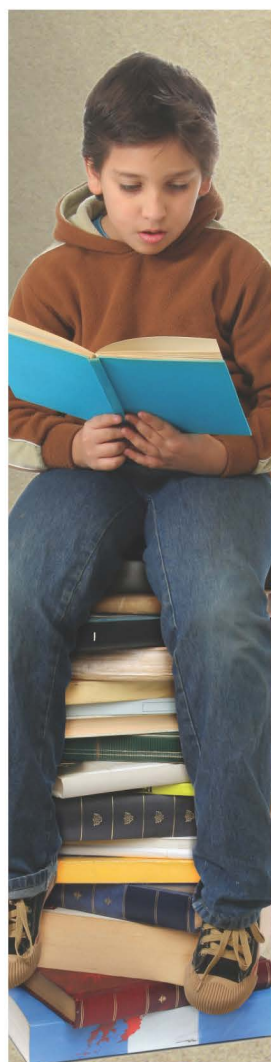


DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICIES

**POLICY DEPARTMENT**  
STRUCTURAL AND COHESION POLICIES **B**



Agriculture and Rural Development

**Culture and Education**

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Regional Development

Transport and Tourism

**THE IMPLEMENTATION OF  
THE COMMON EUROPEAN  
FRAMEWORK FOR  
LANGUAGES IN EUROPEAN  
EDUCATION SYSTEMS**

**STUDY**







**DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICIES**  
**POLICY DEPARTMENT B: STRUCTURAL AND COHESION POLICIES**

**CULTURE AND EDUCATION**

# **THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMMON EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK FOR LANGUAGES IN EUROPEAN EDUCATION SYSTEMS**

**STUDY**

This document was requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Education and Culture

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Translation: DE, FR

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Manuscript completed in June 2013.  
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**DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICIES**  
**POLICY DEPARTMENT B: STRUCTURAL AND COHESION POLICIES**  
**CULTURE AND EDUCATION**

# **THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMMON EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK FOR LANGUAGES IN EUROPEAN EDUCATION SYSTEMS**

## **STUDY**

### **Abstract**

This study aims at analysing way the compulsory school system approaches foreign language learning. It analyses the use of the CEFR in examination, curriculum development, schoolbooks and teacher training. The study concludes that although links between exams and CEFR are often not supported, the general approach to language learning of the CEFR is implemented; curricula and schoolbooks take notice of contextual language use and the related 'can-do' statements; and teacher training includes referenced to the CEFR. However, the CEFR could use a renewed impetus to increase its effect.



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ALTE</b>	Association of Language Testers in Europe
<b>AT</b>	Austria
<b>BE</b>	Belgium
<b>BG</b>	Bulgaria
<b>CEFR</b>	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
<b>CY</b>	Cyprus
<b>CZ</b>	Czech Republic
<b>DE</b>	Germany
<b>DK</b>	Denmark
<b>EE</b>	Estonia
<b>EL</b>	Greece
<b>ELP</b>	European Language Portfolio
<b>EQF</b>	European Qualifications Framework
<b>ES</b>	Spain
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FI</b>	Finland
<b>FR</b>	France
<b>HU</b>	Hungary
<b>IE</b>	Ireland
<b>ISCED</b>	International Standard Classification of Education
<b>IT</b>	Italy
<b>LT</b>	Lithuania
<b>LU</b>	Luxembourg
<b>LV</b>	Latvia
<b>MFL</b>	Modern Foreign Language
<b>MT</b>	Malta
<b>NL</b>	Netherlands
<b>PL</b>	Poland
<b>PT</b>	Portugal

**RO** Romania  
**SE** Sweden  
**SI** Slovenia  
**SK** Slovakia  
**UK** United Kingdom  
**UK** United Kingdom (Scotland)  
**(Scotland)**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) was developed by the Council of Europe to provide unity in educational and cultural matters among its Member States with regard to foreign language learning, to promote transparency and coherence in the learning and teaching of modern languages in Europe. It was officially published in 2001. The CEFR provides a general framework which indicates what language learners need to learn to be able to use a foreign language effectively in practice. Thereby, the framework creates a common basis for language learning curricula or guidelines, qualifications, textbooks, examinations, and syllabuses across European states<sup>1</sup>. The CEFR is based on an action-oriented approach to language learning and use. It includes six proficiency levels for foreign language learning. The CEFR tries not only to facilitate the comparability between countries (on the basis of a shared conceptual framework for language learning) but also to respect national traditions and systems in language proficiency standards.

In 2008, the Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the use of the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR) and the promotion of plurilingualism was released, to invite Member States to implement the CEFR in their education system and to promote plurilingualism. This recommendation advises governments of Member States to take their constitution, their education system, and the national, regional or local circumstances into account, for the implementation of the CEFR and the promotion of plurilingualism. For this implementation, the following measurements are described (headed by 'general principles' and 'specific measures'):

- **A) General principles and measures** to be implemented by authorities responsible for language education at national, regional and local level which includes creating conditions to provide an effective use of the CEFR. These conditions should encourage cooperation between both education institutions and Member States. Furthermore, it should provide mutual recognition of language qualifications, guidance for language learning with the aim to maintain and develop plurilingualism among European citizens. More importantly, these conditions must encourage teachers, teacher training programmes, learners, education administrators, course designers, textbook authors, curriculum developers, and examining bodies to implement the CEFR and the underlining learner-focused, action-oriented, competence-based approach of the CEFR in foreign language learning and teaching approaches.
- **B) Specific measures aimed at policy making, curriculum and textbook development, teacher training, and assessment:** National, regional and local education authorities who decide to use the CEFR are encouraged to ensure an appropriate and coherent use of the framework by taking the responsibility to facilitate and coordinate cooperation between all relevant stakeholders involved in language education. This includes encouraging all language policy makers and education administrators to ensure unity in language objectives and to promote the awareness of language use and competences in education. Institutes for teacher training of language teachers should be encouraged to use the CEFR effectively for their training programmes. Furthermore, textbook developers have to be encouraged to take the aspects of the CEFR into account when developing language learning textbooks. The same is requested of developers of language tests, examinations and assessments.

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<sup>1</sup> Council of Europe, *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages : Learning, teaching, assessment*, 2001: [http://www.coe.int/t/dq4/education/elp/elp-reg/Source/Key\\_reference/CEFR\\_EN.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dq4/education/elp/elp-reg/Source/Key_reference/CEFR_EN.pdf).

During the years since the CEFR was developed and published, **criticism has arisen** concerning the aims of the framework, its accessibility, description and classification of language competences, the number of competence levels, and application of the CEFR in language tests. Almost every aspect of the CEFR is vulnerable to serious criticism and yet, bearing in mind the extent of its reach, those language professionals who have criticised it in writing are relatively few in number.

A number of **European Union initiatives** have been taken in the field of languages: projects within the Lifelong Learning Programme; incorporation of the CEFR in the Europass format; and the development of the European Survey on Language Competences. The Council of Europe published guidance material on how to use the CEFR in practice:

- In 2009, the Council of Europe published the manual 'Relating Language Examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR)'. The aim of the Manual is to help providers of examinations to relate their examinations with the CEFR by developing procedures to ensure this relation.
- The 'First European Survey on Language Competences' took into account the CEFR levels to identify the proficiency levels of students across fourteen European countries. In addition to analysing the proficiency levels, this survey concluded that within fourteen of the sixteen educational systems analysed, central authorities have recommended or made compulsory the use of the CEFR in language learning policies.

This study provides an insight into the extent to which the Common European Framework for Languages is implemented in European countries. This study will provide:

- An analysis of foreign language competences in learning outcomes of qualifications/ certificates provided at the end of upper secondary education;
- An examination of the use of CEFR in provision of private education;
- An assessment of the social function of language certificates.

The focus is on the first objective.

The analysis focussed on six countries (Sweden, France, the Netherlands, Hungary, Austria and the United Kingdom - Scotland). In the selection criteria related to language families, geographical scope and other characteristics of the countries were taken into account. In addition, the analysis focussed on one qualification type. The selected qualification in each country is comparable in scope and function, and similar with regard to their levelling on the European Qualifications Framework (level 4: qualifications giving access to higher education). The following qualifications are taken into account: Austria: Academic secondary education (in German: Allgemein bildende höhere Schule); Sweden: Higher education preparatory programmes (in Swedish: Högskoleförberedande program); Netherlands: Pre-university education (in Dutch: Voorbereidend Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs); UK (Scotland): Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications; France: Baccalaureate (in French: Baccalauréat); Hungary: General secondary school and vocational secondary school (in Hungarian: gimnázium and szakközépiskola).

## Key findings

Concerning the **implementation in general**, the following is mentioned. Learning a first modern foreign language is mandatory for pupils in upper secondary education according to the language learning policies of five of the six selected countries. Major differences have been identified in the policies towards learning a second and a third

modern foreign language. Some countries (SE, NL, FR, and HU) oblige pupils to learn more than one language whereas in other countries it is optional (UK -Scotland and AT). Encouraging pupils to achieve better results and higher proficiency levels in modern foreign languages is a hot debate topic within the selected countries.

