

The Language Education Policy Profile of the Council of Europe — the example of Austria

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ABSTRACT:

The following article reports on an offer of the Council of Europe to his member countries, the Language Education Policy Profile / Profil de politiques linguistiques éducatives (LEPP) and on the realisation of this procedure in Austria. LEPP is a kind of self-evaluation of a country's language education policy, supported by extern experts nominated by the Council of Europe. In Austria, it was realised between 2006 and 2008. After a brief characteristic of the Council of Europe's language education policy principles, the three phases of the LEPP are illustrated at the example of Austria: a National Country Report describing the current situation; an Expert's Report, written after a visit in the country by the experts; and the final product, the Language Education Policy Profile. Finally, measures taken by Austria's institutions after the end of the process are reported.

KEY WORDS:

Austria, bilingual education, Council of Europe, early language learning, language education policy, language policy unit migrant languages, minority languages, multilingualism, plurilingualism, teacher training

PRELIMINARY COMMENTS

In the following I want to report on a project or more precisely an offer of the Council of Europe to its member countries, the Language Education Policy Profile (Profil de politiques linguistiques éducatives / Profil der Sprach- und Sprachunterrichtspolitik; LEPP). When the project was implemented in Austria, I contributed as scientific advisor. The process of its implementation may be of interest to other countries or regions. Austria shall be used as an example here in order to show the steps involved in the process as well as the benefits for applicant countries.

1. ON THE LANGUAGE AND LANGUAGE EDUCATION POLICY OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

Let me begin with some remarks on the language education policy of the Council of Europe, which constitutes the framework for what is to follow: The Council of Europe has from the beginning promoted societal and individual multilingualism, for instance already in Article 2 of the European Cultural Convention of December 19th, 1954, and in a number of recommendations and decisions of the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, such as Recom-

mendation 1383 (1998) of the Parliamentary Assembly on Linguistic Diversification or Recommendation R (2008) of the Committee of Ministers on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and Plurilingualism.¹

The Council of Europe has taken many concrete measures in support of this policy of multilingualism in the course of the last decades. Let me mention only a few of them: the work of the Modern Language Project-Group / Language Policy Unit of the Council of Europe, such as the formulation and promotion of notional-functional — that is communicative — foreign language teaching, of threshold levels (Kontaktschwelle, T-level, Niveau Seuil); of the Common European Framework of Reference CEFR, the European Language Portfolio ELP, the establishment of the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML, CELV) in Graz in 1995 etc. And one measure among these is the offer, made to each member country, to create a profile of its language and language education policy (LEPP).

In addition, the Council of Europe has elaborated a number of recommendations and guidelines for the development of long-term language and language education policy — to promote plurilingualism of the individual as the central goal of all language-related education policy. One of these is the *Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe*,² which is important for LEPP. This guide emphasizes that plurilingualism of the individual is also a fundamental aspect of any principal policy of social integration and education for democratic citizenship.

2. THE LANGUAGE EDUCATION POLICY PROFILE PROCESS

As mentioned before, the Language Policy Unit / Unité des politiques linguistiques of the Council of Europe thus offers its member countries support in developing their respective Language Education Policy. The aim in this is for member countries (or regions, cities) to conduct a self-evaluation according to specific Guidelines and Procedures and in collaboration with experts of the Council of Europe; and then to develop perspectives for future developments of language education policies in the respective countries.

This is not an external evaluation, but an expert-supported process of reflection on the part of institutions and civil society in the applicant country. The experts of the Council of Europe take on the role of something like a catalyst in this. This procedure is an extended process of 2 to 3 years. The final outcome is a Language Education Policy Profile which documents the current state and makes recommendations for the future development of Language Policy. In this, the Council of Europe follows a holistic, integrated concept of Language Policy. This means that all forms of language learning are included, ranging from national languages, languages of education and teaching, from the regional and minority languages to sign languages and migrant languages as well as second and foreign language teaching.

1 The Council of Europe in its publications distinguishes between “multilingualism” (societal multilingualism) and “plurilingualism” (individual multilingualism).

