. (cf. ibid.: 45-46)

As the present account of potentials and challenges of the CEFR is by no means supposed to be exhaustive, one last issue of criticism should be addressed. Figueras (2012) and Starr Keddle (2008) include different perspectives on the use of the CEFR in their discussion of challenges raised by the Framework. Whereas Starr Keddle argues

that the CEFR is not necessarily suited to language learning at school, Figueras (2012: 483) points at various misuses of the CEFR arising from its perceived usefulness. He criticises that the CEFR was developed in the context of foreign language learning but has been used widely, also with L1 and with languages for specific purposes. Starr Keddle (2008: 50) goes even further when stating that even in the field of foreign language learning the CEFR is not suited to all contexts. The assumption that the language user at A1 level gets help from his/her interlocutor in order to be able to interact, requires a speaker at a higher level of competence than the language learner which is improbable in a classroom setting. The CEFR does not take account of this learning context which “can, sadly, make the CEF seem irrelevant to classroom achievements.” (Starr Keddle 2008: 50)

Whereas using the CEFR in the classroom certainly poses some challenges, it does have advantages as well. Its focus on what can be done with language puts language learning in the immediate context of the real world instead of keeping it limited to the unnatural use within the classroom. Starr Keddle (2008: 45) argues that language learning certainly benefits from this focus on situational and functional language use as well as from the focus on skills and strategies that has been brought to the foreign language classroom by the CEFR. (cf. *ibid.*)

Despite the criticism of the CEFR and the challenges posed by it, Starr Keddle (2008: 43) finds that she is “both an enthusiast and a critic.” The CEFR’s “value as a reference tool to coordinate the objectives of education at all levels is widely appreciated” (Martyniuk, Noijons 2007: 7) but there is widespread consensus (cf. Figueras 2012: 483-484; Martyniuk, Noijons 2007: 7-8; Starr Keddle 2008: 50-52) that user-friendly materials for mediating the CEFR to ensure comprehension, banks of test items for specific language skills and age-specifications of certain levels need to be developed to fully exploit the potential of the CEFR.

4.4. Impact

4.4.1. Europe-wide observations

The CEFR’s significant impact on language teaching and learning in Europe and beyond is undoubted today. Numerous authors and researchers have pointed out its influence and rapid and widespread uptake, as for example Martyniuk (2012: 1) who speaks of a “major impact on language education”, J. Charles Alderson (2007: 659) who

states a “considerable impact in Europe and beyond”, Figueras (2012: 477) who discusses the “unquestionable influence” of the CEFR and many more (Goullier 2007: 36; Little 2007; Béréšová 2011). Before analysing the CEFR’s impact on Austria’s foreign language education in secondary schools, this chapter shall briefly consider the general impact of the Framework in a wider context, even though this can only be done approximately, as Little (2006: 178) states. He argues that the impossibility of defining the worldwide consequences of the CEFR is on the one hand due to the anecdotal nature of its evidence which makes it difficult to evaluate whether or not something is an official consequence of the CEFR. On the other hand the CEFR’s impact is international and has prompted research and publications in different countries and languages which makes it impossible for one person to overview the impact of the CEFR and results in the necessity of an extensive network of researchers for its systematic study. (cf. *ibid.*) Nevertheless, Little (2006: 178; 2007: 648) briefly indicates the general range of the CEFR’s impact by pointing out that, although the Framework was designed for “the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc.” (Council of Europe 2001: 1), its application to testing and assessment far outweighs its impact on curriculum and course design and pedagogy. This influence is most visible in commercial language tests, as in the case of the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) which quickly associated its tests with the six level scales. The impact on national examinations however, as for example school-matriculation exams, is much smaller. (cf. Little 2007: 648-649)

The most recent study on the use of the CEFR in the Council of Europe member states was carried out between May and September 2006. Its aim was to gather information on the use of the CEFR at national level in as many states as possible and use the results as input during the Policy Forum “The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the development of language policies: challenges and possibilities“, which took place in Strasbourg from 6 to 8 February 2007. (cf. Martyniuk 2012: 1) The executive summary of the results of the survey, by Martyniuk and Noijons (2007), shows that the CEFR has proved most useful for the planning and the development of curricula. 26 out of the 30 states that completed the questionnaire declared the CEFR to be *very useful* or *rather useful* for this purpose. They highlighted the learner-centred and action-oriented approach, the concept of lifelong learning as well as those of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism as most useful but also referred to

the lack of detail of some descriptors and the need for additional sub-levels as problems in connection with the common reference levels. (cf. Martyniuk, Noijons 2007: 5-6)

Nearly equally important and useful, with 87% of the respondents viewing it as *very useful* or *rather useful*, was the CEFR considered to be in its function as guide for the development of testing, assessment and certification. Despite the wide acknowledgement of the importance of levels, scales and proficiency descriptors for testing on a national level, the answers (although it has to be borne in mind that the data are from 2006) showed that several countries had not yet used the Framework for this purpose, had done so only for a limited number of exams, or had only pointed out the CEFR's use in connection to self-assessment. (cf. *ibid.*: 7) These findings are consistent with Little's (2012: 645) argument that the CEFR's impact on language testing is considerably higher than its impact on other areas.

The third and final context of use the questionnaire addressed was the use of the CEFR for teacher education and training. The Framework was considered to be *very useful* or *rather useful* by 21 countries, mainly for defining the language proficiency of teachers. Some countries however, stated that they included the Framework in the entire pre-service and in-service teacher training, whereas others referred to a specialised CEFR-based teacher training. (cf. Martyniuk, Noijons 2007: 6)

Martyniuk and Noijons (2007: 7) summarise the findings of the survey by stating a "major impact" of the CEFR on language education in Europe and Eastern Asia. They stress the generally perceived importance as reference document for the development of practical teaching material, of curricula and language policy documents alike but also raise awareness of the countries' need for general clarification, user-friendly material in all areas, as well as the need to familiarise more teachers with the document. (cf. *ibid.*) Due to reasons pointed out above, this study could only give an overview of the Europe-wide impact of the CEFR. In order to get more detailed results the focus has to be shifted from a European perspective to a national one which has, among others, be done by Byram and Parmenter (2012) who edited a volume comprising contributions on policy and academic perspectives on the CEFR from various countries.

4.4.2. The CEFR in Austria

The above mentioned detailed results of the CEFR's consequences within the national educational systems of the Council of Europe member states will in this subchapter be considered in light of Austria's situation. The CEFR is claimed to be used as a reference document for "basically all" ("[...] wird praktisch für alle [...]") (Horak et al. 2010: 19)) innovative developments in the field of Austria's foreign language teaching and learning, including the curricula, the *Bildungsstandards für Fremdsprachen* (standards for foreign languages) as well as the school-leaving exams for which the German term *standardisierte Reifeprüfungen* will be used in the following discussion. These three areas reflect the implementation of the CEFR on a system level, its learner-centred implementation in the form of the European Language Portfolio will be dealt with in Chapter 5. "The European Language Portfolio and its realisation in Austria" later in this paper. (cf. Horak et al. 2012: 19)

4.4.2.1. Curricula

Reading Austria's curricula for foreign language education in secondary schools of general education (*Hauptschulen* and *Allgemein bildende höhere Schulen*), their connection to the CEFR can be seen at first glance in the section defining the subject matter, the *Lehrstoff* (Lehrplan AHS Unterstufe Lebende Fremdsprache: 4; Lehrplan AHS Oberstufe Lebende Fremdsprache: 4; Lehrplan HS Lebende Fremdsprache: 4). This part of the various curricula first states that the communicative partial competences the learners are expected to develop are defined according to the CEFR's six-level classification of language proficiency. It then gives details on the levels that will be referred to in the respective curriculum by stating what the learners can do, subdivided according to the five competences. The curricula lay down the expected levels of competence after each year of language learning. This has been visualised in Tables 2-5 on the following pages:

	Listening	Reading	Spoken interaction	Spoken production	Writing
First year of learning (5.Schulstufe)	A1	A1	A1	A1	A1
Second year (6.Schulstufe)	A2	A2	A1	A1	A2
Third and fourth year (7./8.Schulstufe)	A2, selected descriptors from B1	A2, selected descriptors from B1	A2	A2	A2, selected descriptors from B1

Table 2 *Sekundarstufe 1*, 1st foreign language - Level of competence the learners are expected to achieve

	Listening	Reading	Spoken interaction	Spoken production	Writing
Fifth year of learning (9.Schulstufe)	B1	B1	B1	B1	B1
Sixth year (10.Schulstufe)	B1	B1	B1	B1	B1
Seventh and Eighth year (11./12.Schulstufe)	B2	B2	B2	B2	B2

Table 3 *Sekundarstufe 2*, 1st foreign language - Level of competence the learners are expected to achieve

	Listening	Reading	Spoken interaction	Spoken production	Writing
First year of learning (7.Schulstufe)	A1	A1	A1	A1	A1
Second year (8.Schulstufe)	A2	A2	A1	A2	A2
Third year (9.Schulstufe)	A2	B1	A2	A2	A2
Fourth year (10.Schulstufe)	B1	A2	A2	A2	B1
Fifth and sixth year (11./12.Schulstufe)	B2	B1	B1	B1	B1

Table 4 *Sekundarstufe 1+2*, 2nd foreign language - Level of competence the learners are expected to achieve

	Listening	Reading	Spoken interaction	Spoken production	Writing
First year of learning (9.Schulstufe)	A1	A2	A1	A1	A2
Second year (10.Schulstufe)	A2	A2	A2	A2	A2
Third and fourth year (11./12.Schulstufe)	B1	B1	B1	B1	B1

Table 5 *Sekundarstufe 2*, 2nd foreign language - Level of competence the learners are expected to achieve

However, Austria's curricula do not only refer to the Common Reference levels when defining the subject matter, but are, as a whole, built on general important principles of the CEFR. One of the most essential features of the CEFR is certainly its action-orientated approach (cf. Chapter 4.2.3. "Structure and content" of this paper). The idea that language is an instrument to be used to perform actions in order to achieve a result in a social context is equally reflected in Austria's curricula, where the aim of foreign language education is defined as enabling learners to act in real-world as well as in classroom situations: "Ziel des Fremdsprachenunterrichts ist [...] die Schülerinnen und Schüler [zu] befähigen, Alltags- und Unterrichtssituationen in altersgemäßer und dem Lernniveau entsprechender Form situationsadäquat zu bewältigen" (Lehrplan AHS Unterstufe⁷: 1; Lehrplan Hauptschule Lebende Fremdsprache⁸: 1). At secondary level language education aims further. It is targeted at enabling learners to meet the communicative demands in private and public life and behave appropriately according to linguistic and cultural conventions. (cf. Lehrplan AHS Oberstufe⁹: 1) Austria's adoption of an action-oriented approach in foreign language education is also visible in the fact that communicative competence, as pre-condition of successful communication, is defined as the overarching goal ("Kommunikative Kompetenz als übergeordnetes Lernziel" (Lehrplan AHS Unterstufe: 2; Lehrplan AHS Oberstufe: 2; Lehrplan Hauptschule Lebende Fremdsprache: 2)). This emphasis shifts the focus of language learning away from error-free communication to the accomplishment of a communicative task.

⁷ Bildungsministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur (BMUKK). 2006. *Lehrplan der AHS, Unterstufe, Lebende Fremdsprache (Erste, Zweite)*.

⁸ Bildungsministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur (BMUKK). 2008. *Lehrplan der Hauptschule, Lebende Fremdsprache (alle Sprachen)*.

⁹ Bildungsministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur (BMUKK). 2006. *Lehrplan der AHS, Oberstufe, Lebende Fremdsprache (Erste, Zweite)*.

