REFLESS PROJECT TOP-LEVEL CONFERENCE IN BELGRADE
“Importance of languages, translation and interpretation for the future of Serbia in European Union”

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The conference attendance was impressive - all decision makers from the Higher Education field, representatives of European Union bodies in Serbia, representatives from EU partnering Universities, Rectors, pro-rectors and deans of all universities and colleges participating in the REFLESS project were present, as well as representatives of the number of EU countries to Serbia.

Minister of Science and Technology of the Republic of Serbia, Mr. Žarko Obradović and project coordinator Ms Jasmina Nikolić hosted the representatives of the Council of Europe and European Commission at the Minister’s office at 15h on that day, and The Ministry of Science and Technology of the Republic of Serbia was represented at the conference by the State secretary to the Ministry of Science and Education, professor Radivoje Mitrović.

Active participation of Head of Delegation of European Union to the Republic of Serbia, Mr. Vincent Degert, Head of Council of Europe Office in Serbia, Ms. Antje Rothemund, Director of European Integration Office in Serbia, President of the European Centar for the Modern Languages Mr. Waldemar Martyнюк, Rector of the University of Belgrade, Mr. Branko Kovačević, Mr Michael Kelly (video 1, video 2), director of the UK Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies, Ms Persefoni Pouliou Enlacement Co-ordinator at the Multilingualism and Interpreter Training Support Unit DG SCIC at the European Commission, Mr. Laurent Bazin Director of the Institute for Languages and International Studies at the University of Versailles, Mrs. Milica Delević EU Integration Office Director in Government of Serbia, a list of important participants from Serbian and EU organizations, institutions and Universities, representatives of all the members of the consortium, speaks of the reputation the REFLESS project has acquired, and it also shows the intense institutional support that has been given to the project. As professor Filipović noticed:

“For the first time in the history of Serbia languages have been placed this high on the scale of strategic objectives and relevance within the European future of Serbia. And the fact that we had members of number of EU institutions and number of Serbian institutions this morning to greet us and to show us their support for the project is, actually, worth a thousand words.”

REFLESS project top-level conference in Belgrade
The conference’s objective was to show the importance of the REFLESS TEMPUS project and to obtain wider institutional support for the project.

The presentations and discussions were dedicated to language policies in Serbia and the EU, development of education system in the area of language studies in accordance with language
education policies, standards and recommendations of the Council of Europe, education of conference interpreters, as advised by European Commission and possibilities of cooperation between Serbian and European institutions. Specific topics that were discussed include the importance of linguistic and cultural diversity, the importance of language for the future of Serbia in EU; participation of professionals in developing study program in Translation and Interpretation; establishing co-operation with high education institutions that offer foreign language studies, especially with European Center for Modern Languages in Graz; availability and use of programs, funds and other instruments of support in development of education in the area of foreign language studies.

These topics were discussed within two round tables:

**Languages in Serbia and Europe: present, future and challenges**, dedicated to the importance of languages and language education policy, and

**Translation and Interpretation in Serbia and Europe: experience, future plans and challenges.**

**FIRST ROUND TABLE FINDINGS**

The importance of languages and linguistic/cultural diversity

“Languages are core values of a nation and they are a part of our identity. As such, languages should be given an important place in nation’s priorities.”

(Mr. Vincent Degert, Head of Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Serbia)

Mr. Michael Kelly pointed out that languages are strategically important for the future of Europe, not only as an inseparable part of our identity, but also for its economic, social and political value. Languages facilitate to governments access to external markets and affect career opportunities of individuals. People who have limited capability in languages have correspondingly more limited opportunities for career development. Our personal mobility and social cohesion skills depend on language abilities. Languages contribute to personal growth of each one us, and are also an important element of cultural diversity.