2 See *From Linguistic Diversity to Plurilingual Education* (2007).

The process comprises three major phases: 1. A *Country Report*, written by the applicant country, to be used as an initial basis for discussion. 2. An *Experts' Report*, written on the basis of the country report and a one-week visit of the group of experts to the respective country. During this visit, the experts get in touch with politicians, civil servants, officials and practitioners in the field of education, visit schools etc. This report is then discussed with representatives of the respective country during a further visit of the experts. 3. The *Language Education Policy Profile*, which is created by the expert group after this second visit. It incorporates round table discussions on the experts' report. The final version of the profile is created in collaboration between the expert group and representatives of the country, and is then jointly published by the Council of Europe and the respective country.

So far, 16 countries or regions (Aostatal, Lombardy, Sheffield; as of March 2013) have made use of this procedure or applied for it. The list can be found on the website of the Council of Europe,³ where one can also find the English and German versions of both Austria's Country Report and Language Education Policy Profile to download.

3. LEPP IN AUSTRIA

In Austria, the process was initiated or more precisely coordinated by the two related ministries, the Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture (Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur; BMUKK) and the Federal Ministry of Science and Research (Bundesministerium für Wissenschaft und Forschung; BMWF). It was conducted on the organisational level by the Austrian Centre of Competence in Modern Languages (Österreichisches Sprachen-Kompetenz-Zentrum; ÖSZ) and accompanied by a steering group of civil servants and researchers.⁴

The process officially began with a preparatory meeting in Vienna in May 2006. In the course of 2006, the national Country Report was completed. Its first version was presented in fall 2006 at a conference of Austrian experts to gather comments and critique, especially from the members of the Austrian Languages Committee (Österreichisches Sprachenkomitee; ÖSKO). Founded in 2003, ÖSKO is a consulting plat-

³ See: <http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Profils1_EN.asp#TopOfPage>.

⁴ The Austrian Centre of Competence in Modern Languages is an association funded by the Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture; its purpose is two-fold: to implement international developments in Language Policy and to promote concrete innovation in language teaching at schools. As such, it has supported/supervised measures taken to create a language-friendly environment, such as the implementation of the European Year of Languages 2001, the annual Day of Languages on September 26th or promoting innovation through the competition for "The European Label for innovative projects in language teaching and learning" ("Europasiegel für innovative Sprachenprojekte"; ESIS; see also de Cillia — Haller — Kettemann, 2005) and providing the "SPRACHENINNOVATIONSNETZWERKS" (SPIN) to support the development and implementation of innovative projects. The coordination of the Austrian LEPP process was also managed by the ÖSZ (<<http://www.oesz.at/start.php>>; last accessed 30. 8. 2013).

form for the Ministry for Education in which ministries, universities, organisations of civil society such as the Austrian Economic Chambers, the Austrian Chamber of Labour, the Association of Unions, parent associations etc. are represented.

The members of the expert group were David Little (rapporteur), Ireland; Jorum Berntzen, Norway; Angelika Kubanek-German, Germany; Sera de Vriendt, Belgium; Philia Thalgot represented the Council of Europe in the process. Dagmar Heindler acted as the Austrian contact person. As mentioned before, the Centre of Competence in Modern Languages (Österreichisches Sprachen-Kompetenz-Zentrum, ÖSZ) was commissioned to conduct the entire process in Austria on behalf of the two ministries involved (BMUKK and BMWF). The Centre, in turn, commissioned Hans-Jürgen Krumm and me to coordinate the Country Report and act as scientific advisors.

In May 2007, the expert group of the Council of Europe visited Austria for one week after having studied the Country Report. In the course of their stay, the experts met with, among others, the Minister for Education, Art and Culture and the Minister for Science and Research as well as high-level officials of both ministries; there were meetings with members of the Austrian Language Committee (Österreichisches Sprachenkomitee; ÖSKO) and political parties' representatives of education policy. Furthermore, following visits to four distinct institutions of education, there were round tables with Austrian experts on the topics "early language learning and multilingualism with a special focus on migrant languages", "language learning outside the formal system", "minority languages" and "teacher training".

After this visit, the Experts' Report was written but not published. It incorporated the Country Report as well as the discussions and observations that had been made during the one-week visit of the expert group. In March 2008, the Experts' Report was discussed by the ÖSKO and the expert group. Only then was the Austrian Profile created, incorporating this last round of feedback and completed in fall 2008.

