



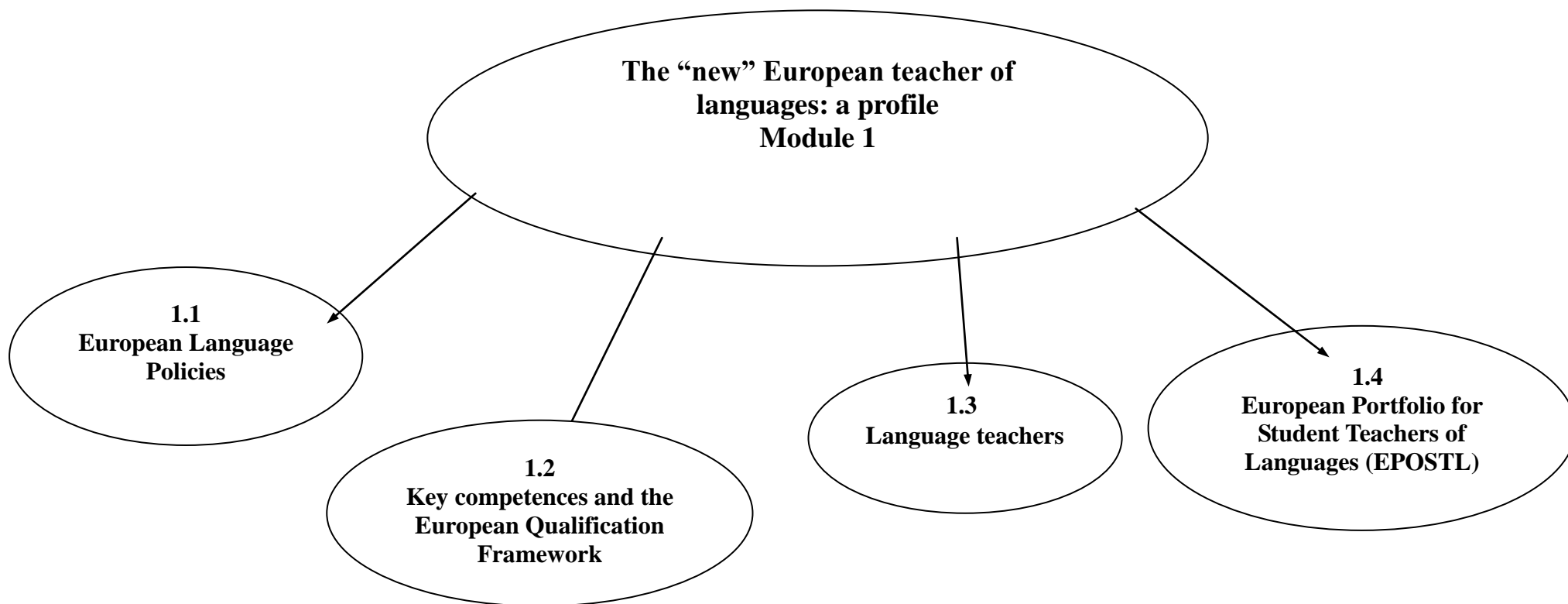
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The "new" European teacher of languages: a profile di Gisella Langé



1.1 European language policies

The European Union has always considered its many languages as an asset and actively promotes the freedom of its citizens to speak and write their own language: There are 23 [official languages](#) and more than 60 indigenous [regional or minority languages](#).

Languages are one of the key features of cultural identity. Learning languages leads to better understanding and the promotion of multilingualism is a way to bring European citizens closer to each other. While committed to political and economic integration among its Member States, the EU sees the use of its citizens' languages as one of the factors which make it more transparent, more legitimate and more efficient. **The policy of official multilingualism** as a deliberate tool of government **is unique in the world**. The three strands of this policy are:

- encouraging language learning and promoting linguistic diversity in society
- promoting a healthy multilingual economy
- promoting social integration through improved knowledge and acceptance of languages.

In March 2000 the European Council set out the *Lisbon Strategy* (also known as the Lisbon Agenda or Lisbon Process): its aim is to make the European Union "the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, and respect for the environment by 2010". Determination and Inventiveness are to be considered key factors for growth and jobs. A labour force with practical language and intercultural skills helps European enterprise to compete effectively in the global marketplace.