All the selected countries relate their modern foreign language learning programmes and policies to the CEFR. Most of the countries have implemented the CEFR to different degrees within their national and/or specific modern foreign language curricula. Only Austria and France have anchored the CEFR in law. The lack of empirical evidence provided by research studies for the link between the CEFR and learning outcomes, objectives of curricula, examination, and/or other (policy) documents which have influence on the education system, seems to be a main obstacle for implementation of the CEFR. In addition, the implementation of the CEFR within the classroom demands different skills from modern foreign language teachers. Therefore several countries (FR, NL, and SE) are worried about the use of the CEFR by modern foreign language teachers.

Concerning the specific measures related to the implementation of the CEFR (examination, schoolbooks and teaching training), the following key findings have been identified:

Taking an exam or test in the first modern foreign language is mandatory in four of the six selected countries (AT, SE, NL and FR). In Austria, the Netherlands and France, passing of this exam or test is required for pupils to obtain their diploma to access higher education. An examination in a second modern foreign language is not required within any of the six selected countries. In the Netherlands and France, a second foreign language is mandatory, however this could be a modern foreign language, a classical language, or a regional language. With regards to **the implementation of the CEFR in final examinations and tests**, the following situations can be distinguished:

- The final exams or tests are based on the CEFR (AT, HU, SE, and NL);
- The final MFL exams are currently not based on the CEFR (FR);
- No link is made between the CEFR and the final MFL examinations UK - Scotland).

Learning outcomes which give a CEFR level indication for examination are determined within five (AT, SE, NL, HU, and FR) of the six selected countries. Only two (AT and NL) of the selected countries have determined different CEFR levels for at least four the language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking). In relation to the invitation of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers, to those national, regional and local education authorities who decide to use the CEFR, it can be concluded that a majority of the selected countries implemented the CEFR in tests or examinations and made this link clear by a transparent display of the modern foreign language learning outcomes in CEFR levels.

In relation to **publishers of schoolbooks** which are intended for the selected qualifications, a distinction can be made between countries where the development of the schoolbooks and the content is bound by State Regulations (AT and HU) and countries where there are no State Regulations concerning the development and content of schoolbooks (SE, NL, FR, and UK - Scotland). With regard to the implementation of the CEFR in these schoolbooks the selected countries can be divided into two groups: countries in which publishers used the CEFR indirectly (AT, HU, and SE) through obligations set in national curricula; and countries in which publishers can either decide themselves whether or not to use the CEFR, or where it is not used at all (NL, FR and UK -Scotland). In relation to the invitation of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers, it can be concluded that some governments enforce

publishers of MFL schoolbooks to use the CEFR and some stimulate publishers to use the CEFR in national and/or specific MFL curricula.

In all the selected countries except the UK -Scotland, the CEFR is included in **in-service teacher training programmes**. Compared to the situation of the pre-service teacher training, only three of the selected countries (AT, NL, and FR) use the CEFR. Hence, differences in the use of the CEFR in teacher training among the selected countries are most clearly identified for pre-service teacher training. Therefore four situations concerning the implementation of the CEFR in pre-service teacher training can be identified:

- First, trainers of MFL pre-service teacher training programmes are obliged to use the CEFR;
- Second, the CEFR is embedded in curricula;
- Third, no advice or requirement is set for use of the CEFR; and
- Finally, no link is made.

Due to the fact that teachers are free to plan and design their lessons, for example by choosing the material such as schoolbooks and the didactic methods, it is difficult to conclude whether teachers actually use the CEFR in their lessons. However, for some of the selected countries it is assumed that these MFL teachers know the CEFR, because of the link within the curricula. In relation to the invitation of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers, it can be concluded that the implementation of the CEFR in pre-service and in-service teacher training is enforced within a few selected countries by the government.

In general, the CEFR is widely used by both **private providers** that offer modern foreign language courses and **language assessment organisations**. With regard to the reasons why people want to obtain a language certificate (increasing their chances on the labour market, required for work, access to university, personal development), or in other words the social function, a CEFR level indication seems to be of added value as it increases transparency in the courses offered and recognition of modern foreign language competence levels across the different borders.

Concerning foreign **language proficiency levels**, the following can be mentioned. From the different data sources a coherent picture emerges when it comes to a general assessment of MFL proficiency levels of the selected countries. The following ranking can be proposed:

- Group 1: Very high performers (Sweden and the Netherlands);
- Group 2: High performers (Austria);
- Group 3: Medium performers (Hungary and France);
- Low performers (UK -Scotland).

Although differences do occur, in general there is a relationship between the degree of CEFR implementation and proficiency levels. It cannot be concluded that this is a causal link however. Factors other than the degree of CEFR implementation impact the MFL proficiency levels, such as general traditions towards languages and whether the language is widely used or not. In general, in countries where the national language is widely used abroad (English, French), the need to learn another language is lower than in countries where the national language is less widely used (Dutch, Swedish). Finally, the linguistic landscape of the country might explain the particular situation of a country with regard to the MFL proficiency levels.



## Conclusions

The main conclusions are provided below:

**Key conclusion 1:** Countries implement and use the CEFR to different degrees, ranging from anchoring the CEFR-related learning outcomes in law to no reference to the CEFR whatsoever. In general it can be concluded that the more the CEFR is implemented and used in policy documents (laws, national curricula), the more the CEFR is used in examination, schoolbooks and teacher training.

**Key conclusion 2:** Major challenges in the implementation concern firstly, the lack of empirical evidence to establish links between learning outcomes and the CEFR levels and secondly, the ability of MFL teachers to use the CEFR in their lessons as intended.

**Key conclusion 3:** There is general agreement concerning the CEFR indication of learning outcomes of MFL in upper secondary education. The stated learning outcomes across the six countries are generally similar. The level of learning outcomes related to the first MFL is usually set at level B2, for the second MFL in general the related level is B1.

**Key conclusion 4:** A majority of the selected countries implement the CEFR in tests or examinations; however the links between MFL learning outcomes to CEFR levels lack in general empirical evidence.

**Key conclusion 5:** In general, the CEFR is used in schoolbook development. Whether the CEFR is used, depends to a large extent on whether the CEFR is implemented and used in curriculum development and is mentioned in (legal) guidance material (national curricula).

**Key conclusion 6:** There are huge differences between countries on whether the CEFR is used in pre-service teacher training programmes. The situation with regard to in-service teacher training is much better, where five of the six selected countries offer training programmes which include the CEFR.

**Key conclusion 7:** Whether teachers know about the CEFR depends on the emphasis placed on the CEFR in curriculum and in teacher training within the country.

**Key conclusion 8:** There is a relationship between the degree of CEFR implementation and proficiency levels recorded; the degree of implementation appears to be higher in countries with higher proficiency levels. However, first of all the causal relationship between the two is unclear and secondly, other (contextual) factors play a more important role in explaining the proficiency levels (such as whether the official language is widely used outside their home country, and the linguistic landscape as such).

**Key conclusion 9:** In general, the CEFR is well embedded in the private providers' practices and procedures which provide MFL certificates. The CEFR is reflected in MFL certificates by a CEFR level indication, included in the used material, and teachers are aware of the CEFR by in-service training programmes.

**Key conclusion 10:** For learners, private providers and language assessment institutes, the CEFR provides transparency and creates possibilities to make comparisons of the courses offered. The reason for individuals to obtain a formal certificate is mostly to increase chance on the labour market. In addition, although the manuals and guidelines on the CEFR are considered helpful, still the complexity of the CEFR hampers its use by private providers. There are calls for more simplified versions of the CEFR.

## Recommendations

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages was developed by the Council of Europe to promote transparency and coherence in the learning and teaching of modern languages in Europe. The CEFR tries both to facilitate the comparability between countries (on the basis of a shared conceptual framework for language learning) and tries to respect national traditions and systems in language proficiency standards. In order to allow the CEFR fulfil this envisaged role in the future, strengthened by European Unions actions, the following recommendations are provided to the European Parliament and the Member States concerning the above mentioned key conclusions:

### **Recommendation 1 (to the European Parliament): Embracing the CEFR by the European Parliament and Commission as the tool to stimulate policy development in the Member States on foreign language learning**

The CEFR has already existed for more than ten years and major developments have taken place during this time. The implementation however, could use a renewed impetus, more at a political level, through European Community actions in supporting the Council of Europe's framework. It is therefore recommended to:

- Further develop the Survey Lang initiative by including both more countries and more languages (not only the first two most widely taught languages, but a broader range, to prevent narrowing down policy attention to the first or second language only).
- Stimulate sharing experiences at national level of reforming language learning policies towards a more action-oriented approach and creating unity in assessing and indicating competence levels of pupils. This could take the form of peer learning activities, compendia of practices, unified formats to report on developments.
- More pronouncedly demand European programmes such as the follow-up of the Lifelong Learning Programme to support the use of the CEFR and the action-oriented approach and stimulating the use of the Europass CVs. In addition, the European Qualifications Framework, which has a similar base, should be linked more clearly to the CEFR to enhance the transparency and awareness of both the action-oriented approach and the CEFR level indications.