3.1 THE COUNTRY REPORT

The Country Report is the foundation for the subsequent process of creating the Profile; it is also the point of departure for the consulting services of the Council of Europe. The Country Report thus gives an overall overview of Austrian language and language education policy, including all languages (official/national languages, regional and minority languages, foreign languages). The Country Report is not only primarily a report of the Austrian administration, but also of external experts. Hans-Jürgen Krumm and me were commissioned to coordinate the process and to "hire" the contributing authors for the individual subchapters.⁵

As regards data for the Report, existing literature on Language Policy and School Language Policy in Austria as well as sources and written material of various institutions were used. In order to reach a statistical basis for the representation of language

5 To be precise, this meant above all Michaela Haller, also Gunter Abuja and Carla Carnevale for Part One; Gunter Abuja and Elisabeth Jantscher for Part Two; and Georg Gombos, Elisabeth Furch, Arnold Gritsch, Barbara Seidlhofer and Angela Horak for Part Three; and Andrea Dorner for the complementary addendum on German as a native language.

teaching at Austrian schools, a survey on language teaching was conducted. The statistics show which foreign languages are being learned by how many pupils in which school types. For instance, Czech is being learned by 0.3% of the pupils in primary school (4th grade), by 0.15% at 8th grade and by 0.19% at 12th grade.

In addition, a large number of experts were contacted. For instance, a new survey was conducted for the domain of kindergarten in Austria. The compiled results were incorporated into the Report. After the visit of the expert group, an addendum on the teaching of German as native/educational language was compiled because the experts had recognised a gap in light of the fact that the Council of Europe follows an integrative language policy that includes the respective countries' national languages and educational languages. In relation to the topic "German as language of teaching", however, the question of pluricentrism and the Austrian variety of German ("Austrian German") was not broached. This issue is currently being dealt with in the project "Austrian German as language of teaching and education" (Österreichisches Deutsch als Unterrichts- und Bildungssprache), funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF).⁶

The final version of the Country Report (Language and Language Education Policies in Austria. Country Report, 2007), which is publicly available on the Internet, is thus the result of very careful research and an extended process in which numerous people were involved. The aim was to achieve as precise as possible a documentation and therein reach as great as possible a consensus between experts and officials concerned with language learning in Austria, but also between other stakeholders such as parent associations. Naturally, this process was not without its frictions and conflicts. The compiling of the Country Report, by itself, already became an important process of raising consciousness and networking among the involved institutions and persons. In order to involve as many as possible in this process, a large number of experts were consulted and involved by the authors during the compilation of the Report and in fall 2006 a conference was held at Vienna University, inviting the members of the ÖSKO and experts, and allowing for feedback on the first version as basis of discussion. In the course of this feedback process, approx. 50 more or less elaborate suggestions for changes, additions or corrections of content were made. The final version of the Austrian Country Report is thus the outcome of an extensive feedback process: everyone so willing was able to contribute. The Report is thus based on a broad foundation.

3.1.1 STRUCTURE OF THE COUNTRY REPORT

Every Country Report in the LEPP process has three parts. Part I contains the documentation of the current situation, e.g. demographic data and information on the education system in general, information on Austrian language policy; an overall overview of Austrian school language and language teaching policy concerning all languages (national language/educational language German, officially recognised and new minority languages, foreign languages); information on the organisation

⁶ See <<http://oesterreichisches-deutsch.bildungssprache.univie.ac.at/>>.

of language learning within the framework of the Austrian education system (pre-school and school domains, tertiary domain, vocational training; for all languages; for all learners); the current practice and tradition of examination, educational standards, portfolios; information on teacher education; innovative approaches in language learning (Content and Language Integrated Learning CLIL, CEFR, ELP, language and cultural education etc.). In addition, language learning outside the formal system is covered as well — to the degree to which data was available.

Part II of the Country Report deals with the implementation of the Council of Europe's recommendations on language learning, multi- and plurilingualism as well as diversification in language learning. It also documents in how far multi- and plurilingualism and the diversification of languages available are implemented on the national level.

Part III of the Country Report deals with the so-called national focus or “national areas of emphasis”. Each applicant country decides on important fields for the future development of school language policy that shall be developed further in the process of creating the Language Education Policy Profile. The aim in this is to engage with a national focus topic and develop several scenarios or future perspectives. The national focus for Austria comprised the following:

- (a) early language learning, in kindergarten (public and private) as well as in primary school;
- (b) the interfaces between pre-school learning and school respectively between primary school and secondary education, and
- (c) the initial and in-service training of teachers (including kindergarten).