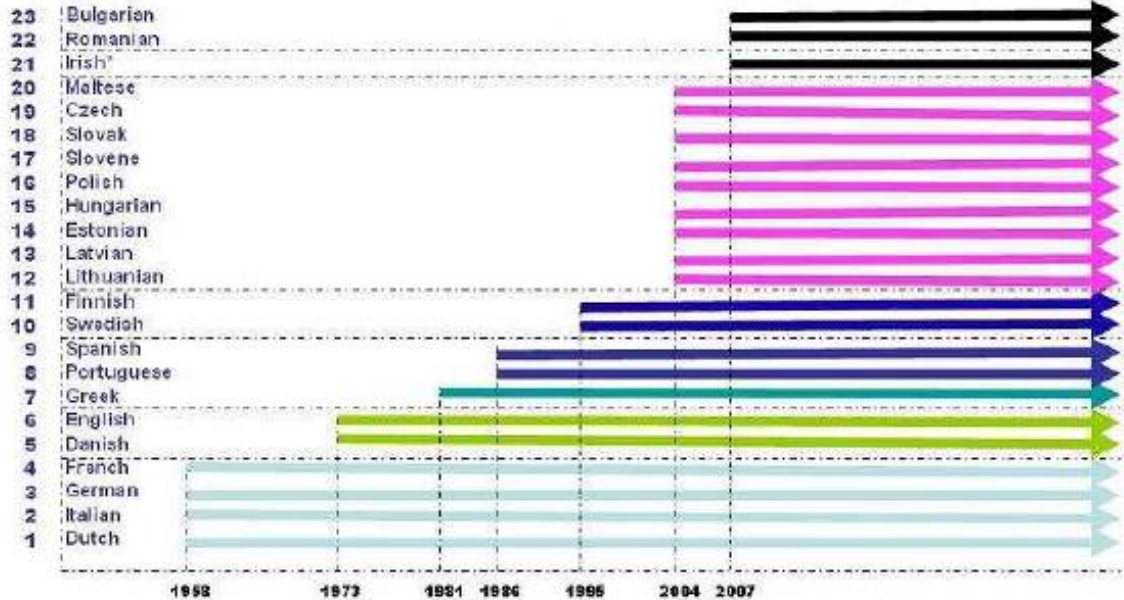
The EU's language policy aims for a situation in which **every EU citizen can speak at least two** foreign languages

in addition to their mother tongue as it appears in the following figure.



EU Official languages

From 1957.....to 2007



* Irish: Treaty Language since 1973. Catalan, Basque, Galician: Special status since 2006

The Council of Ministers meeting in Barcelona in March 2002 set the ambitious target of "**Mother tongue plus two**

(foreign languages) for every citizen". This has led to a more active policy of promoting the learning and teaching of languages, through the various [*European education and training programmes*](#).

In the *Education and Training 2010* work programme the ability to communicate in foreign languages was defined as a **key competence**. Building on the success of the European Year of Languages in 2001, the **Action Plan** "Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity" (2004-2006) was adopted by the Commission in 2003. Three categories of actions were proposed: 1) characterising language learning as a lifelong activity from pre-school to old age; 2) the quality of language teaching and 3) the creation of an environment favourable to languages. The year 2008 was declared the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. Yet another aspect of multilingualism has become the focus of attention, that of **languages as an instrument to improve mutual understanding and integration**.

Another milestone in the EU language policy is to be found in the European Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a [*A strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training \("ET 2020"\)*](#) referring to the importance of the Barcelona objective of 2002 of learning two foreign languages from an early age. The Ministers invited the Commission in strategic objective 2, to pursue work "to enable citizens **to communicate in two languages** in addition to their mother tongue, to promote language teaching, where relevant, in vocational education and training and for adult learners, and to provide migrants with opportunities to learn the language of the host country".

1.2 Key competences and the European Qualification Framework

The EU has developed a framework to help Member States ensure that their citizens develop the key competences that they need to lead successful and fulfilling lives. The [European Framework for Key Competences for Lifelong Learning](#),

released in December 2006, identifies and defines **8 key competences for European citizenship**, the key skills that everyone needs in order to achieve employment, personal fulfilment, social inclusion and active citizenship in today's knowledge-driven world:

- 1) Communication in the mother tongue
- 2) Communication in foreign languages**
- 3) Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology
- 4) Digital competence
- 5) Learning to learn
- 6) Social and civic competences
- 7) Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
- 8) Cultural awareness and expression.

The framework includes competences in 'traditional' subjects, such as mother tongue literacy, numeracy, knowledge of foreign languages, science and IT skills. But it also covers other skills, such as learning to learn, social and civic competence, initiative-taking, entrepreneurship, cultural awareness and self-expression. Initial education and training systems across the EU should support the development of these competences in all young people. Adult education and training need to give real opportunities for all adults to build and maintain their skills.

In April 2008, the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council established the [European](#)

Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning. The core of the EQF are **eight reference levels** describing what a learner knows, understands and is able to do – 'learning outcomes'. Levels of national qualifications will be placed at one of the central reference levels, ranging from basic (Level 1) to advanced (Level 8). It will therefore enable much easier comparison between national qualifications and should also mean that people do not have to repeat learning if they move to another country.

ANNEX II

Descriptors defining levels in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

Each of the 8 levels is defined by a set of descriptors indicating the learning outcomes relevant to qualifications at that level in any system of qualifications

	Knowledge	Skills	Competence
	In the context of EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual	In the context of EQF, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments)	In the context of EQF, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy
Level 1 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 1 are	basic general knowledge	basic skills required to carry out simple tasks	work or study under direct supervision in a structured context
Level 2 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 2 are	basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study	basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools	work or study under supervision with some autonomy
Level 3 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 3 are	knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study	a range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information	take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems
Level 4 The learning outcomes relevant to Level 4 are	factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study	a range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study	exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities
Level 5 (*) The learning outcomes relevant to Level 5 are	comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge	a comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems	exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change review and develop performance of self and others

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Level 6 (**) The learning outcomes relevant to Level 6 are	advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles	advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study	manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups
Level 7 (***) The learning outcomes relevant to Level 7 are	highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields	specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields	manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams
Level 8 (****) The learning outcomes relevant to Level 8 are	knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields	the most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice	demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research

Compatibility with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area

The Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area provides descriptors for cycles.