### **Recommendation 2 (to the Member States and the European Parliament): Endorsement of links between systems and the CEFR by countries**

Although links are made between MFL learning outcomes and the CEFR levels, these links are not endorsed by other Member States. As such this is not necessary, but when it comes to trusting in each others' qualifications and accredited learning outcomes, the procedures applied to substantiate the links should be understandable and possibly acceptable for Member States. It is therefore recommended to:

- Establish principles for linking language learning in national education systems to the CEFR. These do not necessarily have to cover technical aspects, but should be used for stimulating the political/social debate on language learning. Principles could, for instance, be: involving all relevant stakeholders (policy makers, experts, teachers, schools, publishers); make use of external expertise; establish a common action plan for the referencing to the CEFR to establish agreement concerning the scope for linking to the CEFR.
- Facilitate the involvement of other countries in making links between language learning in national education systems and the CEFR. Key question is whether other countries trust the links established. Have peers (also at the level of policy makers), preferably of different countries, to reflect on the links established, in order to increase the reliability of the link for other countries.
- Stimulate peer learning and peer review among policy makers from different countries to stimulate the establishment of clearer links between language learning

in national education systems and the CEFR and hence using the CEFR as a reform agenda for language learning policies.

**Recommendation 3 (to the Member States): Increase the actual use of the CEFR in schools**

As we have seen, the use of the CEFR at ground level is stimulated by higher level policy actions, such as including the CEFR in law, or using the CEFR in determining the National Curricula. In addition, further actions are required to stimulate teachers and publishers to use the CEFR. It is therefore recommended to:

- Create credibility and a best-fit of the framework in the national context by making use of experiences and discussions with other European countries, consult experts, and use the manual of the Council of Europe. In addition, for the purpose of unambiguous use, the CEFR should be anchored in the national curricula and the MFL specific curricula to embed firmly the action-oriented approach in language learning.
- Stimulate the use of the CEFR levels to set yearly target levels to monitor progress. It could be necessary to provide guidance to set sub-levels to have the possibility for more incremental stages.
- Either stimulate the alignment of schoolbooks with national curricula, or make teachers/schools knowledgeable in making use of existing material to adopt an action-oriented approach. This can for instance be done by stimulating exchange of learning material more widely.
- Enhance the emphasis of the action-oriented approach in pre-service and in-service teacher training.

**Recommendation 4 (to the European Parliament): Further research is needed**

Although this study covered a wide area, many issues surrounding the CEFR are still unclear. This predominantly concerns social/political issues related to language learning. Hence, it is recommended to further study the following issues:

- What are the up-coming languages, and is the CEFR broad enough to deal with non-European languages, such as Chinese?
- What is the impact of the European language indicator on language policies in Europe? Establishing an indicator is a valuable tool to further stimulate policy debates, however, it should not result in a more narrow focus on language learning.
- How can the CEFR be used to strengthen the position of minority and regional languages?
- Investigate the possibility of having a supra-national body or advisory group in which countries review each others' references between the own language learning policies and the CEFR. This supranational body could function as a platform to exchange experiences, monitor developments, provide practical guidelines, create mutual trust In each others' references of MFL qualifications and CEFR levels, and finally, set/develop the policy agenda.



# 1. INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

## 1.1. Aim of the study

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) was developed by the Council of Europe to provide unity in educational and cultural matters among its Member States with regard to foreign language learning. The CEFR provides a general framework which indicates what language learners need to learn to be able to use a foreign language effectively in practice. Thus, the framework creates a common basis for language learning curricula or guidelines, qualifications, textbooks, examinations, and syllabuses across European states<sup>2</sup>. In 2008, the Recommendation of the Council of Europe on the use of the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR) and the promotion of plurilingualism was released. This invites Member States to implement the CEFR in their education system and to promote plurilingualism<sup>3</sup>.

This study provides an insight into the extent to which the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages is implemented in European countries. The aims of this study are to:

- Provide the CULT committee with an assessment on the use of the CEFR in schoolbooks and secondary examinations (Analyse the impact of the policy measures taken after the elaboration of CEFR; Provide an insight on those areas of language learning and teaching which were not in the focus of policies and reviews of CEFR until now);
- Provide an overview of the existing policies/situation in the EU regarding the implementation of CEFR;
- Provide conclusions and recommendations;
- Highlight what further research may be necessary.

## 1.2. Research tasks and questions

Given the aims of this study to provide an insight into the implementation of the CEFR in European countries, it is necessary to specify the research areas or tasks. The first task concerns analysing foreign language competences in terms of learning outcomes of qualifications/certificates provided at the end of **upper secondary education**, by making use of the CEFR as a 'translation-device'. Besides accessing the implementation in state schools, the second task focuses on the relation between the CEFR and the provision of **private education**. The final task is not related to a specific kind of education but analyses the **social function** of obtaining a language certificate in general. To address these research tasks, a number of operationalised research questions have been defined, as summarised in box 1.

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<sup>2</sup> Council of Europe, *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages : Learning, teaching, assessment*, 2001: [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/elp/elp-reg/Source/Key\\_reference/CEFR\\_EN.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/elp/elp-reg/Source/Key_reference/CEFR_EN.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Council of Europe, *Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the use of the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the promotion of plurilingualism*, 2008: [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/SourceForum07/Rec%20CM%202008-7\\_EN.doc](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/SourceForum07/Rec%20CM%202008-7_EN.doc). Although it is outside the scope of this current study, according to a meta-study on more than sixty academic papers, second language study has a positive impact on a high number of issues. Second language study: 1) benefits academic progress in other subjects; 2) narrows achievement gaps; benefits basic skills development; 4) benefits higher order, abstract and creative thinking; 5) (early) enriches and enhances cognitive development; 6) enhances a student's sense of achievement; 7) helps students score higher on standardised tests; 8) promotes cultural awareness and competency; 9) improves chances of college acceptance, achievement and attainment; 10) enhances career opportunities; and 11) benefits understanding and security in community and society; see: NEA Research, *The Benefits of Second Language Study Research Findings with Citations*, 2007.

### **Box 1: Research questions**

1) Analysis of foreign language competences in learning outcomes of qualifications/certificates provided at the end of secondary education, by making use of the CEFR as a 'translation-device':

- a) Are foreign language competences as stated in the learning outcomes of secondary education qualifications linked to the CEFR levels?
- b) Accordingly, are examination, provision, curricula and learning materials (across the compulsory schooling period) designed in such a way as to achieve learning outcomes corresponding to CEFR levels?
- c) What macro-level background characteristics (such as policy and legal frameworks) of language learning and learning protection can be contextualised?
- d) Are there mechanisms in place that regulate the use of CEFR scales by examination bodies?
- e) What can explain the limited use of CEFR scales by teachers, in spite of the fact that training for them is apparently provided?
- f) Provide a comparison of the stated learning outcomes (by using the CEFR) and the methods to obtain these competences by a cross-country analysis on whether graduates have similar foreign language skills.
- g) Compare the findings of European surveys on foreign language skills with the degree of implementation of the CEFR between countries.

2) An examination of the use of CEFR in provision of private education (adult Learning):

- a) What is the usage of CEFR levels on certificates provided?
- b) How are the courses provided?
- c) What course materials are used?
- d) How is examination and assessment organised?
- e) What rights and recognition do certificates provide?
- f) How is quality assurance (including staff quality) performed and/or supervised?

3) An assessment of the social function of language certificates:

- a) For what purpose do people obtain a 'formal' language certificate (e.g. test by Goethe-Institute, Alliance Française/Didier, and Cambridge English)? Is it for further learning, gaining access to certain schools/universities, access certain professions?

## **1.3. Demarcation of the study**

As this explorative study on the implementation of the CEFR, is limited both in terms of time and budget, a balanced demarcation is established to make sure that the study acquires the required thoroughness in a limited number of countries instead of providing a shallow analysis in a large number of countries. Due to the limitations, the study cannot provide a full picture of the situation in all European countries. For these reasons, the explorative study is demarcated in the following way:

- The study analysed the implementation in compulsory education in six European countries;
- Within each country, the study analyses one qualification-type. The selected qualification in each country is comparable in scope and function, and similar with regard to their levelling on the European Qualifications Framework (EQF);
- The study focuses on three foreign languages (English, German, and French); however, it will take into account other languages as well when relevant.