The report documents the status quo — it does not explicitly mention aims of language policy. Instead, in relation to the above-mentioned three points it formulates “issues for discussion” to be resolved within the LEPP process. Thus, for instance, regarding the kindergarten system in Austria the report called for nation-wide legal framework or raised the issue of changing the education of kindergarten pedagogues to a tertiary education system. To mention a further example: Regarding the facilitation of plurilingualism, the report asked what a consistent framework for multilingualism until matriculation could look like. These questions were then largely taken up in the LEPP.

3.2 THE EXPERTS' REPORT

As an intermediary phase, as I have mentioned, the process calls for the drafting of an *Experts' Report* (that is not published). The report contained additional emphases, e.g. in the field of bilingual teaching for linguistic minorities and a special highlighting of the importance of bilingual education for the deaf and hearing-impaired. And, as mentioned before, the experts requested an addendum on the teaching of German as educational language. At a round-table event in March 2008 at the Ministry of Education, the experts group presented this report to all those involved and concerned in Austria. The Austrian experts, in turn, gave feedback to the report.

3.3 THE AUSTRIAN LANGUAGE EDUCATION PROFILE – LEPP

The Profile contains, first of all, a short introduction presenting the principles of the language and language education policy of the Council of Europe and a brief characterisation of the situation in Austria based on the Country Report. The focus in the following chapters is on a discussion of the three core areas mentioned above, namely early language learning, teacher education and research into language teaching and learning, as well as continuity of language teaching. In the course of the process leading to the Profile, two further core areas were adopted, namely, first the role of education languages (i.e. German and the officially recognised minority languages Slovene in Carinthia and Croatian and Hungarian in Burgenland) and the promotion of German (L1 and L2) and the first languages of migrants; and, as a second focus, minority languages and bilingual education.

Each of these chapters offers explications that refer to the Country Report and the results of the discussions at the round table in March 2008. In addition, every chapter concludes with a short summary of topics for further consideration in the process of developing a national language policy and in its implementation, which should be undertaken after publication of the Profile.

To give but one example, let me address the subchapter on minority languages and bilingual education.

3.4 MINORITY LANGUAGES AND BILINGUAL EDUCATION

The subchapter begins with a brief presentation of bilingual programs as elite models (above all, programs with English as working language) and focuses on the role of bilingual schools for autochthonous minorities. This is followed by the models for promoting the six spoken minority languages: Croatian, Hungarian, Slovene, Slovak, Czech and Romani as well as Austrian Sign Language (ÖGS). A very detailed subchapter is devoted to the education of the deaf, also addressing issues such as the cochlear implant. The experts decided on this focus on ÖGS in order to promote the development of bilingual school forms for the deaf and hearing-impaired. In conclusion, the chapter lists so-called “topics for further consideration”, such as:

Regarding the Autochthonous Minorities Including Roma:

“Consideration should be given to the following questions, raised in the Country Report:

How can the learning of neighbouring languages and/or of regional or minority languages be assured and receive support?

How can native speakers be included to a greater extent?

What measures should be taken to furnish ‘native speakers’ (particularly mother tongue teachers) with more linguistic and pedagogical knowledge?

[...]

Consideration should also be given to introducing measures calculated to further secure the linguistic and cultural inheritance of the autochthonous minorities, bearing in mind the trend towards assimilation and the abandonment of linguistic and cultural distinctiveness identified in the 2001 census; [...] remedying the lack of teachers of minority languages, including neighbouring and migrant languages, by offering ‘conversion’ training for native speakers of those languages who already possess a teaching qualification in a modern foreign language; [...]” (Sprach- und Sprachunterrichtspolitik in Österreich, 2009, pp. 117f).

Regarding the Deaf:

“Consideration should be given to: further developing bilingual deaf education, which will require a significant increase in the number of teachers proficient in ÖGS and German; developing training programmes for deaf (native signer) teachers of ÖGS; providing for the empirical evaluation of developments in bilingual deaf education; [...] increasing the number of deaf students at Austrian universities and ensuring that they have full access to information and knowledge; establishing a research framework for ÖGS in at least one Austrian university” (Sprach- und Sprachunterrichtspolitik in Österreich, 2009, p. 118).