The conviction that errors are a natural and necessary attribute to language learning is made explicit in Austria's curricula: "[...] dass Fehler ein selbstverständliches Merkmal des Sprachenlernens sind" (Lehrplan AHS Unterstufe: 2; Lehrplan AHS Oberstufe: 2)). Following the CEFR's definition that "[e]rrors are due to an 'interlanguage'" (Council of Europe 2001: 155) the curriculum for foreign language education at lower secondary level acknowledges that errors are "evidence of the learner's willingness to communicate despite risks" (ibid.: 155) (cf. Lehrplan AHS Unterstufe: 2; Lehrplan Hauptschule Lebende Fremdsprache: 2) and encourage teachers and assessors to judge them with respect to the learner's level. (cf. ibid; Lehrplan AHS Oberstufe: 2)

This is not the only instance the Austrian curricula for foreign language education adopt a learner-centred approach. The curriculum aimed at the upper secondary level stresses the importance of learner-centred methods in general and the need for a diversity of methods to ensure that different pre-conditions regarding types of learners, learning styles and the learner's pace as well as his/her social competences and general strengths and weaknesses are taken into consideration. (cf. Lehrplan AHS Unterstufe: 2; Lehrplan AHS Oberstufe: 2; Lehrplan Hauptschule Lebende Fremdsprache: 2) It is furthermore the task of foreign language education to develop the learners' study skills in order to facilitate autonomous and lifelong learning:

Der Fremdsprachenunterricht hat darüber hinaus die Aufgabe, fachliche Grundlagen, Lernstrategien und Lerntechniken für den weiteren selbstständigen Spracherwerb, insbesondere im Hinblick auf lebensbegleitendes und autonomes Lernen, zu vermitteln und zu trainieren. (Lehrplan AHS Unterstufe: 1)

The above quote does not solely illustrate the importance of the development of study skills, which are referred to as "the ability to make effective use of the learning opportunities created by teaching situations" by the Council of Europe (2001: 107), but also brings in aspects of life-long learning and autonomy, both being central elements of the CEFR. The Framework stresses the lifelong nature of language learning and the necessity of promoting 'learning to learn': "once teaching stops, further learning *has* to be autonomous" (ibid.: 5) and situations enabling the learners to "become increasingly aware of the way they learn, the options open to them and the options that best suit them" (ibid.: 141) should be created in the frame of foreign language education.

As has been demonstrated throughout the previous chapters, all of the Council of Europe's involvement into language learning happens in the context of plurilingualism

and pluriculturalism (cf. Chapter 2.3. “Multilingualism – plurilingualism” of this paper). This is especially visible when reading the CEFR with all its efforts to diversify and intensify language learning to promote plurilingualism (cf. Council of Europe 2001: 4). The importance of the plurilingual approach is highlighted in the Austrian curriculum for foreign language education at lower secondary level and the encouragement of the learner’s positive attitude towards plurilingualism and linguistic diversity is demanded: “Die Förderung einer positiven Einstellung zu individueller Mehrsprachigkeit und Sprachenvielfalt ist auf mannigfache Weise anzustreben.” (Lehrplan AHS Unterstufe: 3; Lehrplan Hauptschule Lebende Fremdsprachen: 3) This however, is not only to be made a priority in language education, but also in other classes. Bilingualism or plurilingualism should have a positive connotation and learners should be encouraged to make contributions in their respective first language. (cf. Lehrplan AHS, Allgemeiner Teil¹⁰: 5; Lehrplan Hauptschule, Allgemeine Didaktische Grundsätze¹¹: 1)

Equally, the learners’ awareness of the link between language and culture (cf. Chapter 2.4. “Intercultural competence” of this paper), should be raised. The curricula point at the fact that language and culture inevitably form the speaker’s world-view and makes their discussion an aim of general education (cf. Lehrplan AHS, Allgemeiner Teil: 3; Lehrplan Hauptschule, Allgemeine Didaktische Grundsätze: 4). They describe foreign language learning as useful and necessary for both approaching foreign cultures and reflecting on cultural diversities and values. Foreign language education should thus contribute to a peaceful co-existence (cf. Lehrplan AHS Unterstufe: 1; Lehrplan Hauptschule Lebende Fremdsprache: 1). According to the curriculum foreign language education offers various opportunities that should be seized to discuss intercultural topics, talk about cultural differences and common values and reflect on Austria’s culture as well as personal experiences. (cf. *ibid.*) In this context a serious examination of the regional, Austrian, and European identity is to be pursued. (cf. Lehrplan AHS, Allgemeiner Teil: 1; Lehrplan AHS Unterstufe: 1) This emphasis on the learner’s personal identity is consistent with the priorities of an intercultural approach in language education according to the CEFR, namely

¹⁰ Bildungsministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur (BMUKK). 2004. *Lehrplan der AHS, Allgemeiner Teil.*

¹¹ Bildungsministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur (BMUKK). *Lehrplan der Hauptschule, 2.Teil: Allgemeine didaktische Grundsätze.*

[...] to promote the favourable development of the learner's whole personality and sense of identity in response to the enriching experience of otherness in language and culture.” (Council of Europe 2001: 1)

So far, it has been shown that many of the CEFR's fundamental principles have been adopted to form the basis of Austria's foreign language education. Many more references to the CEFR can be found in Austria's (foreign language) curricula, as for example the demand to familiarise the learners with various communicative situations and topics (Lehrplan AHS Unterstufe: 3; Lehrplan AHS Oberstufe: 4; Lehrplan HS Lebende Fremdsprache: 3; Council of Europe 2001: 51-53) by dealing with different text types (Lehrplan AHS Unterstufe: 5; Lehrplan AHS Oberstufe: 4, 6; Lehrplan HS Lebende Fremdsprache: 6; Council of Europe 2001: 95-96).

Furthermore, the Austrian curricula have adopted the CEFR's approach to grammar as an instrument to express meaning: “Grammatical competence is the ability to understand and express meaning” (Council of Europe 2001: 113). The curricula stress the priority of the functional aspect of grammar and the importance of its acquisition in its communicative context (cf. Lehrplan AHS Unterstufe: 2; Lehrplan Hauptschule Lebende Fremdsprache: 2):

Grammatik ist im Fremdsprachenunterricht vorrangig unter funktionalem Aspekt zu erarbeiten [... und] Grammatikübungen ha[ben] überwiegend im Rahmen themen- und situationsbezogener kommunikativer Aktivitäten und Strategien zu erfolgen. (Lehrplan AHS Oberstufe: 3)

Considering that language use is always embedded into a certain context, the Austrian curricula highlight the importance of sociolinguistic competence, which is “concerned with the knowledge and skills required to deal with the social dimension of language use” (Council of Europe 2001: 118). Their distinction between linguistic, pragmatic and sociolinguistic competences (cf. Lehrplan AHS Oberstufe: 3) and the fact that importance is ascribed to all three of them originate in the CEFR's subcategorisation of communicative language competences. The CEFR argues that all three components of communicative competence are necessary for the realisation of communicative intentions. (cf. Council of Europe 2001: 108)

The above discussion of parallels in the Austrian (foreign language) curricula and the CEFR leaves no doubt that the CEFR has had remarkable influence on the Austrian language education curricula. The curricula are based on general fundamental values and principles of the Framework, as its learner-centred and action-oriented approach,

the importance of self-evaluation, reflection, plurilingualism and pluriculturalism and the priority of the development of competences and strategies (cf. Horak et al. 2010: 19). They also include detailed distinctions and concepts that are specific to certain parts of the CEFR, as for example the categorisation of linguistic competences, the concept of errors in the learning process and the wide range of topics suggested.

4.4.2.2. *Bildungsstandards* and *Kompetenzbeschreibungen* (E8/ROM8)

The CEFR's accentuation of competences in the language learning process is not only reflected in Austria's foreign language curricula, but also in the concept of the Austrian *Bildungsstandards*. They describe expectations regarding the results of teaching and learning in a school-context by defining the competences the majority of the learners should have acquired at the time of change from one school or educational institution to another. The *Bildungsstandards* for English, often referred to as *BiSt E8*, lay down what the learners should be able to do at the end of the eighth level of education. Their introduction in law and the Austrian language education system in January 2009 was followed by the development of the *Kompetenzbeschreibungen* which, similarly, define the learners' competences in their second foreign language. Both models, the *Bildungsstandards* and the *Kompetenzbeschreibungen*, are based on the CEFR and amend the foreign language curricula as instruments permitting the description of proficiency levels. They describe the competences that can be expected in reading, listening, writing, spoken production and spoken interaction and should thus contribute to a results oriented design of education in general. (cf. *Bildungsstandards* 2012 online; *Bildungsstandards und Kompetenzbeschreibungen* 2012 online; Horak et al. 2010: 28)

Angela Horak et al. (2010: 29) argue that these standards firstly ensure constant quality control and secondly provide guidelines for teachers. The latter, pedagogical function of the standards provides assistance to teachers by setting clear goals without restricting them in their choice of methods or design of lesson plans. The second function of the *Bildungsstandards* is one of control making comparisons of receptive and productive competences between classes, schools and national results possible and thus ensuring that the standard of quality in Austria's foreign language education is maintained. (cf. *ibid.*) The comparisons should be based on the results of examinations checking whether the benchmarks have been achieved. These regular check-ups are framed in the

regulation dealing with the *Bildungsstandards*, BGBl. II Nr. 1/2009, which equally defines the standards for English by referring to the CEFR's competence levels. (cf. Verordnung Bildungsstandards im Schulwesen, Anlage 2009) As the Austrian *Bundesinstitut für Bildungsforschung, Innovation & Entwicklung des österreichischen Schulwesens (bifie)* (2011: 11) points out, the formulation of the *Bildungsstandards* has been adapted to the can-do descriptors of the CEFR and the European Language Portfolio. Its practice handbook does not only provide the descriptors (ibid.: 11-13), which can be found in the regulation mentioned above, in a user-friendly way, but also lists the topics the learners are supposed to be able to deal with (cf. ibid.: 14) and stresses the fact that communicative, intercultural and social competences as well as strategies are an important part of the *Bildungsstandards*. Descriptors for those competences are equally provided in the publication (cf. bifie 2011: 15-16).

Similarly to the *Bildungsstandards*, the *Kompetenzbeschreibungen* are definitions of learning outcomes showing which competences the learners are expected to have developed at a given time. However, whereas the *Bildungsstandards* have been defined for English, the *Kompetenzbeschreibungen* refer to the learner's second foreign language. The descriptions and exemplary tasks for French, Italian and Spanish, which are according to Carla Carnevale et al. (2012: 5) the most frequently taught second foreign languages in Austria's schools, were published in 2009. The *Kompetenzbeschreibungen* describe the competences that learners should have developed in their second foreign language after two years of learning. They are neither regulated by law, nor intended to be used for system monitoring. Their purpose is thus to be found in the encouragement of language teachers to reflect on their teaching, to provide them with an additional framework as well as to support them in preparing their learners for the *standardisierte Reifeprüfung*. Ideally, the *Kompetenzbeschreibungen* will have a positive effect on the school's multilingual environment and strengthen the position of second foreign languages next to the first foreign languages. (cf. Carnevale et al. 2012: 5; *Kompetenzbeschreibungen für die zweite lebende Fremdsprache* 2012 online) Like the standards for English, those for the second foreign language explicitly refer to the CEFR and are based on the curriculum: "Die [...] Kompetenzbeschreibungen [...] beziehen sich auf die Referenzniveaus A1 und A2 des GERS [...] und reflektieren dabei die Inhalte des österreichischen Lehrplans" (Göschl et al. 2009: 9). The practice handbook (Göschl et al. 2009), again paralleling that

published for the *Bildungsstandards*, provides detailed descriptors for linguistic, communicative, intercultural and social competences as well as strategies and gives exemplary tasks. The ÖSZ has announced to develop further tasks exemplifying competence-oriented learning at upper secondary level and thus helping to prepare learners better for the final school leaving exam in their second foreign language (cf. *Kompetenzbeschreibungen Projektbeteiligte* online).