The geographical demarcation is based on the following criteria:

- At least one country with a **mother language which is widely used elsewhere** (UK -> English; DE, AT -> German; FR -> French; ES -> Spanish; PT -> Portuguese);
- At least one country with a **mother language not widely used elsewhere** (NL -> Dutch; HU -> Hungarian; DK -> Danish; SE -> Swedish; LV -> Latvian; LT -> Lithuanian; EE -> Estonian; CZ -> Czech; SK -> Slovak; SI -> Slovenian; EL -> Greek; BG -> Bulgarian; RO -> Romanian; PL -> Polish; IT -> Italian);
- At least one **multilingual country**, where people have a high proficiency in at least one other language than their mother tongue (e.g. Luxembourg, Sweden, Slovakia, Latvia, the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria)<sup>4</sup>;
- At least one **monolingual country**, where the majority of the population reports not to speak a foreign language (e.g. Hungary, Ireland, the United Kingdom, Italy, Portugal, and Spain).

In addition, the selection is geographically balanced (Western-Europe, Eastern Europe, Southern Europe and Northern Europe); spread over different language-families (at least one Roman and one Germanic language); and is balanced with regard to size of the countries.

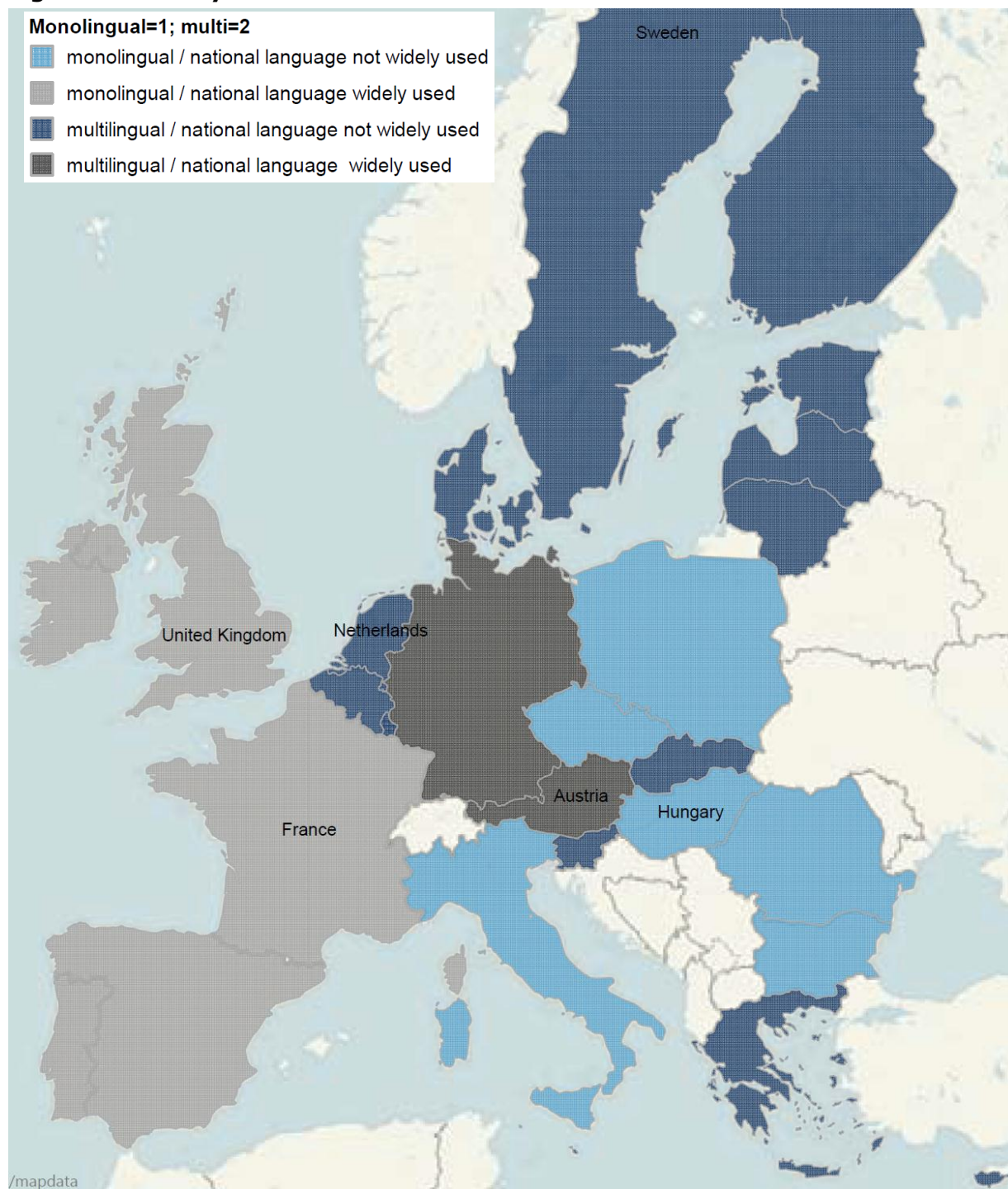
On the basis of these criteria the following six countries, as depicted in figure 1, have been chosen (country names included).

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<sup>4</sup> European Commission, Special Eurobarometer 386 Europeans and their languages, 2012, see: [http://ec.europa.eu/languages/languages-of-europe/eurobarometer-survey\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/languages/languages-of-europe/eurobarometer-survey_en.htm).



**Figure 1: Country selection**



**Source:** Authors

Hence, the following countries have been selected: Austria, France, Hungary, the Netherlands, the UK (Scotland) and Sweden.



## **1.4. Methodology, conceptual framework and structure of the study**

### **1.4.1. Methodology**

The methods used for this study are outlined for each research task:

#### **Secondary school analysis**

The information for this research task was obtained through desk research and national level stakeholder interviews. A country factsheet template was developed and included the questions that were used as a guideline to analyse the situation of the implementation of the CEFR in the six selected countries. The desk research is complemented by stakeholder interviews. Amongst others the following stakeholders have been interviewed: ministries, test organisations or developers, education inspectorates, publishers of textbooks, schools that offer teacher training for foreign languages, and foreign languages teachers. The information obtained was included in the country factsheets.

#### **Exploration of private providers use of the CEFR**

The used methods for this research task include desk research and interviews with private providers. Moreover, for this task a concise checklist was developed as a guideline for the short telephone interviews. For each of the six selected countries, private providers were contacted and asked about their use of the CEFR. These private providers were randomly selected from a list of private providers per country<sup>5</sup>. In addition, websites of private providers were studied to see whether references are made to the CEFR.

#### **Exploration of the social function**

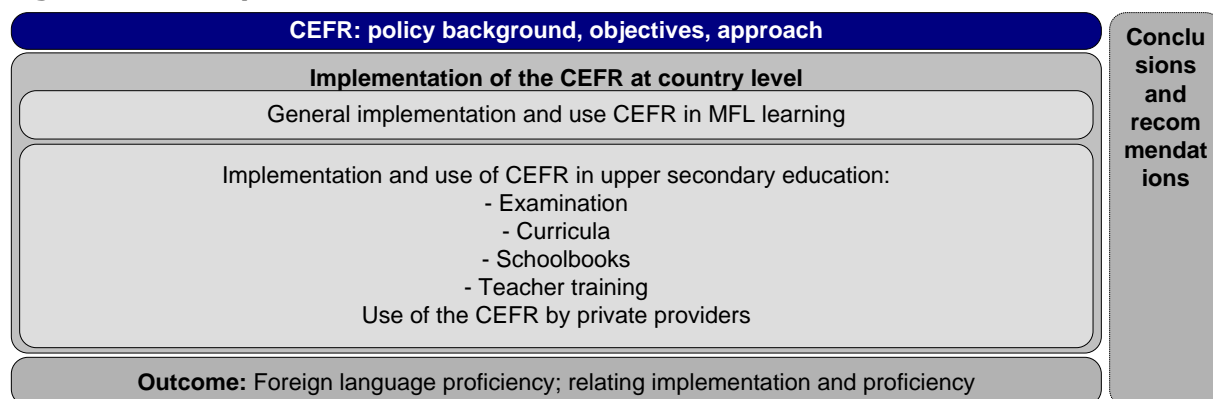
Assessing the social function was done on the basis of the previous steps and addition data gathering in relation to testing organisations responsible for assessments of English, French and/or German. This provided an insight into the main reasons for people to obtain a formal modern foreign language certificate.

### **1.4.2. Conceptual framework and structure of the study**

The following figure provides an overview of the conceptual framework of the study. First, the general policy background of the CEFR is sketched. Secondly, the general implementation and the implementation in upper secondary education (examination, curricula, schoolbooks and teacher training) is examined. Finally, we looked at the outcome of the implementation: are there any common patterns identifiable concerning implementation and language proficiency and the added value of the CEFR.

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<sup>5</sup> Collected by ESL base: <http://www.eslbase.com/schools/>.