Finally, the concluding Chapter 8 of the Profile presents concise considerations of leading principles for the development of language and language-related policy and their implementation. It also summarises the priorities, measures and plans of the two involved ministries. To give a few examples, let me mention the short-term measures of crucial importance for the Ministry of Education:

“enhancing German as a second language and intercultural training in (kindergarten) teacher training; increasing the language competence of future primary school teachers; moving towards a competence-based approach to language teaching at primary level; providing additional support for mother tongue teaching, the teaching of German as a second language [...], and bilingual programmes” (Sprach- und Sprachunterrichtspolitik in Österreich, 2009, p. 120).

4. AND WHAT HAPPENED AFTER?

After completing the process, the final Profile was presented in December 2008 at a large all-Austrian conference in Graz, followed by the publication of conference proceedings of the same title “Languages Conference 2008: Our Society is multilingual — but is our education? Measures towards an overall concept of language edu-

cation in Austria / Sprachenkonferenz 2008: Unsere Gesellschaft ist mehrsprachig — unsere Bildung auch? Maßnahmen für ein Gesamtkonzept sprachlicher Bildung in Österreich” (Sprachenkonferenz, 2009).

At this conference, the rapporteur of the expert group of the Council of Europe, David Little, presented the core points of the Country Profile and noted the key challenges for the future of Austrian education system. The greatest challenge, so David Little claimed, would be “to pursue a holistic policy that includes an overall concept of language education and that recognises the linguistic diversity of Austrian society in all its domains and also anchors it the educational process, and in doing so involves all important stakeholders and decision makers”.

After this conference, a “package of measures for multilingualism” was developed in the Ministry for Education. As far as universities are concerned, among other things, Graz, Salzburg and Vienna took concrete measures to promote research into language teaching that can be regarded as more or less direct consequences of the LEPP process: the founding of a Centre for research into language teaching at Salzburg University (SaZS), a Centre for language, plurilingualism and language didactics at Graz University, and a Chair for didactics and research into language teaching at Vienna University.

As far as concrete measures in the wake of the LEPP process are concerned, I would like to return to the points raised in Section 3.1.1: since 2009, there is a nationwide framework for the kindergarten system in Austria (BildungsRahmenPlan); the change of kindergarten pedagogues’ education to a tertiary system, however, has not been implemented until today. The consistent concept for multilingualism was realised by Hans-Jürgen Krumm and Hans H. Reich.

In 2011 they developed the “Curriculum Mehrsprachigkeit”, “multilingualism curriculum” (Krumm — Reich, 2011; Reich — Krumm, 2013). It represents a kind of subject-spanning curriculum taking into consideration multilingualism in all subject areas, including biology and mathematics, and following the motto of “All teaching is also language teaching”. This project will enter a pilot stage at Austrian schools and Vienna University in fall 2013.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The LEPP process has certainly set many things into motion in Austria (see de Cillia — Haller, 2013). The procedure can be recommended to any country, region or city that is interested in documenting language resources and developing an efficient multilingualism policy.

One goal of the LEPP process was to document the current situation and determine what had already been achieved as well as to develop new perspectives. The process first led to a precise documentation of the language situation and to a reflection of language policy topics. By itself, this already led to a qualitative leap in Austria. We now have access to a comprehensive database and very detailed documentation in the form of the Country Report: previous blind spots were first researched (vocational training, adult education, pre-school education) and better documented.

A further aim was for the LEPP process to develop new synergies for language or language-related education through networking, bringing all involved or concerned together. This goal, too, was reached. In total, over 30 organisations and 70 experts from many different areas of education contributed to the Country Report and Profile. All in all, for instance, approx. 100 people were involved in the one-week program of the expert group's visit to Austria. Parents associations, in particular, showed great commitment and involvement in the LEPP process by organising discussion events in every federal province of Austria. So, the result of the process was very binding for everyone involved.

Finally, concepts and measures were developed that lead to a more conscious and deliberate language education policy and language planning, which leads to a qualitatively new approach by the decision makers responsible for school development.

An important finding of the Country Report, however, has not been addressed until today: The EU's Barcelona-aim of L1 plus 2, according to which two languages in addition to the language of education should be learnt during the period of compulsory education, has not been reached: In 2010, merely 8.9% of students in Austria (secondary grade II) were learning two foreign languages (Key data, 2012, p. 67), and the first foreign language is virtually always English. Thus, Austrian schools first and foremost facilitate individual bilingualism in German and the Lingua Franca English, but not individual plurilingualism.

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