To sum up, both models of standards for foreign languages in Austria are closely linked to the CEFR and the curricula which are, as this paper's chapter 4.4.2.1. on the Austrian curricula has pointed out, themselves connected to the Framework. They are intended to be used as instruments for reflection on teaching – in the form of informal reflection by the teacher whether his/her learners have achieved the set aims and/or in the form of official feedback on a system level.

4.4.2.3. *Standardisierte Reifeprüfung*

Similarly to the intentions of the *Bildungsstandards* and *Kompetenzbeschreibungen*, the introduction of standardised tasks in the Austrian *Reifeprüfung* aims at ensuring a results-oriented design of teaching. The tasks' competence-orientation is argued to carry on the development of the recently reworked curricula by enhancing the teaching of competences that are needed to act in a communicative real-world situation. Standardised competence-oriented exams are supposed to contribute to quality improvement within the Austrian education system. The *standardisierte Reifeprüfung* will serve as school-leaving exam in the AHS from the academic year 2014/15 onwards and the *neue Diplomprüfung* will be introduced into the system of the BHS in 2015/16. This new concept is designed to meet the requirements of competence-orientation with the help of its three-part system, consisting of a paper, three or four written exams and two or three oral exams. (cf. *Standardisierte Reife- und Diplomprüfung 2012* online)

The standardised foreign language exams (English, French, Italian, Spanish) test the learners' listening, reading and writing competences (BHS) as well as their skills in an area referred to as "language use in context" (AHS). The learners have to show that they are able to communicate independently, successfully and appropriately in the given social context: "wie die Kandidatinnen und Kandidaten selbstständig, also ohne Hilfe, erfolgreich und sozial angemessen (wenn auch nicht unbedingt fehlerfrei) kommunizieren können." (*Lebende Fremdsprachen 2012* online) As has been discussed

in the context of the foreign language curricula (cf. Chapter 4.4.2.1. “Curricula” of this paper), errors are not to be seen as the prior assessment criterion. The focus of assessing the learner’s performance should be on his/her success in handling a communicative situation, which is an approach that can clearly be traced back to the CEFR. The Framework’s influence is also visible in the emphasis on providing context (“kontextgebundenen Testformate[n]” (*Lebende Fremdsprachen* 2012 online.)) as well as on the importance of the use of authentic texts (“aus authentischen Texten” (ibid.)) dealing with topics of immediate relevance to the learner (“zu Themen ihres Erfahrungshorizonts” (ibid.)). Furthermore, the standardised exams are supposed to test linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences – a classification that has been adapted from the CEFR and can also be found in the foreign language curricula. (cf. *Lebende Fremdsprachen* 2012 online)

The examinations are designed to test the learners’ competences which should have been developed in the course of the years preceding the exam. The development of productive and receptive competences as well as strategies to handle unexpected linguistic and situational problems should thus have a major role in foreign language teaching and learning. Learners should therefore be encouraged to, among others, infer meaning from the context, compensate for the lack of linguistic knowledge and develop their understanding of a text step-by-step. (cf. ibid.)

The *standardisierte Reifeprüfung*, the *Bildungsstandards* and *Kompetenzbeschreibungen* and the (foreign language) curricula all encourage the above outlined aims of Austria’s foreign language teaching, i.e. the enhancement of a results-, action- and competence-oriented approach, the development of linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences as well as strategies to use language as a means to act in a specific social situation, the enhancement of autonomous and life-long learning, the encouragement of plurilingual and intercultural competence, and that of reflection and self-evaluation to name only a few. They thus clearly show the impact of the CEFR on Austria’s foreign language education and reflect its implementation on a system level. The European Language Portfolio, as will be shown in the following chapter, contributes to this implementation process by providing an instrument aimed at the learners themselves.

5. The European Language Portfolio and its realisation in Austria

5.1. What is the European Language Portfolio?

5.1.1. Introduction to the ELP

The concept of the European Language Portfolio (ELP) was developed by the Council of Europe's Language Policy Division. Its development is chronologically and in terms of content closely connected to that of the CEFR. The ELP is a document accompanying a language learner in his/her language learning process and experiences by allowing recording and reflecting on achievements and (inter)cultural experiences in language learning situations encountered both inside and outside formal education. Being property of the learner, its main aims, as defined by the Council of Europe, are

- *to help learners give shape and coherence to their experience of learning and using languages other than their first language*
- *to motivate learners by acknowledging their efforts to extend and diversify their language skills at all levels*
- *to provide a record of the linguistic and cultural skills they have acquired [...]* (*What is the ELP?* online)

The careful formulation of those aims provides for a diversity of languages, learners, learning contexts and possible uses of the portfolio. The European Language Portfolio thus cannot be “a single entity” but rather is to be viewed as “a large family of more or less closely related realisations of a set of guiding principles” (Little, Goullier, Hughes 2011: 11) which is able to meet “the challenge of diversity” (ibid.) that language learning and teaching is confronted with at present. Between 2001 and 2010, 118 ELP models were developed in 33 countries and validated by the Council of Europe (cf. *Accredited ELP models 2000-2010* online; see also Chapter 5.2.1. “From validating to registering an ELP” of this paper). Each of them is targeted at a specific age group (from very young learners to adults) in various educational sectors. Some were designed for learners having different needs than the average language learner who typically learns a foreign language at school, as for example portfolios aimed at university students (France), immigrants learning the language of the host country (Ireland), language teachers, translators and interpreters (Russia), blind and visually impaired learners or those learning a language for academic and professional purposes (Spain). (cf. *List of accredited models by country* online) Although the models are designed for various learner groups in different contexts and differ in their formats (bound or loose-

leaf paper models, downloadable versions, electronic models), they all follow the Council of Europe's *Principles and Guidelines* and thus share not only distinctive formal features but also values and fundamental principles. However, before focusing on the latter in the following subchapter (Chapter 5.1.3. "Principles and values") the next section will briefly discuss the ELP's structure.

5.1.2. Formal features

The European Language Portfolio was conceived as a "companion piece" (Little 2005: 321; Little 2012: 275) to the CEFR and was designed to mediate the CEFR's action-oriented and learner-centred approach to language learners (cf. Little et al. 2011: 5; Little 2012: 275). It consists of three obligatory components, namely the Language Passport, the Language Biography, and the Dossier.

The **Passport** section gives an overview of the owner's individual linguistic identity and proficiency in different languages at a given point in time and provides space for periodical updates of his/her self-assessment of his/her language proficiency. The summary is defined in terms of the CEFR's common reference levels and skills. (cf. Little 2012: 275; Gonzalez 2009: 374) Self-assessment is, as Little (2002: 186; 2005; 2012: 277) has repeatedly argued, fundamental to successful use of the ELP, but, as Jesús Ángel González (2009: 374) points out, it is not the only basis of the ELP's Passport. The Passport section equally allows for teacher-assessment and assessment by educational institutions and examination boards. It thus describes (partial and specific) language competences and significant (intercultural) learning experiences and, at the same time, records formal qualifications and information stating on what basis, when and by whom the assessment was carried out. (cf. Language Policy Division 2011: 7-9)

Whereas self-assessment in the Language Passport certainly performs the same function as an exam at the end of a phase of learning, Little (2002: 186) shows that worries about self-assessment in the ELP tending to focus on its summative function capture only part of the picture. The **Language Biography**, the second component of the ELP, is based on self-assessment which is supposed to accompany the learning process and facilitate the learner's involvement in planning, reflecting on and evaluating his/her learning process. In order to do so it provides checklists of communicative tasks in the form of 'I can' descriptors, scaled by the CEFR's levels of competence and arranged according to its five skills (cf. Chapter 4.2.3. "Structure and content" of this paper). These checklists

expand on the summary descriptors contained in the CEFR's self-assessment grid (Council of Europe 2001: 26-27) and are designed to help learners in their self-assessment as well as goal-setting process. The organisation of the Language Biography section should encourage learners to state what they can do in each of their second languages (L2s) as well as to include reflection on learning styles, strategies and intercultural experiences in order to promote plurilingualism. (cf. Little 2012: 276; González 2009: 374; Language Policy Division 2011: 9-10)

Finally, the last – and most open - part of the ELP is referred to as **Dossier** and provides space for the learner to include work in progress as well as selected materials documenting his/her achievements, experiences and proficiency improvement. For this purpose, some ELP developers distinguish between a process and display dossier. The samples included are supposed to illustrate the progress recorded in the Language Passport and the Language Biography. (cf. González 2009: 374)

The authorities developing an ELP are required to respect the three-part structure suggested by the Council of Europe in order to ensure that each learner in his/her particular learning context has the possibility to use each of the components according to his/her needs and facilitate recognition of his/her Passport within Europe. (cf. Language Policy Division 2011: 7, 9) The developers are furthermore required to adhere to terminological conventions by firstly using the titles *European Language Portfolio*, *Language Passport*, *Language Biography* and *Dossier* in either English or French in addition to any other language and by secondly using the common reference levels and the distinction of the skills of the CEFR in order to proclaim their European character by incorporating a minimum of common features. (cf. *ibid.*: 6, 10)

5.1.3. Principles and values

In addition to maintaining the three-part structure described above, all accredited ELPs must be developed in conformity with the aims and principles described in the Council of Europe's *Principles and Guidelines* and in the CEFR. "In particular [they] must not lose sight of the fact that the ELP is a tool to promote plurilingualism and pluriculturalism." (Language Policy Division 2011: 6) This quote brings up two issues deserving detailed consideration. Firstly, the ELP is clearly declared as a tool, an instrument to promote plurilingualism. Subsequently to the discussion of the CEFR as a policy instrument in chapter 4.2.2. "The CEFR in the context of the Council of Europe's

policy” previously in this paper, the ELP’s clear allocation of value to plurilingualism and its inseparable link to the CEFR make it undeniably to another instrument of the Council of Europe’s policy. As stated in the *Principles and Guidelines* (Language Policy Division 2011: 4), “[t]he ELP reflects the Council of Europe’s concern with [...]” the mutual understanding of all European citizens, Europe’s linguistic and cultural diversity and the development of intercultural competence and plurilingualism (cf. *ibid.*). Hence, values are overtly ascribed to the ELP and it is clearly an instrument to realise the Council of Europe’s objective “to promote awareness and encourage the development of Europe’s cultural identity and diversity” (*The Council of Europe’s objectives* online)

Secondly, the focus on plurilingualism is explicitly stated at the beginning and maintained throughout the document. According to the Council of Europe (Language Policy Division 2011: 5) the ELP is designed to “take account of *all* of the learner’s language and intercultural learning” (*ibid.*) and value “the full range of the learner’s language and intercultural competence” (*ibid.*). This however is inconsistent with the fact that it “is based on the Common European Framework of Reference” (*ibid.*: 6) which has been developed for L2 learning. Also, one of the ELP’s main aims has been shown to be helping learners organising their experiences in learning and using “languages other than their first language” (*What is the ELP?* online). However, the Council of Europe’s definition of plurilingual competence is founded on the individual’s first language, as Little (2012: 278) points out: an individual’s experience of language, according to the CEFR, “expands [...] from the language of the home to that of society at large and then to the languages of other peoples” (Council of Europe 2001: 4). The ELP’s explicit aim to promote plurilingualism is therefore slightly inconsistent with its reference to the CEFR’s checklists which are concerned exclusively with L2 proficiency. The Council of Europe is however aware of and acknowledges this discrepancy:

Although the common reference levels refer to communicative proficiency in languages other than the mother tongue, the ELP “values the full range of the learner’s language and intercultural competence” [...] (Language Policy Division 2011: 8)

The ELP does indeed have a section capturing the full linguistic profile of its owner, namely the Language Passport. This component includes the learner’s first languages and invites him/her to reflect on what they can do in different languages. It thus helps

them becoming aware of their increasing plurilingual repertoire, as Little (2012: 278) concludes.