**Figure 2: Conceptual framework****Source:** Authors

The conceptual framework generally describes the structure of the study as well:

- **The CEFR:** Chapter 2 presents the framework itself; the policy background is explained; criticism raised concerning the CEFR is discussed; and finally recent policy actions taken are elaborated on.
- **Implementation in general:** in Chapter 3 foreign language learning and the implementation of the CEFR in policy documents is discussed;
- **Specific measurements:** Chapter 4 focuses on the implementation of the CEFR in schoolbooks, examinations, teacher training programmes and the knowledge and use of the CEFR by teachers. Furthermore, the use of the CEFR in the private sector is discussed;
- **Foreign language proficiency:** Chapter 5 provides information on language proficiency and discusses differences between countries;
- **Conclusions and recommendations:** in Chapter 6 the conclusions and recommendations are outlined.

The annex provides overview of the literature used and the persons who contributed to the knowledge-base of this study.

## 2. THE RELEVANCE OF THE CEFR AND ITS DESIGN

### KEY FINDINGS

- The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) was developed by the Council of Europe to promote transparency and coherence in the learning and teaching of modern languages in Europe. It was officially published in 2001.
- The CEFR is based on an action-oriented approach to language learning and use. It includes six proficiency levels for foreign language learning.
- The CEFR both tries to facilitate the comparability between countries (on the basis of a shared conceptual framework for language learning) and respecting national traditions and systems in language proficiency standards.
- Comparing language proficiency levels achieved in formal school qualifications programmes and language certificates among Member States by using the CEFR is difficult. As recognition is closely related to trust in each others' qualifications and assessment procedures, recognising qualifications that are granted on the basis of different assessment traditions might pose a threat to trusting these qualifications as being an expression of the learning outcomes stated.
- During the years since the CEFR has been developed and published, criticism has arisen concerning the aims of the framework, its accessibility, description and classification of language competences, the number of competence levels, and application of the CEFR in language tests. Almost every aspect of the CEFR is vulnerable to serious criticism and yet, bearing in mind the extent of its reach, those language professionals who have criticised it in writing are relatively few in number.
- A number of European Union initiatives have been taken in the field of languages: projects within the Lifelong Learning Programme; incorporation of the CEFR in the Europass format; and the development of the European Survey on Language Competences. The Council of Europe published guidance material on how to use the CEFR in practice (the Survey and the Council of Europe guidance material is highlighted below).
- In 2009, the Council of Europe published the manual 'Relating Language Examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR)'. The aim of the Manual is to help providers of examinations to relate their examinations to the CEFR by developing procedures to ensure this relation.
- The 'First European Survey on Language Competences' took into account the CEFR levels to identify the proficiency levels of students across fourteen European countries. In addition to analysing the proficiency levels, this survey concluded that within fourteen of the sixteen educational systems analysed, central authorities have recommended or made compulsory the use of the CEFR in language learning policies.

## 2.1. The Common European Framework of Reference for languages

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) was developed by a Council of Europe's international working party set up by the Language Policy Division with a view to promoting transparency and coherence in the learning and teaching of modern languages in Europe. After a pilot scheme involving extensive field consultation, the Framework was officially published in 2001, the European Year of Languages, and has since been translated and published in almost 40 languages – in Europe and beyond.

The CEFR includes a descriptive scheme of language use and competences as well as scales of proficiency for the different parameters of this scheme. It also contains chapters on curriculum design, methodological options for language learning and teaching, and principles of language testing and assessment. The comprehensive, learner-focused descriptive scheme provides the reader with a tool for reflecting on what is involved not only in language use, but also in language learning, teaching and assessment. The CEFR thus provides a common basis and a common language for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, textbooks, teacher-training programmes, and for relating examinations and qualifications to one another. It allows the different partners involved in planning and delivering language provision and in assessing language progress and proficiency, to co-ordinate and situate their efforts.

The descriptive section of the CEFR is based on an action-oriented approach to language learning and use. It presents an analytic breakdown of what proficient language users have to do in order to achieve effective communication, together with the various kinds of knowledge and skills they have to call upon in order to do so.<sup>6</sup>

The Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR) describes six proficiency levels for foreign language learning. The first levels are A1 and A2 and called the levels of a 'basic user', B1 and B2 are the levels of an 'Independent user', and people who command C1 and C2 are considered 'Proficient Users'. These level-descriptions are described according to the underlining action-oriented approach of the creators of the CEFR. This approach views learners and users of foreign languages as members of a society who accomplish tasks in certain circumstances and within social contexts. For that reason the level descriptions are outlined in a can-do-statement<sup>7</sup>. The so-called can-do-statements describe what a learner should be able to do in effectively communicating at the determined CEFR level. Besides the general descriptions for each CEFR level, the 'can-do-statements' are described for five different skills: listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production, and writing. In table 1 the 6 CEFR levels are presented together with the responding can-do-statements.

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<sup>6</sup> Council of Europe, *Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the use of the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the promotion of plurilingualism*, 2008: [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/SourceForum07/Rec%20CM%202008-7\\_EN.doc](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/SourceForum07/Rec%20CM%202008-7_EN.doc).

<sup>7</sup> Council of Europe, *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages : Learning, teaching, assessment*, 2001: [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/elp/elp-reg/Source/Key\\_reference/CEFR\\_EN.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/elp/elp-reg/Source/Key_reference/CEFR_EN.pdf).

**Table 1: CEFR levels and can-do-statements<sup>8</sup>**

Level	Can-do statements
<b>A1: Breakthrough or beginner</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type.</li> <li>– Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has.</li> <li>– Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.</li> </ul>
<b>A2: Waystage or elementary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment).</li> <li>– Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters.</li> <li>– Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.</li> </ul>
<b>B1: Threshold or intermediate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc.</li> <li>– Can deal with most situations likely to arise while travelling in an area where the language is spoken.</li> <li>– Can produce simple connected text on topics that are familiar or of personal interest.</li> <li>– Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes &amp; ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.</li> </ul>
<b>B2: Vantage or upper intermediate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation.</li> <li>– Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party.</li> <li>– Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.</li> </ul>
<b>C1: Effective Operational Proficiency or advanced</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning.</li> <li>– Can express ideas fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions.</li> <li>– Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes.</li> <li>– Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.</li> </ul>
<b>C2: Mastery or proficiency</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read.</li> <li>– Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation.</li> <li>– Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in the most complex situations.</li> </ul>

Source: Council of Europe

<sup>8</sup> Council of Europe, Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment, 2001:  
[http://www.coe.int/t/dq4/education/elp/elp-reg/Source/Key\\_reference/CEFR\\_EN.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dq4/education/elp/elp-reg/Source/Key_reference/CEFR_EN.pdf).

Between May and September 2006 a survey was conducted focussing on the use of the CEFR at national level in the 30 Member States of the Council of Europe. In general, the conclusions of the survey indicated that the influence of the CEFR on education was traced in a variety of official documents. A main problem which was indicated concerning the use of the CEFR levels was the lack of detail of some descriptions. Although most countries have made some effort to implement the CEFR in tests or examinations for primary, secondary, and adult education, the lack of detail of some level descriptions made it difficult to link the tests and examinations with the CEFR. In addition, the survey analysed the use of the CEFR in teacher training. Within teacher training, the spectrum of use is quite varied among the countries: some use the CEFR only for CEFR-based teacher training, others use it for both pre-service and in-service teacher training, and again in other countries, there was no definitive information available which indicates the use of the CEFR<sup>9</sup>.

As a consequence of the widespread use and adoption of the CEFR, the Council of Europe organised an intergovernmental forum<sup>10</sup> for Member States to discuss upcoming policy issues related to the framework. In addition to identifying the policy issues, the forum focused on the responsibility for appropriate use of the framework. Primarily, this responsibility lies with the Member States; Member States should search for solutions to problems encountered and provide each other with good practices concerning the use of the CEFR. The Member States have to work together to ensure consistency related to the use of the CEFR. This cooperation requires a proactive attitude from the Member States, which was encouraged by the 'Recommendation on the use of the CEFR'<sup>11</sup> of the Committee of Ministers. This recommendation to Member States to use the CEFR was released considering the aim of the Council of Europe to ensure unity in educational matters by encouraging cooperation between Member States. Furthermore, unity in language education could encourage international mobility and closer cooperation on different subjects, like trade, industry and commerce.

The Recommendation Cm/Rec(2008)7 on the use of the CEFR by Member States, recommends governments of Member States to take their constitution, their education system, and the national, regional or local circumstances into account, for the implementation of the CEFR and the promotion of plurilingualism. For this implementation, the following measures are described (headed by 'general principles' and 'specific measures'):

- **A) General principles and measures to be implemented by authorities responsible for language education at national, regional and local level.** These principles and measures include: creating conditions which provide an effective use of the CEFR. These conditions have to encourage cooperation between both education institutions and Member States. Furthermore, it should provide mutual recognition of language qualifications, guidance for language learning with the aim to maintain and develop plurilingualism among European citizens. More importantly, these conditions need to encourage teachers, teacher training programmes, learners, education administrators, course designers, textbook authors, curriculum developers (mostly policy makers), and examining bodies to implement the CEFR and the underlining learner-focused, action-

<sup>9</sup> Martyniuk, W., Noijons, J., *Executive summary of results of a survey on The use of the CEFR at national level in the Council of Europe Member States*, 2007:

[http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Survey\\_CEFR\\_2007\\_EN.doc](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Survey_CEFR_2007_EN.doc).