Each cycle descriptor offers a generic statement of typical expectations of achievements and abilities associated with qualifications that represent the end of that cycle.

(*) The descriptor for the higher education short cycle (within or linked to the first cycle), developed by the Joint Quality Initiative as part of the Bologna process, corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 5.

(**) The descriptor for the first cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area agreed by the ministers responsible for higher education at their meeting in Bergen in May 2005 in the framework of the Bologna process corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 6.

(***) The descriptor for the second cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area agreed by the ministers responsible for higher education at their meeting in Bergen in May 2005 in the framework of the Bologna process corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 7.

(****) The descriptor for the third cycle in the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area agreed by the ministers responsible for higher education at their meeting in Bergen in May 2005 in the framework of the Bologna process corresponds to the learning outcomes for EQF level 8.

The EQF applies to all types of education, training and qualifications, from school education to academic, professional and vocational. The system shifts the focus from the traditional approach which emphasises 'learning inputs' such as the length of a learning experience, or type of institution. It also encourages lifelong learning by **promoting the validation of non-formal and informal learning.**

Initial education and training should support the development of key competences to a level that equips all young people – including the disadvantaged – for further learning and working life. Adult education and training should give real opportunities to all adults to develop and update their key competences throughout life.

1.3 Language teachers

Language teachers have a central role to play in building a multilingual Europe. Professional training for language teachers is crucial for good quality teaching and successful language learning. They, more than teachers of other subjects, are called upon to exemplify the European values of openness to others, tolerance of differences, and willingness to communicate. The curricula and structures for training teachers of a foreign language need to respond to changing demands about the language skills that pupils and students should acquire.

The skills and personal resources required to teach languages well are considerable. Member States have the responsibility to ensure that all teachers of a foreign language have appropriate initial training, including practical skills and techniques through training in the classroom and experience of living in the country whose language they are going to teach. It is important that language teachers have the opportunity to update and improve their knowledge and skills throughout their career through in-service training. Stays abroad and exchanges provide valuable experience, motivation and continuing professional development for language teachers: teacher mobility is supported by E.U. programmes (e.g. [Comenius](#); [Grundtvig](#)).

In order to harmonise qualifications for language teachers across Europe, in 2004 the European Commission funded the preparation of the [European Profile for Language Teacher Education – A Frame of Reference](#)

This “framework of reference” aims to serve as a checklist for existing teacher education programmes and a guideline for those still being developed. It deals with the **structure** of **educational courses**, the **knowledge** and **understanding** central to language teaching, the **diversity** of teaching and learning strategies and skills, the kinds of **values** language teaching should encourage and promote.

EU initiatives in initial language teacher education include assistantship programmes for schools with the aim of giving assistants, who will be future teachers, the opportunity to enhance their knowledge of other European languages, countries and education systems, as well as to improve their teaching skills.

Areas to be developed for in-service training in language teaching include:

- Practice of the target language
- Update knowledge of the target language culture
- Update teaching skills and classroom practice
- Familiarity with new technologies and associated methodologies (e.g. e-learning, distance learning, interactive whiteboards)
- Access to support networks and professional associations
- Development of reflective practice and action research skills
- Management skills

Needless to say, teachers can face personal, financial or institutional obstacles to taking part in mobility programmes. A recently commissioned study [Detecting and Removing Obstacles to the Mobility of Foreign Language Teachers](#) offers a set of recommendations to the European Commission suggesting the need to “consider drafting a mobility strategy specifically for foreign language teachers”.

1.4 European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL)

Another interesting reference tool for teachers who want to reflect on their knowledge, skills and values necessary to teach languages is the *European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages. A reflection tool for language teacher education*(EPOSTL) . Intended for students undergoing their initial teacher education, it is a valuable tool also for in service teachers. It was developed in 2007 for the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe by a team of teacher educators from different countries with the aims:

- to help student teachers assess their own didactic competences
- to enable them to monitor their progress and to record their experiences
- to facilitate discussions of aims and curricula between teacher educators working within different national or European contexts.

The document is downloadable from the ECML website in three different languages: [English](#), [French](#) and [German](#).

According to the authors, the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* and the *European Profile for Language Teacher Education – A Frame of Reference* were a relevant input for EPOSTL. The team worked out a categorisation model for specific didactic competences and produced 196 “can-do” descriptors of competences related to language teaching which comprises a self-assessment section. These descriptors have been grouped into seven general categories that represent areas in which teachers require knowledge and a variety of competences. The following figure “categorisation of descriptors” on page 6 of the EPOSTL is a mind map that can help any teacher in developing professional awareness and identifying their weaknesses and strengths.