This links to the general requirement that every version of the ELP needs to take into account the diversity of the learners' needs, not only concerning their linguistic and cultural background, but also with respect to their age and learning purposes as well as learning contexts. (cf. Language Policy Division 2011: 10) Furthermore, ELPs must reflect the Council of Europe's concern with transparency and coherence in language learning and the clear description of language competence (cf. *ibid.*: 4-5). Further principles of the ELP, as stated in the *Principles and Guidelines*, are closely linked to its functions and objectives and will be discussed separately in the following section.

5.1.4. Functions and objectives

The ELP is designed to fulfil two functions, a reporting and a pedagogical function. The fulfilment of both is obligatory for every ELP version and is prescribed by the *Principles and Guidelines* in which the ELP is referred to as “a pedagogic and reporting tool” (Language Policy Division 2011: 4). As a pedagogical tool it accompanies the learner in his/her learning process by helping him/her to identify aims, plan and modify the learning process in order to accomplish those, reflect on and monitor the progress, and evaluate the outcomes through self-assessment. (cf. González 2009: 375) Maria Stoicheva et al. (2009: 6) describe the pedagogic function as motivating one. Its aim is to “motivate learners by acknowledging their efforts to extend and diversify their language skills at all levels” (*ibid.*). Their account of the ELP's pedagogic function focuses less on the steps in the process of language learning than González's description above. Instead, it puts emphasis on the learners' motivation to improve their communicative competences in various languages, to add additional languages to their plurilingual repertoire, and to make new cultural experiences. However, similarly to González (2009), Stoicheva et al. (2009: 6) equally point out the importance of helping learners to reflect on learning objectives and ways of learning and to plan and evaluate outcomes. These aspects of the ELP as a pedagogical tool guide the learners in the process of becoming more autonomous learners.

Whereas, in summary, the pedagogic function can be said to emphasise the process aspect of language learning, its product aspect is focused on by the ELP's reporting function. The ELP as a reporting tool provides a record of language skills and

intercultural competences. This summary is designed to supplement the certificates and diplomas a learner has been awarded. In this context the ELP might for example be used to add learner-specific information on his/her language learning experience to results of formal examinations. (cf. González 2009: 375; Little et al. 2011: 7) The ELP contains instruments helping its owner to consciously capture his/her levels of competence in different languages in a detailed and internationally transparent way. It might thus also be presented at the occasion of a change to another school or another educational sector, at the beginning of a language course or added to an application as Stoicheva et al. (2009: 6) point out. In connection to the latter possible use of the ELP they refer to the European Union's *Europass* which includes a Language Passport that is a version of the ELP's Language Passport section.

On the one hand, the ELP's two complementary functions support the learner in his/her development of learner autonomy by providing instruments enabling him/her to plan, modify, reflect on and evaluate his/her learning process. On the other hand it helps the learner providing an overview of and recording proficiency in languages at a given point in time, thus stressing the product of his/her language learning process. Little (2002: 182) argues that both functions merge in the on-going process of self-assessment.

5.1.4.1. Learner autonomy

Besides linking the ELP's pedagogic and reporting function, self-assessment is, as Little (2002: 186) states, "fundamental to effective ELP use". Being able to evaluate one's own learning is one part of the ELP's aim to promote learner autonomy, which equally involves planning and monitoring their learning process (cf. Language Policy Division 2011: 5). The European Language Portfolio is thus one instrument in the Council of Europe's efforts and educational projects to stimulate learner autonomy, as Little (2002: 186) points out. According to his definition, learners can be said to be autonomous when they take responsibility for their learning processes and furthermore, actively deal with the questions asking for the subject, the reason, the mode, and the degree of success of their learning processes. This concept of learner autonomy explains not only Little's, but also the ELP's and thus the Council of Europe's attachment of great importance to reflection and self-assessment. The *Principles and Guidelines* clearly identify the ELP with the Council of Europe's concern with "the development of the

language learner” and his/her “development of the capacity for independent language learning” (Language Policy Division 2011: 4). Its commitment to learner autonomy is based on the fact that this is one of the cornerstones of education for democratic citizenship and lifelong learning (cf. *ibid.*).

Furthermore, Little (2005: 321) makes aware of the close connection between learner-centred approaches, as the Council of Europe chose for its CEFR, and the development of learner autonomy. Both require the learner to take decisions concerning his/her learning goals, content and methods and both assign a central role to self-assessment. Given the fact that the ELP is closely linked to the CEFR and explicitly refers to it, the concepts of learner autonomy and self-assessment will briefly be considered in the context of the CEFR. The planning of self-directed learning is one of the CEFR’s explicitly stated intended uses. The document encourages learner autonomy comprising the learner’s awareness of his/her competences as well as his/her ability to set learning objectives, select material and carry out self-assessment. Self-assessment, according to the CEFR, is increasingly being stressed, whether aiming at planning one’s own learning or at reporting one’s own ability to communicate in languages that the learners have or have not been formally taught (cf. Council of Europe 2001: 6, 20). Although the Council of Europe suggests that self-assessment can be an effective complement to tests and teacher assessment, it sees its main potential in its use as a tool for motivation and awareness raising (cf. *ibid.* 191-192). This aspect has been outlined and stressed by Stoicheva et al. (2009) in their discussion of the ELP’s function (cf. Chapter 5.1.4. “Functions and objectives” of this paper). However, in order to help learners “to appreciate their strengths, recognise their weaknesses and orient their learning more effectively” (Stoicheva et al. 2009: 192) the CEFR emphasises the necessity of clear descriptors defining standards of proficiency. This is the reason why every ELP version needs to include checklists either as part of the language biography or in an appendix (cf. Language Policy Division 2011: 9). The *Principles and Guidelines* furthermore stress that “[a]ll ELPs should include the self-assessment grid from the Common European Framework in its entirety as a basic point of reference” (*ibid.*: 7) and that the checklists need to be appropriately formulated to help learners of all ages to assess their language proficiency with reference to the common reference levels (cf. *ibid.*). Little (2005: 325-326) points out that the ELP’s self-assessment checklists, which are derived from the CEFR’s illustrative scales, are used to carry out one of the two kinds of self-

assessment the ELP requires, namely formative self-assessment. Additionally, the CEFR's self-assessment grid is a central component in encouraging summative self-assessment.

Little (2012: 276) argues that the ELP can support the development of learner autonomy in three ways. Firstly, the checklists of the Language Biography section – provided they have been developed in accordance with the respective national curriculum – can help both learners and teachers to guide the learning process by providing assistance in planning, monitoring and evaluating learning over a school year, a term or even smaller units. Secondly, the ELP has been designed to help learners reflecting on their learning styles, strategies and language learning in general. Finally, the ELP can also encourage the use of the target language as medium of language learning and reflection if the ELP is presented in the learner's target language. (cf. *ibid.*: 276-277) This latter aspect however is problematic because it risks that the learner does not understand what he/she is expected to reflect on or cannot express his/her experiences, feelings and assessment.

Although the CEFR defines self-assessment very briefly as “judgement about your own proficiency” (Council of Europe 2001: 191), there is more behind the concept than simply marking one's own language production. The ability to carry out self-assessment and reflect on one's own language learning process provide the necessary basis for learner autonomy which can only be gradually achieved by developing and exercising the reflective skills of planning, monitoring and evaluating learning, as Little (2002: 186) points out.

5.1.4.2. Plurilingualism

Although learner autonomy is probably the most prominent concept being linked to the ELP, the Council of Europe ascribes equal value to the ELP's function as “a tool to promote plurilingualism and pluriculturalism” (Language Policy Division 2011: 5) and stresses that it reflects the Council of Europe's concern with “the development of plurilingualism as a life-long process” (*ibid.*: 4). Little et al. (2011: 19) (also Fleming, Little 2010: 9) support this general perception by referring to their examination of the ELP's use and implementation in its first ten years of existence which showed that plurilingual and intercultural education have had the greatest difficulty in being noticed and employed despite the fact that the ELP has always been presented as a tool supporting learner autonomy, plurilingualism and intercultural education alike. Based

on these fundamental values that the ELP ascribes importance, the Validation Committee has refused to validate any ESP model that focused on one particular language and did not encourage its owners to reflect on their plurilingual repertoire. (cf. Little et al. 2011: 19)

Plurilingualism as a fundamental Council of Europe concept, its definition and role as basis of many Council of Europe documents has been discussed in detail in chapter 2.3. “Multilingualism - plurilingualism” at the beginning of this paper and shall therefore, instead of being repeated, only be referred to at this point. However, some additions with respect to approaches adopted by ELP developers and their accommodation in different ELP models will be made. Little et al. (2011: 19) reveal two attitudes to plurilingualism in their study of ELP models developed between 1998 and 2011. The first one views plurilingualism as a social fact that needs to be valued but does not require any specific attention in the ELP as it may be “the natural result in the learner of an improvement in language teaching and learning” (ibid.). This approach to plurilingualism may be reflected in an ELP model by the presentation of headings or other text in different languages. The commitment to linguistic diversity is shown by the use of and thus the ascription of value to languages that may be learned but are uncommon or do not have a high prestige in the learner’s society. Some ELPs have been shown to repeat the content of some pages in various languages or have encouraged learners to plan and reflect on their learning process in relation to specific languages, which again results in the reproduction of the same pages in different languages. In order to encourage learners to reflect on their plurilingual repertoire despite keeping the languages separately some ELP models have added a section to the Language Biography that provides space for reflection on all of their languages at the same time. (cf. ibid.: 19-20)

However, this approach to plurilingualism has been gradually replaced by a second one, one that is based on the assumption that plurilingualism, like learner autonomy and intercultural competence, provides the learner with “a specific way of viewing language learning and use” (ibid.: 19). The development of plurilingual competence and the learner’s plurilingual repertoire is thus an objective of every part of the ELP that needs to be actively pursued. Different from the realisations of the plurilingual component described above, the second approach is realised by the use of the same self-assessment

checklist for all languages of the ELP's owner which gives him/her the possibility to discover differences in his/her competences and provides an overview of his/her plurilingual repertoire. Furthermore, the learner is invited to reflect on similarities and differences in his/her languages and their resources and limits. Little et al. (2011: 20) summarise that the plurilingual repertoire tends to be the central subject of reflection in most recently developed ELP models and finally also highlight its possible use to invite learners to reflect on language-related mediation activity and multilingual communicative situations. (cf. Little et al. 2011: 19-20)

Following the discussion of different ways that have been found to accommodate the plurilingual dimension in ELP models Little (2012: 278) concludes that

[...] it seems likely that the CEFR's 'plurilingual approach' will be best served not by designing ELP's in a particular way but by using them as the basis for exploring the shape and nature of plurilingual profiles.

He suggests creating some space in the school timetable or national curricula that provides time to deal with all the languages taught in the school and home languages with the aim of exploring plurilingualism and interculturalism. At this point reference should be made to a suggested realisation of Little's proposition in Austria, namely the *Curriculum Mehrsprachigkeit* that has been dealt with in chapter 3.4.2. of this paper. Its focus on interdisciplinary learning targets, its enhancement of the development of the learners' plurilingual competence, and its suggestion to dedicate one to two lessons per week to plurilingualism are very much in line with Little's suggested shift away from possible forms of inclusion of the plurilingual component into ELP models to using the ELP and its approaches to plurilingualism as a basis for exploring plurilingual profiles within the school.

5.1.4.3. Intercultural awareness

Even though the ELP's intercultural dimension cannot be separated from its efforts to help learners developing plurilingual competence, the *Principles and Guidelines* put equal emphasis on both and refer to them separately. The ELP "reflects the Council of Europe's concern with respect for diversity of cultures and ways of life" (Language Policy Division 2011: 4) and should thus "promote intercultural learning and the development of intercultural awareness and intercultural competence" (ibid.). While the Language Passport "records [...] intercultural learning experiences" (ibid.: 8), the Language Biography "include[s] information on linguistic, cultural and learning

experiences” (Language Policy Division 2011: 10) and “focus[es] on intercultural learning” (ibid.). According to Little (2012: 278), these two sections of most ELP models aimed at adult learners indeed encourage their owners to reflect on their intercultural experiences, although they usually do not provide any specific focus. As for the Dossier, the extent to which proof or documentation of the user’s intercultural experiences is included depends to a great extent on how important those experiences are felt to be by the learner. (cf. ibid.)