<sup>10</sup> Gouiller, F., *Intergovernmental Language Policy Forum: The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the development of language policies: challenges and responsibilities*, Strasbourg, 2007: [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/SourceForum07/ForumFeb06\\_%20Report\\_en.doc](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/SourceForum07/ForumFeb06_%20Report_en.doc).

<sup>11</sup> Council of Europe, *Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the use of the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the promotion of plurilingualism*, 2008: [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/SourceForum07/Rec%20CM%202008-7\\_EN.doc](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/SourceForum07/Rec%20CM%202008-7_EN.doc).

oriented, competence-based approach of the CEFR in foreign language learning and teaching approaches.

- **B) Specific measures aimed at policy making, curriculum and textbook development, teacher training, and assessment:** National, regional and local education authorities who have decided to use the CEFR are encouraged to ensure an appropriate and coherent use of the framework by taking the responsibility to facilitate and coordinate cooperation between all relevant stakeholders involved in language education. This includes encouraging national, regional, and local language policy makers and education administrators to ensure unity in language objectives and attainments and promote the awareness of language use and competences in education. Institutes for teacher training of language teachers should be encouraged to use the CEFR effectively for their training programmes. Furthermore, textbook developers have to be encouraged to take the aspects of the CEFR into account for developing of language learning textbooks. The same is requested to developers of tests, examination, and assessments.

## 2.2. Using the CEFR

As mentioned earlier, the CEFR is adopted progressively in education policies within European Member States and other European countries (non-EU Member States). The CEFR is not mandatory for Member States to use or even to implement in policy documents. The Committee of Ministers noticed that in some occasions, the implementation of the CEFR was without really using the general approach behind the framework and the key concept and values associated with it.<sup>12</sup> Because of this, the Committee of Ministers outlined the principles and challenges which should be considered by organisations before using the CEFR (see box 2)<sup>13</sup>.

### Box 2: Principles and challenges before using the CEFR

- 1 The CEFR is purely descriptive – not prescriptive, nor normative;
- 2 The CEFR is language neutral – it needs to be applied and interpreted appropriately with regard to each specific language;
- 3 The CEFR is context neutral – it needs to be applied and interpreted with regard to each specific educational context in accordance with the needs and priorities specific to that context;
- 4 The CEFR attempts to be comprehensive, in that no aspects of language knowledge, skills and use are deliberately left out of consideration. It cannot, of course, claim to be exhaustive leaving no room for further elaboration and development, which are to be welcomed;
- 5 The CEFR offers a common language and point of reference as a basis for stakeholders to reflect upon and critically analyse their existing practice and to allow them to better 'situate their efforts' in relation to one another;
- 6 The use of the CEFR should contribute to increased transparency of processes and procedures, improved quality of provision and comparability of outcomes;
- 7 The use of the CEFR should contribute to the promotion of the basic educational values for which the Council of Europe stands, such as social inclusion, intercultural dialogue, active democratic citizenship, language diversity, plurilingualism, learner autonomy and lifelong learning.

<sup>12</sup> Council of Europe, *Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the use of the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the promotion of plurilingualism*, 2008:

[http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/SourceForum07/Rec%20CM%202008-7\\_EN.doc](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/SourceForum07/Rec%20CM%202008-7_EN.doc).

<sup>13</sup> Council of Europe, *Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the use of the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the promotion of plurilingualism*, 2008:

[http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/SourceForum07/Rec%20CM%202008-7\\_EN.doc](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/SourceForum07/Rec%20CM%202008-7_EN.doc).



The reason for the Committee of Ministers to outline those principles was to ensure that the CEFR was used in a coherent, realistic, and responsible way.

Using the CEFR properly requires the users to understand that the CEFR is meant to help organisations to describe and establish proficiency levels for languages to ensure that qualifications of Member States are comparable. Member States can adopt the categories, levels and the descriptions, which the CEFR provides; however, Member States can, in adopting the levels, relate the CEFR to the local context. The CEFR allows the opportunity for this flexibility. This can mean that countries propose sub-levels or elaborate the CEFR levels, for example by defining 'plus levels' (A2+ or A2.2, B1+ or B1.2, B2+ or B2.2). The authors of the CEFR explain that a branching approach is used for the development of CEFR levels and descriptions. This approach means working with broad level (descriptions), thereby the levels can be divided into 'plus levels' without losing the reference of the main CEFR levels<sup>14</sup>. For that reason, in theory, there does not have to be a conflict between the local educational context or strategy of a member state and using the CEFR. The CEFR tries both to facilitate the comparability between countries (creating a similar understanding of language proficiency) and to respect national traditions and systems in language proficiency standards.

Comparing language proficiency levels achieved in formal school qualification programmes and language certificates among Member States by using the CEFR however, is much more difficult. This because of the different language assessment traditions in schools. In some Member States, examinations of language proficiency are conducted on a yearly basis. These exams are developed by examination providers and marked by a board of experts. Other Member States, on the other hand, give teachers or school staff the responsibility to develop and mark the examination which lead to a qualification. These are just two examples along the spectrum of language assessment traditions, which make clear that these differences can constrain mutual recognition of qualifications. As recognition is closely related to trust in each others' qualifications and assessment procedures, recognising qualifications that are granted on the basis of different assessment traditions might pose a threat to trusting these qualifications as being an expression of the learning outcomes stated.

Good practices of assessing language competences related to the CEFR could help to ensure that qualifications become more comparable, trusted, and recognised. Unfortunately, it appears that there are Member States with well-organised assessment cultures, which are able to develop procedures to reflect good practices, training, control systems and ways to ensure the quality of tests, and Member States in which this kind of assessment culture is lacking. Therefore, the Council of Europe decided to assist Member States to validate the relationship between their examinations and the CEFR. In 2009, this resulted in the manual, called 'Relating Language Examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR)'<sup>15</sup>. The aim of the Manual of the Council of Europe is to help providers of examinations to relate their examinations with the CEFR by developing procedures to ensure this relation. Moreover, The Council of Europe describes procedures first, to achieve transparency in the way examinations are developed; second, to ensure more providers develop competences in this area, and third, to develop a national and international network of different organisations that deal with examinations.

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<sup>14</sup> Council of Europe, *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages : Learning, teaching, assessment*, 2001: [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/elp/elp-reg/Source/Key\\_reference/CEFR\\_EN.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/elp/elp-reg/Source/Key_reference/CEFR_EN.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> Council of Europe, *Relating Language Examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR)*, 2009: [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/ManualRevision-proofread-FINAL\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/ManualRevision-proofread-FINAL_en.pdf).



To provide more evidence on linking the CEFR and examinations, the Council recommends that Member States describe their experiences with the manual in practice. This relates to the fact that the manual is not a guide prescribing *how* to develop good language examinations or tests, but it intends to describe what can constitute a trustworthy link between exams, assessment procedures and the CEFR. On the other hand, the manual does not claim to be the only proper way to relate the CEFR to examinations or tests. Moreover, this would explain that the manual is not to be used on a compulsory basis, and it provides therefore no label or other certificate, which would guarantee that the link is made properly.

The usefulness of the manual is assessed by examination bodies. In order to assess the manual, both existing tests which had no relation with the CEFR, and existing tests which were made after the CEFR was released, were used.

As mentioned before, the CEFR has to be used in accordance with the local context. In addition, examinations and tests have differences in content and styles according to their local context. For the implementation of the CEFR within examination and tests by using the manual, this would mean that the manual cannot guarantee that an examination at level B1 is the same level as other examinations which claim to be level B1. Furthermore, it is possible that a learner can have different scores on two exams which claim to be at level B1 because the learner was not familiar with the style and content of the examination which were developed for a different context.<sup>16</sup>

### 2.3. Criticism on the CEFR

During the years since the CEFR was developed and published, criticism has arisen concerning the aims of the framework, its accessibility, description and classification of language competences, the number of competence levels, and application of the CEFR in language tests.<sup>17</sup>

There is some general consensus among the developers of the CEFR and the early adopters of the framework, that the CEFR is interpreted and used in a slightly different way than was intended. This arose from confusion on the **purpose of the framework**. The CEFR is not intended as a "manual, but a framework, a catalogue rather than a description. But it does focus attention on the many parameters of language use and language competences, inviting the reader to reflect on the relevance of each for his or her own work"<sup>18</sup>. Brian North states that the function of the CEFR is to "stimulate reflection and discussion", to "empower and to facilitate, not to prescribe or control"<sup>19</sup>.