Multilingualism, which is a part of cultural diversity of Europe, is essential for European legitimacy and transparency of its decisions, added Mr. Durand, while Mr. Waldemar Martyniuk, Director of the European Centre for Modern Languages, stressed the social and individual importance of the positive approach to development of plurilingualism: “If we want intercultural dialog, social cohesion, democratic citizenship and economic progress, then language competence is what we need to think about in the first instance.” He also emphasized that linguistic (and cultural) diversity shouldn’t be viewed as a problem that needs to be solved, but as a potential benefit, something worth being valued, promoted and supported.

Ms. Vranes shared this point of view and stressed that it is an obligation of every person, and especially of a philologist, to preserve this diversity. Our task as language specialists is to widen the knowledge about our own linguistic and cultural inheritance, but also to familiarize people with traditions and cultures of other nations through their languages. By learning a language, we don’t just acquire the knowledge of phonology, syntax, morphology of the language in question, but we also discover a specific and unique Weltanschauung.

**Language education reform**
The REFLESS project coordinator, Ms Jasmina Nikolić, shared valuable conclusions of the working visits the team took to the EU Universities, which represent the guidelines for future REFLESS project development. They include: harmonization of foreign language studies in Serbia with the European standards; promoting languages in Serbia and Serbian language in Europe; raising awareness of all relevant institutions regarding the importance of languages and language education policies, defining benchmark statements for philological profession and developing curriculum framework for foreign language study programs; working on international cooperation, introducing new technologies and the blended learning concept, opening of university centers for translation; designing and implementing translation and interpretation studies in higher education and harmonizing study programs with labour market needs.

**Internationalization, mobility and multidisciplinarity with practical outcome**

In his speech about higher education reform Rector Kovačević said that the path of internationalization, mobility (i.e. networking between institutions, researchers and professors) and multidisciplinarity should be followed. Each study program has to have some practical outcome and be strongly related to the labor market, since the task of education is to improve economy and provide jobs. Actually, adjusting language studies in accordance to labor market needs has been set as one of this project's objectives. Ms. Jelena Gledić presented preliminary results of labor market analysis in Serbia.

Language education reform in Serbia is essential for:

- country’s smooth transition into the EU
- need for highly-educated professionals for new jobs required by an expanding labor market, and
- participation in the EU space of higher education as an equal partner

It will establish the value of the Serbian language and allow all professionals to negotiate efficiently with the EU market in their mother tongue, by providing well-trained translators and interpreters.

Developing and reforming language education policy was mentioned by Dean of the Faculty of Philology, Aleksandra Vranes, as one of the highest priorities of our society. Without language education policy, there can’t be reforms in the language education area, so the Government and the University must work together and share their responsibilities. These reforms are necessary for modernization of Serbia in the area of language studies and represent one step further on our path towards the European Union. As professor Filipović said, “we need to look for a way to design language education policies across the curriculum, not only horizontally, but also vertically. We need to affect the way we teach the languages in different levels...We need to look very closely at linguistic competences and also pedagogical competences of our future language teachers.”

**Reforms that go into depth**

The Council of Europe, as stated by Ms. Antje Rothemund, settled a coherent and very holistic approach to language education policy. It aims at promoting plurilingualism and linguistic diversity, and at contributing to social cohesion, to democratic citizenship and mutual understanding, which is an important precondition for inter-cultural communication, for peace and reconciliation. She also believes that **reform of foreign language studies should go into depth, and not content itself with staying on the surface.**

**Dialogue with the government**
In the opinion of Mr. Michael Kelly, Director of the UK Subject Center for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies, the reform should be carried out through the **dialog**. Language experts must harmonize the way they envision the future of language education, which means that they need to:

- reach sufficiently broad consensus on **defining key priorities**, in order to provide wider involvement
- collaborate in the creation of new study programs
- educate and train translation and interpretation professionals

On the other hand, state support and involvement of the government is of immense importance for successful realization of proposed reforms. As Mr. Kelly said: **“There’s no alternative to engaging with policy makers”**, who must be presented in a clear way, with specific problems language education is facing. They are also necessary for implementation of any changes that require changes in legislation.