The intercultural dimension, as defined by the CEFR¹², is realised in most ELPs by prompts inviting the user to consider the presence of cultural diversity in his/her environment and help them developing a positive attitude towards them as well as to their own cultural perspective. However, Little et al. (2011: 21) point out that the reflection process started by questioning attitudes and reactions to otherness needs more space than can be provided in the ELP, a document that should be designed as a learner’s companion, also in the sense of being easily transportable. In order to provide support in the learner’s development of intercultural competence and ensure that reflection on (inter)cultural encounters is not confined to the ELP, it was decided to develop a document enhancing intercultural education available to all educational contexts, not just to language courses, in the form of the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters*. (cf. Little et al. 2012: 21)

According to the Council of Europe, its *Autobiography* is a tool to promote respect for diversity and mutual understanding. Emphasising the critical analysis of its users’ intercultural experiences, it complements the *European Language Portfolio* in two versions, one for young learners up to the age of eleven and one for learners at secondary level and beyond. It has been developed to promote intercultural dialogue and respect for diversity both nationally and across borders and is designed to be used in formal and non-formal contexts and across the curriculum. The *Autobiography* invites its owner to reflect on intercultural encounters that have had a strong effect on them. It is designed to help learners discovering what underlies these encounters, becoming more aware of their experiences and reactions and thus developing their intercultural competences. (cf. *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters Overview* online) Aiming

¹² For a detailed account of the Council of Europe’s definition of and approach to interculturality and the close association between language and culture deriving from the CEFR see chapter 2.4. “Intercultural competence” of this paper.

at critical reflection upon the users' own memorable intercultural experiences and helping them to analyse them, the Autobiography supplements the ELP in its efforts to encourage and record intercultural learning experiences.

5.1.5. Origins

The origins of the Council of Europe's ELP date back to projects that had been carried out long before the ELP's final shape was determined by the project "Language learning for European citizenship" between 1989 and 1996. Mike Fleming and David Little (2010: 8) argue that while its reporting function goes back to the 1970s, when attempts were made to develop a European credit system for L2 learning by adults, the ELP's pedagogic function originates in the Council of Europe's commitment to cultural exchange, learner autonomy and lifelong learning. However, the impulse to develop the ELP came from the Rüschtikon Symposium on "Transparency and coherence in language learning in Europe" held in 1991. The Council for Cultural Cooperation concluded by recommending the development of a "European Language Portfolio' [...] held by individuals in which they may record their cumulative experience and qualifications in modern languages" (Council for Cultural Cooperation 1992: 40). Furthermore, it was determined that the ELP should contain

a section in which formal qualifications are related to a common European scale, another in which the learner him/herself keeps a personal record of language learning experiences and possibly a third which contains examples of work done. Where appropriate entries should be situated within the Common Framework.
(ibid.)

This quote clearly shows that the present ELP's three-part structure was already decided on in 1992. Equally, its reference to the CEFR and its two pedagogical functions were laid down at this early stage. (cf. Fleming, Little 2010: 8)

The project "Language learning for European citizenship" resulted in two draft versions of the CEFR and various proposals for the development of the ELP for different groups of language learners. At the end of the project, the Council for Cultural Cooperation recommended further development of the ELP and its introduction on an experimental basis in 2001, the European Year of Languages. Various pilot versions were developed and tested at all educational levels in fifteen Council of Europe Member States, including Austria, between 1998 and 2000. The seven seminars that invited project coordinators to share experiences soon revealed that detailed self-assessment grids are a necessary basis of the ELP's pedagogic function as both teacher and learners found it

difficult to relate learning processes to the general descriptors of the CEFR's self-assessment grid. The second problem encountered was related to the integration of self-assessment into teacher-centred pedagogical traditions that did not encourage learners to take an active part in their evaluation and learning process. Other issues that came up in the piloting phase could be solved more easily, such as the risk that the large variety of ELP models could result in a collection of local variations of a common European theme. In order to avoid this, a standard Language Passport for adults was developed and its use with learners older than 15 was encouraged. It ensures transparency, international recognition and a common approach. (cf. Little 2002: 183-184)

Feedback from the pilot projects showed that a vast majority of learners and teachers found the ELP useful for self-assessment as well as for comparison of teachers' assessment with the learners' self-assessment. Equally highlighted was the ELP's motivational aspect. As regards the ELP's reporting function learners and teachers stated to be lacking clear guidelines relating to the link between assessment carried out by teachers and the learners' self-assessment. They were doubtful concerning to what extent self-assessment could contribute to the final evaluation of language competence and to formal examinations. (cf. Little 2002: 184) Little (2005: 335) argues that "[i]t is not that self-assessment should (or could) replace assessment by teachers and/or external authorities". Rather, self-assessment allows the learners to reflect on the interaction between curriculum and assessment as well as on the CEFR's fundamental view of language learning from a communicative perspective. The ELP and the CEFR thus open up the possibility of a new assessment culture, one that approaches language learning, teaching and assessment from the same communicative perspective. (cf. Little 2005: 334-335)

5.2. Validation

5.2.1. From validating to registering an ELP

The Council of Europe laid down the guidelines and principles the ELP needs to follow in October 2000, but the ELP's realisation is decided on nationally, resulting in "a large family of more or less closely related realisations of a set of guiding principles" as Little et al. (2011: 11) point out. At the same time the Education Committee of the Council for Cultural Cooperation set up a Validation Committee assigned with the validation and accreditation of ELP models. (cf. Little et al. 2011: 10; Little 2012: 276) Only validated

models, i.e. models that have been shown to be in conformity with the *Principles and Guidelines*, are allowed to be referred to as “European Language Portfolio” and use the Council of Europe’s ELP logo on the front cover. They are furthermore obliged to include it at the beginning of each part, use the ELP’s key terminology (cf. Chapter 5.1.2. “Formal features” of this paper), refer to the common reference levels and the CEFR’s skills and provide key headings in English and/or French alongside with any other language. (cf. Language Policy Division 2011: 6, 10)

By the end of 2010 the validation process was replaced by registration. The 118 ELPs that had been accredited up to this time were used as a basis for templates that the Council of Europe provides on its website in order to encourage ELP developers to draw on previously made experiences when constructing an ELP. Registration of national ELP models does not only allow its developers to use the logos of the Council of Europe, but it also ensures that ELP developers as well as everyone interested in the ELP have access to the new development. This guarantees that experience gained in developing and implementing ELP models is shared. The Council of Europe bases its registration process on self-declaration. The developers are required to declare that their ELP model conforms to the *Principles and Guidelines* by answering a questionnaire. Additionally, information on the developers and the model’s target group has to be provided. The Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe checks the registration and, provided no problems are encountered, sends the registration number and provides access to the logos that need to be added. After these have been added the final version must be uploaded and is then added to the list of registered models and made available for inspection. (cf. *How to register an ELP model* online) Little et al. (2011: 16) argue that the validated and registered models are important resources that ELP developers can draw on to construct new models and develop the ELP further. However, this development will only be possible as long as the ELP’s effects on learning, teaching and assessment can be shown to be positive. According to Little et al. the evidence gathered so far has been encouraging but more research on the ELP’s impact is required, as will be discussed in chapter 5.3. “Dissemination, implementation and impact” of this paper.

5.2.2. Austria's ELP models

Like every other Council of Europe member state, Austria was encouraged to develop national ESP models, aimed at different target groups and being compatible with its educational systems and its curricula. Austria's participation in the ELP's piloting phase allowed for the early validation of its first ELP model, an ELP aimed at learners at secondary level in vocational schools¹³, in 2001. In the same year the BMBWK commissioned the ÖSZ to develop national ELP models for Austria. The project group was formed in February 2002 and started its work on a pilot version of an ELP aimed at learners at lower secondary level, i.e. general secondary school (*Hauptschule*) and academic secondary school (*AHS*). 43 teachers at various school types and in different parts of Austria were chosen to pilot this version between March 2003 and March 2004. (cf. Nezbeda 2009 online) Their feedback, as well as information gathered through questionnaires that the learners answered, provided important input for the revision of certain parts of the ELP and revealed valuable elements that needed to be included in the teachers' guide to the ELP and its usage in the classroom. Furthermore the findings of the evaluation team provided insights into issues such as acceptance of the ELP and its efficiency. (cf. *ESP-M Evaluierung* online) The project "Das Europäische Sprachenportfolio als Lernbegleiter in Österreich (Mittelstufe)" was brought to an end in October 2004 when Austria's first national ELP commissioned by the BMUKK and entitled „**Europäisches Sprachenportfolio. Mittelstufe (10 - 15 Jahre)**“¹⁴ (also referred to as ESP-M) was accredited by the Council of Europe. Its use is approved for all language classes, including German, at lower secondary level of the *AHS*, at the *Hauptschule* as well as the *Polytechnischen Schule*. (cf. *ESP-M Das fertige Produkt* online)

The second portfolio that the ÖSZ was asked to develop for the BMUKK was one aimed at young adults, aged fifteen and older. The project was initiated in October 2004, the piloting phase followed between autumn 2005 and summer 2006 and the revised, final version "**Europäisches Sprachenportfolio für junge Erwachsene (ESP**

¹³ Krieger, Wernfried; Mangold-Renner, Adelheid; Rieder, Lotte; Weitensfelder, Daniela. 2001. *Europäisches Sprachenportfolio für die Sekundarstufe II – 14+. Berufsbildende mittlere und höhere Schulen*. Wien: Pädagogisches Institut der Stadt Wien. (Validierungsnummer 24.2001)

¹⁴ Horak, Angela; Nezbeda, Margarete; Öhler, Rose; Abuja, Gunther. 2011². *Europäisches Sprachenportfolio. Mittelstufe (10-15 Jahre)*. Graz: ÖSZ. (basiert auf Validierungsnummer 58.2004)

15+)”¹⁵ was accredited in 2007. The criteria for the pilot project were similar to the ones for the evaluation of the ELP for learners at lower secondary level and the project led to similar insights, of which some refer to the learners’ perception of changes in their language learning, to the teachers’ estimation of pros and cons of the ELP’s use in the language classroom, and to the identification of sections that needed revision. (cf. *ESP 15+ Informationen zum Projekt 2011* online) The ELP for young adults carries on the ESP-M’s efforts to accompany the learner in his/her learning process and is mainly used at upper secondary level in the AHS and BHS. According to the ÖSZ (cf. *ESP 15+* online) this ELP model has been developed with special regard to its possible use at university level or by learners learning a language with or without relation to their professional career. Its development was a close co-operation between the ÖSZ and the *Center für berufsbezogene Sprachen* (CEBS), Austria’s national in-service teacher training centre specialising in vocationally-oriented language education. One of the results of this collaboration is the ELP’s Language Passport: it is designed to be particularly useful for job applications. (cf. *ESP 15+* online)

It has been shown that the ESP-M and the ESP 15+ accompany the learner at secondary school level and beyond. However, in order to ensure that the ELP accompanies the learner throughout his/her whole school education in Austria, an ELP to be used at primary school level needed to be developed. The „**Europäisches Sprachenportfolio. Grundschule (6 - 10 Jahre)**“¹⁶, in short *ESP-G*, was developed by the ÖSZ in co-operation with five experts between September 2005 and 2008. Its design prepares the learners for their use of the ESP-M and ESP 15+ and ensures that form and content meet the needs of very young learners by, for example, using pictures to set tasks and including sections that do not require the learners to write, but to colour in or tick off (cf. *Das ESP für die Grundschule* online) The piloting phase in the academic year 2007/2008 involved 25 schools from all over Austria and was brought to an end in June 2008 when the piloting teachers met to exchange their experiences, formulate recommendations concerning the ELP’s implementation and finally to collect and present best practice examples.