As many critics state, the CEFR was not very **accessible and user-friendly**. This observation was reflected in the Council of Europe survey mentioned earlier<sup>20</sup>. In their extended summary of the survey results Martyniuk and Noijons indicate that

<sup>16</sup> Council of Europe, *Relating Language Examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR)*, 2009: [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/ManualRevision-proofread-FINAL\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/ManualRevision-proofread-FINAL_en.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> This section is based on Valax, Philippe, *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: A critical analysis of its impact on a sample of teachers and curricula within and beyond Europe*, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Trim, J. L. M., *The Place of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages in teacher education and training*, In Project Y2 – Report of Central Workshop 4/2005, Appendix 1, 13-27, Graz: European Centre for Modern Languages, 2005, pp. 17-18, (emphasis added by Valax, Philippe, *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: A critical analysis of its impact on a sample of teachers and curricula within and beyond Europe*, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> North, B. (2005, 15 June). *Le Cadre européen commun de référence: Introduction*. [The Common European framework of reference: Introduction]. Paper presented at the Journée Pédagogique du 15 juin 2005, Paris: Alliance Française. North (2005), taken from: Valax, Philippe, *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: A critical analysis of its impact on a sample of teachers and curricula within and beyond Europe*, 2011.

<sup>20</sup> Council of Europe. *Survey on the use of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR): Synthesis of Results*, 2005.

"[Respondents] stress the need for general clarification (such as comments on theoretical concepts, examples and good illustrations, sets of tasks for use in specific contexts, a bilingual terminology glossary for each country), as well as the need to familiarise more teachers with the document by organising national and international events, exchanging good practice, etc."<sup>21</sup>

More fundamental criticism was provided on the way the CEFR deals with **describing and classifying the competences**. For instance "Vincent (2004) criticizes the way in which competences are dealt with in the CEFR generally, observing that the contribution of cognitive sciences in the area of communicative competencies in the last two decades has been ignored. He notes that although the separation of general competences and communicative language competences was justified by the authors of the CEFR on the grounds that the former are acquired before the learning of foreign languages, this justification is flawed, taking no account of the fact that all knowledge is language-related and that communicative knowledge and competences are in fact acquired prior to the learning of a foreign language (p. 43, note 2). He also claims that there is a lack of coherence in consideration of the relationships between the two types of competency (p.44). Perhaps most significantly, he notes that the authors of the CEFR confuse knowledge, competency and aptitude (p.48) presented in a 'cumulatif' (cumulative) model which is essentially a behaviourist model (rather than a dynamic one), precisely the type of model that has been challenged by constructivists (p.47)". In other words, the distinct competences cannot be considered as separate add-ons which make up the holistic foreign language competence<sup>22</sup>.

The **number of six competence levels** in the CEFR was already issue for debate during its development phase. In the implementation phase of the CEFR, countries initiated to develop sublevels. In the survey<sup>23</sup> the 'need for defining additional sub-levels' was one of the 'most acute problems' identified by a majority of countries in relation to the use of the common reference levels. As a solution to this problem, the countries created sub-levels<sup>24</sup>, something that inevitably has a negative impact on international comparability.<sup>25</sup>

Another often expressed criticism is that the CEFR possess difficulties in **applying it in language tests**. This criticism does not affect the CEFR specifically, but puts in focus the general difficulties in testing and assessing language competences. This issue also concerns the way links are suggested between language tests, examinations

<sup>21</sup> Martyniuk, Waldemar, Noijons, José. Executive summary of results of a survey on the use of the CEFR at national level in the Council of Europe Member States. Document presented at the Council of Europe Intergovernmental Language Policy Forum: The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the Development of Language Policies: Challenges and Responsibilities, 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Vincent, L., *Compétence communicative et savoirs culturels en didactique des langues étrangères: analyse critique du Cadre européen commun de référence pour les langues [Communicative competence and cultural knowledge in the didactics of foreign languages: A critical analysis of the Common European framework of reference for languages]*, 2004. In J. Greenfield (Ed.), *Proceedings of the symposium Ensino das Línguas Estrangeiras : Estratégias Políticas e Educativas (13-15 December 2001)*, pp. 41-50. Porto: Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto. Cited from Valax, Philippe, *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: A critical analysis of its impact on a sample of teachers and curricula within and beyond Europe*, 2011.

<sup>23</sup> Council of Europe. Survey on the use of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR): Synthesis of Results, 2005.

<sup>24</sup> Martyniuk, Waldemar, Noijons, José. Executive summary of results of a survey on the use of the CEFR at national level in the Council of Europe Member States. Document presented at the Council of Europe Intergovernmental Language Policy Forum: The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the Development of Language Policies: Challenges and Responsibilities, 2007, p. 6.

<sup>25</sup> Also identified as an acute problem was the "repetitiveness and lack of details of some descriptors" (p. 6). Reference was also made to the "lack of descriptors for mediation and translation skills", and the absence of fine-tuning the descriptions of certain CEFR levels and to make them more age-specific" (Martyniuk, Waldemar, Noijons, José. Executive summary of results of a survey on the use of the CEFR at national level in the Council of Europe Member States. Document presented at the Council of Europe Intergovernmental Language Policy Forum: The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the Development of Language Policies: Challenges and Responsibilities, 2007, p.7).

and the CEFR: how are these links justified?<sup>26</sup> The same applies to the application of the CEFR in schoolbooks.

As Phillippe Valax concludes in his critical analysis<sup>27</sup>, almost every aspect of the CEFR is vulnerable to serious criticism and yet, bearing in mind the extent of its reach, those language professionals who have criticised it in writing are relatively few in number. However, Valax' study (a survey under frontline professionals in France, the UK, Taiwan, Hong Kong, New Zealand and Australia) reveals that there is little interest in, or enthusiasm for the CEFR among those frontline professionals who will ultimately determine whether it has any real impact on the teaching and learning of languages. It concluded that the CEFR promises considerably more in the area of language curriculum design than it is capable of delivering.<sup>28</sup>

## 2.4. Measures taken to further implement the CEFR

In recent years, activities have been conducted to deal with many of these criticisms. The Council of Europe developed the following (Box 3) support material to clarify a number of the issues mentioned here above.

### Box 3: The CEFR and language examinations: a toolkit

- a Manual for Relating Language Examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment accompanied by Further Material on Maintaining Standards across Languages, Contexts and Administrations by exploiting Teacher Judgment and IRT Scaling.
- a technical Reference Supplement to the Manual for Relating Examinations to the CEFR
- illustrations of the European levels of language proficiency
- content analysis grids for speaking, writing, listening and reading materials
- the proceedings of the colloquium on Standard Setting Research and its Relevance to the CEFR
- a Manual for Language test development and examining for use with the CEFR – produced by ALTE (Association of Language Testers in Europe) on behalf of the Language Policy DivisionUnit, Council of Europe (2011).

The most important document is the Manual for Relating Language Examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment. The aim of this manual is to help the providers of examinations to develop, apply and report transparent, practical procedures in a cumulative process of continuing improvement in order to situate their examination(s) in relation to the CEFR. The Manual specifically aims to: contribute to competence building in the area of linking assessments to the CEFR; encourage increased transparency on the part of examination providers; and finally, encourage the development of both formal and informal national and international networks of institutions and experts.

In addition, the European Commission embraced the CEFR and initiated projects on the subject of multilingualism and measuring language proficiency levels. Within the **Lifelong Learning Programme** 'languages' was identified as one of the transversal

<sup>26</sup> See for instance Figueras, N.. The CEFR, a lever for the improvement of language professionals in Europe. Modern Language Journal, 91(4), 2007, pp. 673-675, p. 673.

<sup>27</sup> Valax, Philippe, The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: A critical analysis of its impact on a sample of teachers and curricula within and beyond Europe, 2011.

<sup>28</sup> Valax, Philippe, The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: A critical analysis of its impact on a sample of teachers and curricula within and beyond Europe, 2011.

<sup>29</sup> See: [http://www.coe.int/t/dq4/linguistic/Manuel1\\_EN.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dq4/linguistic/Manuel1_EN.asp).

themes, crossing all activities (Key Activity 2: Languages). Within the programme, no particular emphasis is put on the CEFR as such.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, the European Union adopted the CEFR as the standard for defining language levels. The new **Europass**, officially launched in January 2005, incorporates the Language Passport of the European Language Portfolio (ELP) and refers to the CEFR levels.<sup>31</sup> Finally, the European Commission launched the first **European Survey on Language Competences**<sup>32</sup>. In 2002, one of the calls of the Barcelona European Council for further action on education were to improve the basic skills of languages at an early age by teaching at least two foreign languages. Furthermore, it was recommended to measure the development of this call by establishing a linguistic competence indicator<sup>33</sup>. The European Commission initiated a survey<sup>34</sup> to measure the language proficiency of 54,000 students across Europe and described the outcomes in terms of the CEFR. This first survey on language competences provides participating European countries<sup>35</sup> an insight of the language skills of their students at the last year of lower secondary education or the second year of upper secondary education. Students were tested on their first most widely taught foreign language and the second, which differs among the participating countries. Moreover, this study analysed whether the CEFR is recommended by central authorities and whether the CEFR is used by teachers and within teacher training.