**A good example: University of Versailles**

Mr. Laurent Bazin ([video 1](#), [video 2](#)), Director of the Institute for Languages and International Studies at the University of Versailles considered that the Serbian reform could follow the example of the University of Versailles, where language diversity is being promoted throughout university-level education. This would entail gaining state support in introducing compulsory language classes for all professions, which would be provided by language schools. Another significant aspect is providing tailor-made classes, as well as conducting a **structural reorganization** throughout the universities.

**SECOND ROUND TABLE FINDINGS**

**Why do we need M.A. Studies in conference interpretation?**

Most important reason is our future in the European union. Mr. Degert has already stressed the importance of highly qualified interpreters in this respect, since they are the ones who should facilitate negotiations between Serbia and EU:

> “We’ll not just be discussing nice negotiations with diplomatic words. We’re going to enter into very technical issues... and there we need to understand what we are talking about. So, it is very, very important that we have well-trained interpreters to work on this issue and facilitate the understanding of negotiators on each side of the table”.

Same applies to all other negotiations on all levels and on the variety of subjects - skilled interpreters are necessary for mutual understanding and effectiveness of communication.

**The situation**

The problem is the number of highly skilled conference interpreters cannot meet the needs. Professor Trbojević pointed out that, language studies at Serbian universities usually focus on written translation but not on interpreting and therefore, conference interpreting and translation training should be organized and driven in institutionalized and systematic way.
How shall we proceed?

Ms. Persefoni Poulou (Enlargement Co-ordinator, Multilingualism and Interpreter Training Support, DG Interpretation, European Commission) and Mr. Claude Durand (Head of Unit for Multilingualism and interpreter training support, DG Interpretation, European Commission), presented useful advice.

1. Time is essential.
It's crucial to start early if there's no interpreting tradition.
As Mr. Durand pointed out, over 50 years of experience of DG SCIC have shown that the best option for conference interpreters training is at the graduate (Master's) level.

2. There's no success without involvement of the authorities.
The national authorities are expected to give their full support and to choose one center of excellence. Academic authorities, on the other hand, should focus on creating the European Master's in Conference Interpreting as an intensive, practice-oriented course.

3. Learning by doing principle
The program should not aim at learning languages, but at acquiring skills, techniques and professional knowledge through “learning by doing” principle. That's why we'll need conference equipment, professional conference interpreters as teachers and native speakers to deliver speeches for practicing purposes.

4. Selection based on quality and set of abilities
A rigorous selection of candidates entering the program is also very important.
A perfect candidate is not the one with only language skills, but also with analytical and communication skills. “It's true that languages are sine qua non, they are necessary for interpreters, but they are not enough. We are looking for professionals who know how to analyze, assimilate message and who can convincingly and faithfully convey the intention, the tone, the register, the style of the speaker into another language”, said Ms. Poulou.

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions of the first round table:
- the language education reform cannot happen without the active dialog with the government
- relevant language education professionals in Serbia are to define clear objectives and key priorities
- pro-active and comprehensive approach to language education is the only way.

Conclusion of the second round table
- Conference interpreters should be trained at the graduate level (Master's). Therefore, European Master's in Translation and Interpretation is of utmost importance given the European future of our country.
- Highly qualified interpreters are necessary to facilitate negotiations between Serbia and EU
- Quality is the key for success in training – for candidates, teachers and methods alike.

Ms. Antje Rottenmund, Head of the Council of Europe Office in Serbia, congratulated the REFLESS TEMPUS project team for the work done in designing the project and for having succeeded in defining the needs for language studies reforms:
“This project can already be considered a big achievement and is a good foundation for what is coming now. REFLESS is a very ambitious program aiming to build highly skilled professional language capacities, which is an evident need and an important resource for Serbia as a country aspiring EU membership and also a firm place in the globalized world.”

The effects of this conference give us energy to continue with the same optimism and ambition. REFLESS project has been given the status of national importance, since Serbia has established the reform of foreign language studies in HE as one of the national priorities. REFLESS project inspired relevant academic and government institutions to work together on achieving the same goal, and the values the project stands for have been publicly recognized.