¹⁵ Abuja, Gunther, Annau, Eva; Ganster, Siegfried; Keiper, Anita, Mayer-Tauschitz, Isolde; Mittendorfer, Franz; Nezboda, Margarete; Steinhuber, Belinda; Winkler, Gabriele. 2007. *Das Europäische Sprachenportfolio für junge Erwachsene (ESP 15+)*. Graz, Salzburg, Linz: Veritas. (Validierungsnummer 88.2007)

¹⁶ Felberbauer, Maria; Grabner, Silvia; Gritsch, Arnold; Kolroser, Christine; Pelzmann, Debrah. 2010. *Das Europäische Sprachenportfolio für die Grundschule (6 - 10 Jahre)*. Graz: ÖSZ. (Validierungsnummer 99.2009)

To sum up, all of Austria's three national ELP models are designed in concordance with the national curricula as well as with the CEFR, contribute to the development of the five linguistic competences, enhance individualisation, and promote plurilingualism and interculturalism. All of them guide the learners in their development of the competences they are expected to have developed by the end of a certain educational level. These expectations are described in detail by the *Bildungsstandards* and the *Kompetenzbeschreibungen* for the end of the eighth educational level (cf. Chapter 4.4.2.2. "Bildungsstandards and Kompetenzbeschreibungen (E8/ROM8)" of this paper) and by the *Grundkompetenzen "Lebende Fremdsprache"* (GK4) for the end of the fourth educational level. Finally, the ESP 15+ accompanies and supports the development of the competences that are central to the *standardisierte Reife- und Diplomprüfung* (cf. Chapter 4.4.2.3. "Standardisierte Reifeprüfung" of this paper). Its focus on the learners' needs is claimed to encourage the development of learning strategies as well as the ability to reflect on one's own competences and to plan one's own learning process. It thus enhances learner autonomy. (cf. Nezbeda 2011: 2-4)

Stoicheva et al. (2009: 10) point out that "[t]he ELP can be considered as a tool within the context of national educational priorities." In the context of Austria's ELP models it might be interesting to consider the national educational priorities Austria has decided to put emphasis on in its ELPs developed by the ÖSZ. Gunther Abuja, director of the ÖSZ, highlights the importance of their pedagogical aspect and the continuous focus on intercultural learning. (cf. Abuja 2007: 432) In his presentation of the Austrian ELP project at the "8th European Language Portfolio Seminar" in Graz in 2009, he stated that

[a]ll three models were designed to stimulate and support modern, functional language teaching with a focus on language and intercultural awareness, learning and research techniques, introspection and self-awareness, and the plurilingualism of the individual learner in the context of multilingual school communities. (Little 2009: 27)

Although the three national ELP models discussed above are probably the best known ones, they are not Austria's only ELPs. At the time of writing (March 2013) five more Austrian ELPs have been accredited by the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe. Four of them are the result of the Vienna School Board (*Stadtschulrat für Wien*) and the association of Viennese Adult Education Centres' (*Verband der Wiener Volksbildung*) collaboration with the CERNET (Central European Regional Network for Education Transfer) project which aimed at the development of an ELP allowing for the

record of and reflection on cross-border experiences within the central European region (CENTROPE), encompassing Slovakia, Austria, Hungary and Czech Republic. In contrast to the ÖSZ ELPs, these four ELP models are thus no national versions. They are aimed at learners at primary school level¹⁷, at lower secondary level¹⁸ and at upper secondary level and beyond. The latter target group is subdivided into learners in a BHS¹⁹, the ELP for whom has been mentioned above in the context of Austria's first accredited ELP, and learners in an AHS²⁰. While the CERNET programme was ended in December 2004, the Central European Language Portfolio (CELP) was embedded in the new EdQ (Education Quality) programme and will, according to the Vienna School Board, contribute significantly to assuring quality in foreign language education in the CENTROPE region. (cf. *ESP für die mitteleuropäische Region* online; *ESP für die mitteleuropäische Region CERNET* online)

The fifth Austrian ELP that has not been developed by the ÖSZ has been designed with regard to the needs of adults learning a language at the Austrian *Volkshochschulen*, the Adult Education Centres²¹. However, this ELP model shall not be elaborated on in detail within the framework of this paper. Rather, the limited space will be used to examine the ÖSZ ELP's dissemination and implementation and finally also its impact in Austria.

5.3. Dissemination, implementation and impact

So far, the development of ELP models allowing for the realisation of Austria's educational focal points has been in the foreground. Whereas the development, piloting and revision are certainly complex processes involving large amounts of financial resources, time and planning, Michael Fullan (2001: 84) stresses that, whenever a change is initiated, "[t]he processes beyond adoption are more intricate, because they involve more people, and real change [...] is at stake." Equally Philip Glover et al.

¹⁷ Höltzer, Romy. 2008. *Europäisches Sprachenportfolio für die Mitteleuropäische Region. (Primarstufe für SchülerInnen von 6 - 10 Jahren)*. (Validierungsnummer 94.2008)

¹⁸ Ischep, Claudia; Huber, Traude. 2004. *Europäisches Sprachenportfolio für die Sekundarstufe I – 10-bis 15-Jährige*. (Validierungsnummer 63.2004)

¹⁹ Krieger, Wernfried; Mangold-Renner, Adelheid; Rieder, Lotte; Weitensfelder, Daniela. 2001. *Europäisches Sprachenportfolio für die Sekundarstufe II – 14+. Berufsbildende mittlere und höhere Schulen*. Wien: Pädagogisches Institut der Stadt Wien. (Validierungsnummer 24.2001)

²⁰ Kaiser, Hannah, Rice, Heidemarie; Schubert, Christa; Sequenz, Heidi; Truxa, Eleonore; Valsky, Claudia. 2005. *Europäisches Sprachenportfolio für die AHS-Oberstufe*. Wien: Pädagogisches Institut der Stadt Wien. (Validierungsnummer 68.2005)

²¹ Verband Österreichischer Volkshochschulen. 2007. *Europäisches Sprachenportfolio für Erwachsene*. Wien: VÖV. (Validierungsnummer 91.2008)

(2005: 86-89) deal with the dependency of the ELP's impact on its successful implementation. Based on feedback received in the context of the Council of Europe's pilot project to investigate the feasibility and practicality of the ELP between 1998 and 2000, Glover et al. (2005: 86-89) summarised the value of four elements for successful ELP implementation, namely programme integration, committed support of teachers and administrators, teacher and student training, and clarification of status and purpose of the ELP. The first of those four favourable conditions, programme integration, refers to the extent of the ELP's integration into the learning environment. This can be done on class level, institutional level or education system level but integration of the ELP into the curriculum has been noted as being of particular importance. Equally, benefits could be shown to be based on the ELP's compatibility with existing practices. Glover et al. (2005: 87) secondly stress the importance of programmes designed to support teachers in terms of time and financial resources and thirdly refer to the necessity of teacher training to facilitate positive responses to the ELP. Finally, they discuss the need for clear statements concerning the status and purpose of the ELP. The pilot projects revealed insecurities among both teachers and learners as to the ELP's international recognition and its value for mobility and employment purposes. (cf. Glover et al. 2005: 86-89)

The value of those four conditions of successful ELP implementation has been acknowledged by the ÖSZ and forms the basis of its numerous initiatives enhancing the ELP implementation in Austria. As regards dissemination and implementation, ELP pilot teachers became multipliers/teacher trainers who were encouraged to pass on their knowledge to interested schools and teachers. For this purpose the ÖSZ set up a database²² that allows persons interested in the CEFR and the ELP to find like-minded colleagues and experts willing to share their expertise and/or material. In addition to this informal networking, Abuja (as reported by Little 2009: 27) refers to in-service teacher training provided by the ÖSZ and its efforts to design teacher training courses. Furthermore, the ÖSZ sent material informing on the status of Austria's ELP development and dissemination to language teachers, education authorities, superintendents and teacher interest groups in April 2009 in order to inform and promote the ELP (cf. Nezbeda, Keiper 2009: 1).

²² The database is entitled "Kontakttepool" and can be found on the ÖSZ website: http://www.oesz.at/sub_main.php?page=bereich.php?bereich=1-tree=3 → Kontakttepool

The ELP's innovative character, promoting learner autonomy and lifelong learning, helps to translate the CEFR's new educational paradigm into pedagogic action as Little et al. (2007: 17) point out. This characteristic qualifies the ELP for its inclusion into the ÖSZ's Austrian wide network *SPIN* (*SPRachenInnovationsNetzwerk*) focusing on the development of innovations within the field of languages and their realisation. SPIN does not only provide information and a platform facilitating the exchange of experiences, but also assists in the realisation of creative and innovative language projects. According to the ÖSZ, its role as catalyst for innovation has been strengthened since 2009 when the first annual thematic focus, namely the implementation of the ELP, was selected. Within this framework the ÖSZ invited developers and piloting teachers to report on the ELP's use in their immediate environment as well as on their ELP-related projects. (cf. *SPIN Startseite* online; *SPIN Schwerpunkte* online; Nezbeda, Keiper 2009: 1) Furthermore, it supported SPIN-teachers who wanted to use the ELP in their language classes. They were offered ELPs for their learners free of charge, were sent a copy of the pilot version of the ESP-G and the ESP 15+, were provided with information on the use of the ELP and material designed as 'help for self-help', and were also supported if they wished to attend seminars on the ELP. (cf. *SPIN ELP* online)

Teacher training was also focused by the **SEMLANG** project. From 6 until 10 July 2009, the SEMLANG Summer University event was organised within this project's framework. It aimed primarily at bringing together decision makers in the domain of language and education policy, in order to reflect on ways of improving language teacher training within the culturally and linguistically diverse European Union. The ÖSZ highlights the benefits of this event for the Austrian CEFR and ELP implementation process as well as for the promotion of the *European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages* (EPOSTL), a tool to encourage student teachers to reflect on their didactic competences. (cf. *SEMLANG* online) Abjul (as reported by Little 2009: 27) stresses the close connection of the SEMLANG²³ project and the ELP by stating that this project "made it possible to create an awareness of the ELP in European teacher education". Complementary to raising the teachers' awareness of the ELP, the attention of the public was drawn to the ELP by the ÖSZ's efforts to link the

²³ For a more detailed account of the SEMLANG summer university see <http://www.semlang.eu>.

ELP to innovations with which the public was already familiar, for example, the educational standards (cf. Little 2009: 27).

Programmes enhancing the dissemination and implementation of the ELP in general and Austria's national models in particular, are not restricted to their national origins, but develop internationally as well as nationally. Whereas the SPIN initiative and the contacts database are national tools to promote the ELP within Austria, the outcomes of the SEMLANG project have shown to be of international importance as well as fruitful to Austria's national ELP implementation efforts. Another international ESP project the ÖSZ participated in was the **EuroIntegrELP** (Equal Chances to the European Integration through the Use of the European Language Portfolio). Whereas the overall project aim was stated to be the contribution "to the promotion of language learning at high quality standards among adults [...], through the use of the European Language Portfolio (the EAQUALS / ALTE version for adults)" (*EuroIntegrELP* online), the ÖSZ's participation aimed also at deducing implementation strategies for Austria's national context and promoting the ELP for upper secondary level and adult learners as innovative and quality assuring tool within the field of language learning, supporting the ELP's implementation in Austria, adding Austria's perspective to the international discourse, and finally circularising the ÖSZ's main values, as plurilingualism, the close connection between language and culture, learner autonomy and self-evaluation (cf. *Das Projekt EuroIntegrELP* online). At the end of the project in 2007, the participating experts stated that they had succeeded in making decision makers (such as ministries and employers) aware of the existence and benefits of using the ELP as a document certifying a person's linguistic competence. The project had also aimed at and succeeded in encouraging learners to use the ELP as a tool creating opportunities to mobility, employability and access to European values in general. (*EuroIntegrELP* online)

The link between national and international efforts to promote the ELP has been continuously strengthened in the last decade. In 2009, Austria had the opportunity to present its ELP implementation strategies at the "8th European Language Portfolio Seminar" in Graz and discuss future Europe-wide projects and strategies (cf. *Internationales ESP-Seminar* 2009 online). Commissioned by the BMUKK and organised by the ÖSZ, a national seminar immediately followed the international one.

