

## **A clarion call to colleagues concerned with languages in Europe: instructors, teachers, researchers, decision-makers, authors of pedagogical materials**

During the academic year 2017-2018, three organisations concerned with languages came together to make their views known to the Council of Europe as the latter sought to modify an instrument of its language policy: The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR). We hereby wish to share the steps we have already taken and to invite you to participate in the efforts we are hoping to put in place.

Let's briefly recall the background of this initiative. Originally, the CEFR was built through a number of very rigorous steps: first a collective and transnational assignment based on a founding symposium, then a number of individual and collective "reports" on different set themes with "experts" chosen by the Council of Europe, followed by several advanced versions submitted for reactions, a final version presented before Ministers concerned in COE member countries, and finally a national campaign for dissemination and explanation. Thus, the CEFR launched in 2001 by the Council of Europe, later approved by the European Union, was an instrument whose originality was to reflect a theoretical and programmatic structure that would be transversal to languages taught in Europe, be they national, regional, European or not, at a time when the policy of enlargement to Eastern Europe was in progress. The strength of this tool was also perceived outside Europe where it was discussed, and sometimes even imitated. It also generated different productions and pedagogical materials (for example, the *European Language Portfolio*), in places such as the European Centre for Modern Languages.

The project of a "Companion Volume" was launched in 2014 and validated in 2017. Yet, this project is built on a foundation that is much weaker: two joint individual initiatives with funding from outside the Council of Europe, a questionnaire filled online, a dissemination resistant to any debate (cf. *infra*) but a document which loudly claims to have an impact all over Europe. Besides, this instrument is no longer in sync with the problems of Europe of the 2010s characterised by different forms of "identitarian closure", or nationalisms, by the rise in security policy and by the domination of an administrative, neoliberal and technocratic "governance". The decision to "enlarge" the CEFR by renewal and extension through a logic of levels and descriptors even risks reinforcing the forms of technicisation of the teaching of languages and thus opening the door to different forms of political instrumentalization, a fortiori in the contemporary European situation.

These different problems prompted us in May 2017 to send a letter entitled « The expanded CEFR project: a not so good initiative by the Council of Europe » to the Head of Division, Higher Education and Research Division, and the Head of Division of Education Policies of the Council of Europe. The missive highlighted our concerns by pointing out the areas that needed attention, especially as they relate to the ethical, political and scientific implications of the project then in progress. In spite of the fact that the letter enjoyed the support of a considerable number of actors concerned by the teaching and learning of languages in Europe (87 individual and 7 institutional signatories), **the collective alarm raised by our said letter received no response from its recipients.**

In May 2018, we sent an *Open Letter* to the participants at the "Launching Conference of the CEFR Companion Volume with New Descriptors", that took place in Strasbourg (France) 16-18 May 2018. The message of this other letter which was incorporated into the main points of

the first letter **was not transmitted** to the participants of the Conference even though their attention had been drawn to its content through an explicit request made by us to the organisers of the meeting for this to be done.

One year after the validation of the “Companion Volume”, two conclusions can be drawn:

1. The new CEFR is taking advantage of the credit of the initial document but is based on a distorted legitimacy. **We therefore appeal to you to be vigilant:** given that the text enjoys a large publicity, we request that you please alert its potential users of the truncated modalities of its conception.
2. On two occasions, we have had serious reservations and have **informed the Council of Europe of our desire to have an open debate, a request to which there has been no response.**

We remain mobilised, and maintain that there is the need for a reflection that questions the role of languages in today’s European societies, whatever their status, their geographical and national footholds, the diversity of their modes of learning and their teaching contexts. While the momentum of the 2000s created in this domain by the Council of Europe and the European Union has been lost and Europe’s language policy is no longer reactive, **we call for your creative and civic initiatives, in the debates that you will conduct on the ground, in your research and in your productions, in order to throw light on the complexity of a multilingual and multicultural Europe, on the resistance encountered, and on the necessary excesses vis-à-vis the chosen assumptions of the 2000s.**

In this perspective, we plan to organise **two days of debate in Paris mid-June 2019** in order to discuss the orientations and options open to contemporary language teaching and learning (discussion meaning here a principle meant to gather hitherto dispersed energies).

We will move forward shortly on the construction of this federating project. If you wish to be informed, please contact us.

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N.B: All the texts cited (Companion Volume, Letters, etc) are gathered at the following address:  
<https://asdifle.com/content/veille-cecrl>.