The national seminar's explicit aim was to give Austrian teachers, language experts and authorities an understanding of the ELP's role within the discourse of individualisation and standardisation in school education (cf. *Nationales ESP-Seminar 2009* online).

With the focus of this chapter having slowly shifted from national dissemination and implementation projects to the ÖSZ's involvement into international ones, a final brief consideration of international projects initiated by the ECML shall be made. The ECML's efforts to support the implementation of the ELP in Council of Europe member states were put in the foreground within the framework of its 2nd Medium Term Programme (2004-2007). The project, entitled "**Training teachers to use the European Language Portfolio**" (ELP_TT) and co-ordinated by Little, aimed at "supporting the widespread and effective use of the ELP and (by implication) the Common European Framework" (ELP_TT online) and thus

[...] contribut[ing] to the dissemination and implementation of Council of Europe political concepts - especially plurilingualism, pluriculturalism and education for democratic citizenship. (ibid.)

Two follow-up projects, coordinated by Margarete Nezbeda, followed in the years 2008-2009 (ELP_TT2) and 2010-2011 (ELP_TT3). These two short-term programmes were designed to disseminate the ELP training materials developed during the original ELP-TT project. The project website²⁴ contains practical material in various languages, worksheets, links, references and information on national developments and thus provides a platform bringing together the results of several European ELP implementation projects. (cf. *Background to the ELP_TT project* online) The website "Using the ELP"²⁵ resulted from the ELP_TT project and provides a single portal to ELP related materials, connects ELP experts from all over Europe and provides information on the ELP to non-experts. Together with the Language Policy Division's website on how to develop and register an ELP, the ELP implementation site forms a major part of the Council of Europe's portal²⁶ organised around the ELP. (cf. *Using the ELP* online)

Little (2008: 440) points out that training teachers to use the ELP is primarily concerned with the ELP's pedagogical function and with the implementation of this pedagogic objective in the individual teacher's language classroom. However, the realisation of the

²⁴ For the ELP_TT project website see <http://elp-tt2.ecml.at>.

²⁵ For the website "Using the ELP"/ELP implementation see <http://elp-implementation.ecml.at>.

²⁶ For the Council of Europe's website dedicated to the ELP see <http://coe.int/portfolio>.

ELP's aim to promote plurilingualism depends on whole-school policy and practice, as Little (2008: 440) argues. The need for the use of the ELP throughout a learner's school education and across the curriculum was, like the one for teacher training, also addressed in the ECML's 2nd Medium Term Programme. The programme entitled "*The European Language Portfolio in whole school use*" (ELP_WSU), co-ordinated by Little, was concerned with the use of the ELP in all language classes being taught at a school and aimed at the identification of already existing whole-school projects, the support of the initiation of new ones, the study of their impact on language learning and the development of guidelines for their design, implementation and management. In addition to the handbook²⁷, ten case studies, among them a report on an Austrian whole-school project by Rose Öhler, were published on the project's website²⁸. (cf. *Background to the ELP_WSU project* online)

Although numerous projects have been carried out and an exhaustive amount of supporting material and reports have been made accessible, "[t]he ELP's impact on language teaching and learning is very difficult to estimate" as Abuja (reported by Little 2009: 27) points out. Equally Stoicheva et al. (2009: 13), authors of the ELP impact study, raise awareness of the fact that "[t]he impact of the ELP in the classroom is difficult to assess". Considering that their study was based on ten questions and conducted by telephone with twelve contact persons or experts from nine different countries, they acknowledge that they cannot but provide limited results. In order to take account of the fact that the interviewees might not necessarily be best informed about classroom practice, several questions in the questionnaire addressed classroom impact in an indirect fashion, as for example by asking about the availability of the ELP model or the relation of the ELP to textbooks. (ibid.) As Little et al. (2011: 12-13) sum up, the initial reaction to the ELP from both learners and teachers was found to have been positive, however only if the ELP was fully integrated into curricular goals and formal assessment. If teachers and learners felt there was little relation between official assessment tools and formal curriculum goals, the ELP was considered as an optional extra that took up too much time and effort. In the context of the ELP's integration into curricula it has to be mentioned that the impact study revealed that in many cases little

²⁷ Little, David. 2011. *The European Language Portfolio. A guide to the planning, implementation and evaluation of whole-school projects*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. online: <http://www.ecml.at/tabid/277/PublicationID/65/Default.aspx> [23/03/2013]

²⁸ For the ELP_WSU project website see <http://elp-wsu.ecml.at>.

or no distinction between the CEFR and the ELP were made (cf. Stoicheva et al. 2009: 5). Thus, if the interviewees' responses suggested an impact on textbooks, it was often an "impact that would more appropriately be attached to the implementation of the CEFR" as Litte et al. (2011: 14) point out. Given the close link between the two instruments they argue that the discussion of the ELP's impact in close connection to that of the CEFR is understandable. Nevertheless, whereas the CEFR has directly influenced curricula design (for the situation in Austria see chapter 4.4.2.1. "Curricula" of this paper), which then had an impact on textbooks, also the ELP has influenced textbook design, which is clearly visible in the inclusion of checklists, reflection tasks and the use of a dossier, to name only a few examples. (cf. Little et al. 2011: 13-14)

Besides textbooks and assessment, Stoicheva et al. (2009: 15) showed teacher education and training to be an important area of potential impact. Whereas most of the interviewees state that numerous teachers within their country have attended seminars on the ELP, they also report that many teachers feel left alone in the use of the ELP, are looking for practical guidance and have not been afforded the time and support to explore the ELP in detail.

Abuja (reported by Little 2009: 27) adds that although numerous initiatives to engage teachers into the ELP implementation process have been taken, those who are not convinced by the use and added value of the ELP feel no need and obligation to engage with it. Many teachers are not willing to accept the new challenges the ELP poses to them as well as to their learners and the fact that school inspection and parents express little interest hinders the implementation process further. These factors as well as additional costs and the felt complexity of the ELP's concepts make dissemination difficult and contribute to the wide ignorance of the ELP in Austria. (cf. *ibid.*) Evidence that the ELP's use in the individual member states remains elusive comes from the Rapporteur General's report for 2007. It was estimated that 2.5 million individual ELPs had been distributed and 584,000 learners were using an ELP, but only an average of 6,600 copies of each ELP model were in use. This shows that although the number of learners using an ELP throughout Europe was relatively high, the use of the ELP within individual states remained limited. (cf. Little et al. 2011: 10-11)

This data is supported by Karin Grinner's (2007) study on the ELP implementation process and its effects on school development in Austria. It showed that awareness of

the ELP was too low to enhance its acceptance in public and within schools, increase its value for learners and thus encourage its use. Teachers also pointed out that although the ELP was perfectly compatible with the aims of their foreign language classes, the frame conditions of its implementation were insufficient. They referred to cuts in the amount of foreign language lessons and to large numbers of learners per class which made the use of the ELP difficult. Furthermore, they reported on the lack of support of (regional) authorities and the lack of opportunities to reflect on and discuss their implementation efforts with colleagues. Teachers who had taken part in the piloting phase were found to be confident in their work with the ELP, but teachers who had recently started to implement the ELP in their foreign language classes complained about its complexity, the lack of supporting material, a feeling of being left alone and the pressure to succeed resulting from the fact that parents had to finance the use of the ELP. Initiating, guiding and being successful in the ELP implementation process is often felt to be the responsibility of the individual teacher. (cf. Grinner 2006 online)

Despite the above mentioned arguments against the use of the ELP many Austrian teachers have engaged into the implementation process and have found a tool to realise their “pedagogical dream” (Abuja, reported by Little 2009: 27.) in the ELP. Abuja furthermore highlights the motivational aspect of using the ELP as a truly European instrument, which is equally stressed by Little et al. (2011: 13) in the context of the appreciation of the European dimension. This is supported and enhanced by Austria’s educational authorities who did not only commission the development, piloting and evaluation of three of Austria’s national ELP models, but also recommended their use as teaching materials and made them available as educational books within the framework of the Austrian *Schulbuchaktion*²⁹, providing learners with the necessary learning material and thus easing the parents’ financial burden. Providing the ELPs within the framework of the *Schulbuchaktion* also reduces the pressure to succeed in the use of the ELP that was reported on by Grinner (2007).

Abuja concludes that although the impact of ELP on language teaching and learning in Austria is very hard to estimate, the ELP has certainly stimulated discussion about pedagogical and methodological issues such as learner autonomy, self-evaluation and

²⁹ The ELP models *ESP Grundstufe*, *Europäisches Sprachenportfolio 10 bis 15* and *Europäisches Sprachenportfolio 15+* are listed in the Appendix of the respective *Schulbuchlisten* online: <https://www2.schulbuchaktion.at/schulbuchlisten.html> (02/04/2013)

plurilingualism. The current interest of publishing houses in the ELP helps its dissemination and ensures its presence on the book market. For the future, the ÖSZ plans to create closer links between the ELP and school textbooks, explore the possibilities of electronic ELP versions and enforce the ELP in whole-school usage. (cf Little 2009: 27) Little (2002: 184, 187; 2012) repeatedly stresses the need for a whole-school policy in order to effectively pursue the ELP's aim to promote plurilingualism. The need for teachers, learners, parents and decision makers to acknowledge that the ELP's potential can only be realised if the document is used by all language teachers in the school, throughout all educational levels has been put on the ÖSZ's agenda and will be one of its primary concerns of future projects.

6. Conclusion

Having discussed the Council of Europe's fundamental concepts that constitute the basis of its actions within the field of foreign language teaching and learning, its projects aiming at reforming foreign language education in its member states and the influences of those programmes on Austria's foreign language teaching and learning, this chapter shall be used to summarise and interpret the findings of the present diploma thesis in light of the research question.

The basis of this paper's discussion was established by a brief consideration of the Council of Europe's departments involved into foreign language education, its links to the individual member states with a special focus on Austria's national contact point and their missions in view of the Council of Europe's main objectives. Chapter 2 found the Council of Europe's commitment to (foreign) language learning to originate in the protection of its fundamental values, namely human rights, democracy and the rule of law, which are believed to ensure European stability, social cohesion and economic growth. Languages play a central role in the protection and preservation of those values as they encourage intercultural dialogue as well as respect for linguistic and cultural diversity, ensure participation in democratic practice and enhance the feeling of belonging to Europe. Being European has been shown to be defined by the acceptance of common values, such as the positive approach to plurilingualism and the encouragement of intercultural competence, rather than by geographical borders. The development of both plurilingual and intercultural competence are explicit objectives of foreign language education according to the Council of Europe and are to be integrated into language teaching and learning that approaches language in its social, cultural and communicative context.

Chapter 3 continued to investigate the Council of Europe's approach to foreign language education by discussing its language (education) policies. References to and quotations taken from the Council of Europe's founding texts have shown that the concept of plurilingualism forms the basis of the organisation's actions within this field. Plurilingual competence, which has already been defined in chapter 2, refers to an individual's competence to use several languages of different levels of proficiency to act appropriately as social agent in his/her situational and cultural context. This approach to language teaching and learning foregrounds the individual's language repertoire and the

influence of one acquired language on another one, as opposed to the characteristics of a multilingual setting. Multilingualism refers to the co-existence of several languages without implying any interaction between them. At this stage of the present paper's progression a sufficient number of principles and definitions had been provided to enable the establishment of a solid basis for the in-depth discussions that followed in the next chapters. Although the definition of the Council of Europe's approach to foreign language teaching and learning was taken up again and elaborated on at a later point, namely in chapter 4. in the context of the CEFR, chapters 2 and 3 provided the main content that made an answer to the first part of the research question, which asked for the Council of Europe's concept of foreign language teaching and learning, possible. Such an answer must undoubtedly refer to the value of plurilingualism. The Council of Europe's plurilingual approach to foreign language education values linguistic and cultural experiences in various situations and from childhood onwards as common resource that contributes to mutual understanding, co-operation and mobility within Europe. The development of each learner's plurilingual and pluricultural repertoire is thus to be made a main objective in foreign language education according to the Council of Europe. In addition to its plurilingual approach, the Council of Europe is equally concerned with encouraging a learner-centred and action-oriented approach that highlights reflection on the learning process and places language in its communicative context in which it serves its speaker as a means to act.

Having defined the Council of Europe's values and concepts guiding its initiatives within the field of foreign language education, the paper focused at the second part of its research question and aimed at a detailed discussion of Council of Europe projects and programmes and their influences on Austria's foreign language teaching and learning.

One of the three Council of Europe initiatives that were chosen to be discussed in view of the research question within the framework of the present diploma thesis was the LEPP process. Within its framework the Council of Europe provides assistance to its member states wishing to undergo a process of self-evaluation aiming at reflecting on the extent to which they follow the favourable plurilingual approach to language education. Austria's participation in this process of analysis of and reflection on its current linguistic situation resulted in the identification of three main areas in need of special attention, namely early language learning, teacher education and training and

continuity in language learning. The Council of Europe furthermore recommended enhancing co-operation between various institutions within Austria and developing a research culture in Austria's field of language learning and teaching. The establishment of the *ÖSKO neu* and the *Salzburger Zentrum für Sprachlehrforschung* were mentioned to be immediate consequences of Austria's LEPP process, but probably even more important are the development of the *Curriculum Mehrsprachigkeit* and the reorganisation of the Austrian teacher education and training. Although the latter was not directly triggered by the LEPP process, it has been influenced by the process' results as the discussion of the *PädagogInnenbildung neu* in section 3.4.3. pointed out. The *Curriculum Mehrsprachigkeit* was shown to be designed to enhance the development of the learner's plurilingual repertoire and raise awareness of the value of plurilingualism. It can thus be said that the document, with its focus on plurilingualism and the value of linguistic and cultural diversity, is clearly designed to introduce the Council of Europe's principles and values in Austria's teaching and learning practice. However, it is still to be seen how the *Curriculum Mehrsprachigkeit*, its principles and suggestions will be implemented.

Chapter 4 marked the shift from an organisational and partly still theoretical (in the sense that the innovations described above have not yet been implemented) level of Austria's foreign language education to a widely discussed Council of Europe initiative that has shown to be very influential. The CEFR was published in 2001 and is the Council of Europe's current reference instrument designed to set a framework for foreign language education within Europe. Its influence is indisputable throughout Europe, but so is its allocation of value to the Council of Europe's principles. The CEFR has been shown to be far from being the neutral reference instrument that many believe the document to be. As long as its users are aware of the document's intentions, these do not necessarily put it in a bad light. The CEFR has equally been shown to have numerous potentials, such as making European educational systems and qualifications comparable, enhancing learner autonomy and a communicative approach, and raising awareness of the fact that a learner might have a certain level of proficiency in one skill, but might be more or less advanced in another skill of the same language. The present paper has furthermore referred to Europe-wide observations of the CEFR's influence in order to provide an overview of the present situation before focusing on the CEFR in Austria. The extensive discussion has analysed Austria's curricula as well as the

Bildungsstandards and *Kompetenzbeschreibungen* and the *standardisierte Reifeprüfung*. All three of them have been shown to have been remarkably influenced by the CEFR and thus the Council of Europe's view on foreign language education. The curricula do not only define the levels of competence that have to be attained in terms of the common reference levels, but are also based on the CEFR's action-oriented and learner-centred approach, highlight the development of plurilingual and intercultural competences and make the development of strategies and the ability of self-evaluation a priority. The need for on-going reflection on the learning process and the importance of competence orientation is equally stressed by the *Bildungsstandards* and the *Kompetenzbeschreibungen* as well as by the concept of the new *standardisierte Reifeprüfung*. The latter requires not only linguistic competence to pass, but also among others the ability to handle unexpected linguistic and situational problems by use of strategies that have been shown to be a major part of foreign language learning according to the Council of Europe.

The CEFR is a tool that certainly influences foreign language teaching and learning in practice more directly than the results of the LEPP process do. Nevertheless, it is not an instrument that is aimed at the language learner. In contrast to the CEFR, its companion piece, the ELP is such a tool that has been designed for the learner. Due to its close link to the CEFR, it is not surprising that the ELP brings many of the Council of Europe's values into the language classroom. These have been discussed in detail in the present thesis' fifth chapter, which has, after careful consideration of the ELP's context, formal features, functions and principles, analysed its dissemination, implementation and influence with special attention being paid to the situation in Austria in order not to lose the paper's focus on the research question asking for the influence of the Council of Europe's work within the field of foreign language education on Austria's foreign language teaching and learning. Although a recent nation-wide survey on the ELP's use in Austria is lacking at present, the paper tried to collect and present data from various small-scale studies and referred to impressions of experts and teachers to show that the use of the ELP remains limited. It has discussed the ÖSZ's projects and programmes to disseminate and implement the ELP, has shown instances of support of its use by the Austrian authorities and has highlighted areas that need to be addressed in future in order to encourage the ELP's use throughout Austria, from primary school onwards and in all subjects.

In conclusion, the present diploma thesis has demonstrated the influence of the Council of Europe's concepts of foreign language teaching and learning on Austria's foreign language education at various levels. It has shown that the CEFR, and partly also the ELP, have rapidly become two of the most influential instruments in language teaching and learning in Europe in general, and in Austria in particular. Austria has been portrayed as actively participating to international educational developments, but also as one of the Council of Europe's member states being open to innovations within the field of foreign language education and actively involved into projects aiming at adapting Europe-wide developments to its national context. The findings indicate that the re-organisation of Austria's foreign language teaching and learning is far from being completed and that several new developments and new instruments aiming at implementing the Council of Europe's concepts and values into the foreign language educational practice will probably be published in the years to come. It will be interesting whether and to what extent the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters*, the second portfolio that is being promoted by the Language Policy Division at present, will be implemented into the Austrian (language) education. Unfortunately, the limited space of this thesis did not allow for a detailed discussion of this instrument. It would also be interesting to analyse Austria's efforts to realise a whole-school approach to the ELP and the results of these projects. Little et al. (2009: 16) have pointed out that although the evidence gained on the ELP's effects on learning, teaching and assessment can be shown to be positive, more research is required. This is not only true for the ELP, but also for any other projects within the field of innovations in foreign language education, as for example teacher training or implementation of those innovations in the classroom. All of these areas are possible fields of research for future analyses within the field of interest of this diploma thesis and are possible focal points of papers following this one.

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Appendix

Abstract

The purpose of this paper's investigation is to show how Europeanisation, more precisely the Council of Europe's work, has influenced foreign language teaching and learning in Austria. In order to realise this aim, it is initially important to define the Council of Europe's approach to language policy by discussing its fundamental values, before investigating its efforts within the field of European foreign language education. All of its actions are undertaken with the objective to encourage plurilingualism, learner autonomy, lifelong learning, and the development of intercultural competence. This paper intends to explore three major Council of Europe initiatives and their influence on the Austrian foreign language teaching and learning with a special focus on foreign language education at secondary level. It will trace the realisation of the Council of Europe's concepts and values in its programmes and publications and show how these have been implemented into Austria's educational system as well as into its foreign language classrooms. The first section will form the basis for the analysis of the Council of Europe's work and influence by providing definitions of key concepts, considering approaches to language (education) policy, and finally by reporting on Austria's participation in the Language Education Policy Profile (LEPP) process which aimed at reflecting on its linguistic situation as well as on the convergence of its actions and the Council of Europe's values. This extensive discussion of the LEPP process and its consequences will be followed by an analysis of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and its influences on Austrian foreign language curricula and on the development of the *Bildungsstandards* and the *standardisierte Reifeprüfung*. The final section will focus specifically on the CEFR's realisation in the foreign language classroom by the use of the European Language Portfolio (ELP). It will consider Austria's ELP models, their implementation process, to what extent the latter has already been successful and which areas need to be focused on in the years to come. The value of the present paper's extensive literature research lies in its demonstration of the extent to which Austria's foreign language education is influenced by European concepts and values as well as in its summarising discussion of what these "European values" refer to.

Zusammenfassung

Das Ziel dieser Arbeit ist es die Auswirkungen der Europäisierung, genauer gesagt der Arbeit des Europarates, auf das österreichische Fremdsprachenlehren und –lernen aufzuzeigen. Um dieses zu realisieren, ist es zuerst notwendig und wichtig grundlegende Konzepte und vom Europarat gesetzte Schwerpunkte innerhalb der Sprach(en)politik herauszuarbeiten, um im Anschluss daran auf seine Initiativen näher eingehen zu können. Jegliche vom Europarat initiierte Programme verfolgen das Ziel individuelle Mehrsprachigkeit, Selbstständigkeit der LernerInnen, lebenslanges Lernen und die Entwicklung von interkultureller Kompetenz zu fördern. Im Rahmen dieser Arbeit werden drei großangelegte Initiativen des Europarates und deren Einfluss auf das Fremdsprachenlehren und –lernen der Sekundarstufe untersucht. Diese werden mit besonderer Beachtung der ihnen zu Grunde liegenden Konzepte und Werte beleuchtet, um in einem weiteren Schritt hervorheben zu können wie die Wertvorstellungen und Prioritäten des Europarates auf organisatorischer und praktischer Ebene in das österreichische Schulsystem eingebunden und dort umgesetzt werden. Der erste Teil der Arbeit bildet für die folgende Analyse der Projekte und des Einflusses des Europarates die Basis, indem er Definitionen von grundlegenden Konzepten bereitstellt, verschiedene Zugänge zu Sprach(en)politik präsentiert und Österreichs Teilnahme am *Language Education Policy Profiling* darstellt. Dieser Prozess hatte nicht nur die Bestandsaufnahme der sprachlichen Situation in Österreich zum Ziel, sondern zielte auch darauf ab sprachpolitische Prozesse auf die Werte und Ziele des Europarates abzustimmen. Dieser ausführlichen Diskussion des LEPP Prozesses und seiner Auswirkungen folgt die kritische Darstellung des *Gemeinsamen Europäischen Referenzrahmens für Sprachen* (GERS) und seiner Auswirkungen auf österreichische Fremdsprachenlehrpläne, sowie auf die Entwicklung der Bildungsstandards und der standardisierten Reifeprüfung. Der abschließende Teil der Arbeit fokussiert die Implementierung des GERS im Unterricht durch das Europäische Sprachenportfolio (ESP). In diesem Kontext werden Österreichs nationale ESP Modelle und ihr Implementierungsprozess erläutert. Es wird weiters aufgezeigt, dass obwohl dieser bereits viele Lehrkräfte und EntscheidungsträgerInnen erreicht hat, noch viele Bereiche ansprechen muss, um die Nutzung des ESPs österreichweit und in allen Schulfächern zu garantieren. Durch die umfassende Analyse dieser Themenbereiche auf der Basis einer intensiven Literaturrecherche zeigt diese Arbeit auf inwiefern der österreichische

Fremdsprachenunterricht von europäischen Prioritäten und Werten beeinflusst wird und wie diese zu fassen und zu definieren sind.

Curriculum vitae



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