## 2.5. In conclusion

In this chapter we introduced the CEFR, indicated the main points of criticism and mentioned the main policy actions taken by the Council of Europe and the European Commission. Although the European Survey on Language Competences analysed the attitude of central authorities towards the CEFR, the survey did not focus on analysing the regulatory policy regimes towards language learning in the countries participating in the survey<sup>36</sup> and the manner in which the compulsory school system approaches foreign language learning in terms of learning outcomes of qualifications, the examination/assessment, methods used, learning material used, and duration/ volume of the learning programme. Hence, the impact of compulsory foreign language learning on language proficiency remains unclear, especially in relation to the above-mentioned specific measures, whether the CEFR is effectively used in schoolbooks, teacher training and secondary school examinations. For this reason, this study and the remainder of this study will focus on these issues; it will provide an exploration of these issues in the next chapters.

<sup>30</sup> The interim evaluation of the LLP concluded that the "European added value of the KA2 [Key Activity 2] can be seen as substantial. This can be seen as a re-sult both of the specific objectives pursued by the action and of the general absence of al-ternatives for beneficiaries. Regarding the objectives of the KA2, it is clear that the KA2 targets the gaps in national policy provisions. The focus on less widely used and taught lan-guages is by definition additional to already existing provisions. Furthermore, support for regional and minority languages, and especially recent efforts to focus on migrant heritage languages, would be minimal in the absence of LLP funding." See: PPMI, Interim Evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme (2007-2013) ANNEXES TO THE FINAL REPORT, 2011, p. 86-87 ([http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/evalreports/education/2011/llpannex\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/evalreports/education/2011/llpannex_en.pdf)).

<sup>31</sup> Official decision on the launch of Europass: European Commission, OJ L 390/6 31.12.2004, Decision No 2241/2004/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of 15 December 2004 on a single Community framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences (Europass).

<sup>32</sup> See: <http://ec.europa.eu/languages/eslc/index.html>.

<sup>33</sup> European Council, *Presidency conclusions: Barcelona European council 15 and 16 March 2002*, 2002: [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/71025.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/71025.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> European Commission, *First European Survey on Language Competences*, 2012: [http://ec.europa.eu/languages/eslc/docs/en/final-report-escl\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/languages/eslc/docs/en/final-report-escl_en.pdf).

<sup>35</sup> Participating countries are: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, England, Estonia, France, Greece, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden.

<sup>36</sup> Participating countries are: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, England, Estonia, France, Greece, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden.

### 3. THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CEFR IN GENERAL

#### KEY FINDINGS

- This study will focus on modern foreign language learning in upper secondary education programmes of which the related qualification gives access to higher education. Throughout Europe, these qualifications are linked (or are equivalent) to level four of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The following qualifications are taken into account: Austria: Academic secondary education (in German: Allgemein bildende höhere Schule); Sweden: Higher education preparatory programmes (in Swedish: Högskoleförberedande program); Netherlands: Pre-university education (in Dutch: Voorbereidend Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs); UK (Scotland): Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications; France: Baccalaureate (in French: Baccalauréat); Hungary: General secondary school and vocational secondary school (in Hungarian: gimnázium and szakközépiskola)
- Learning a first modern foreign language is mandatory for pupils in upper secondary education according to the language learning policies of five of the six selected countries. Major differences have been identified in the policies towards learning a second and a third modern foreign language. Some countries (SE, NL, FR, and HU) oblige pupils to learn more than one language whereas in other countries it is optional (UK -Scotland and AT).
- Encouraging pupils to achieve better results and higher proficiency levels in modern foreign languages is a hot debate topic within the selected countries.
- All the selected countries relate their modern foreign language learning programmes and policies to the CEFR. Most of the countries have implemented the CEFR to different degrees within their national and/or specific modern foreign language curricula. Only Austria and France have anchored the CEFR in law.
- Lack of empirical evidence provided by research studies for the link between the CEFR and learning outcomes, objectives of curricula, examination, and/or other (policy) documents which have influence on the education system, seems to be a main obstacle for implementation of the CEFR. In addition, the implementation of the CEFR in the classroom demands different skills from modern foreign language teachers. Therefore several countries (FR, NL, and SE) are worried about the use of the CEFR by modern foreign language teachers.

In this chapter, the implementation of the CEFR in general will be discussed. Prior to this discussion, the upper secondary education qualifications selected in the six countries will be identified. As a reference point, qualifications either linked to level four of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) or qualifications which have a similar profile have been selected to be used in the comparative analysis. Using these qualifications means that the focus is on modern foreign language learning in upper secondary education programmes of which the related qualification gives access to higher education. Table 2 presents these six qualifications from the selected countries (AT, SE, NL, UK -Scotland and FR).

**Table 2: The selected qualifications for this study**

Country	Selected qualifications
Austria	Academic secondary education (in German: Allgemein bildende höhere Schule)
Sweden	Higher education preparatory programmes (in Swedish: Högskoleförberedande program )
Netherlands	Pre-university education (in Dutch: Voorbereidend Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs)
UK (Scotland)	Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications
France	Baccalaureate (in French: Baccalauréat)
Hungary	General secondary school and vocational secondary school (in Hungarian: gimnázium and szakközépiskola)

Taking the qualifications mentioned in table 2 as a reference, section 3.1 outlines the language learning policy in the six countries with regard to the number of mandatory modern foreign languages (MFL). The next section (3.2) describes the current policy debates concerning modern foreign language learning. Once this background information is provided, the remaining sections of this chapter will discuss the implementation of the CEFR in policy documents; the difficulties and challenges related to the implementation; and the learning outcomes of the selected qualifications in terms of the CEFR levels.

### 3.1. Language learning policy

In this section, the focus is on the language learning policies in relation to the qualifications which give access to higher education. Within the six countries differences were found between the language learning policies. Language learning policies concern the learning of modern foreign languages, regional languages, and/or classical languages such as Latin and Greek. As mentioned earlier, the CEFR has been developed for learning and teaching of modern foreign languages and therefore, policies, rules and regulations concerning regional languages and classical languages are left outside the scope of this study.

In most European countries, the starting age of the first foreign language as a compulsory subject ranges between 6 and 9 years old. Fifteen countries or regions within countries in Europe specify that certain languages are mandatory, i.e. all students must study the specified language. In fourteen countries or regions within countries, all students must learn English and, in most cases, it is the first language they have to learn. French is more commonly a second specific mandatory language.<sup>37</sup>

Analysing the language learning policies related to modern foreign languages made clear that five of the six countries have rules concerning the obligation for pupils to learn at least one modern foreign language (**first modern foreign language**). Only in the UK (Scotland) is this not the case, as schools are not obliged to commit to the national curricula. Generally, schools in Scotland have confirmed to using the national curricula and will therefore teach a first modern foreign language<sup>38</sup>. Therefore, although the first modern foreign language is not considered mandatory by law in Scotland, in practice, the situation is not very different from the other countries.

<sup>37</sup> See: Eurydice, Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe, 2012.

<sup>38</sup> Higher education institutions: [http://www.ucas.com/he\\_staff/quals/scotquals/cfe](http://www.ucas.com/he_staff/quals/scotquals/cfe).



Sweden and the Netherlands determine which language is the mandatory first modern foreign language and Hungary gives pupils the choice to choose their first modern foreign language between two languages. In Austria, UK (Scotland), and Hungary the first modern foreign language is selected by the pupil. The number of modern foreign languages from which the pupil can choose depends on what the school has to offer.

Major differences have been identified in the policies towards learning a **second modern foreign language**. Some countries, such as Austria and UK (Scotland), do not require pupils to enrol in a second MFL learning programme, but on the other hand provide pupils with the opportunity to enrol in a second MFL class; hence learning a second MFL is optional. In the Netherlands, France, and Hungary it is obligatory to learn a second foreign language. This obligation is however implemented differently in the various countries. In Hungary, for instance, the second MFL is mandatory without any additional requirements being set. Pupils can choose any MFL as their second MFL. In France on the other hand, the policy for learning a second foreign language differs slightly from their policy dealing with the first foreign language. This difference is that the second language can be either a MFL or a regional language. A pupil can choose the second language depending on what the French schools offer. In the Netherlands, the requirements for the second foreign language depend on which study direction the pupil has chosen. Some study programmes<sup>39</sup> require a choice to be made between a regional language or a second MFL; other study programmes require choosing between Latin or Greek as the second foreign language instead of a MFL. The situation in Sweden is more complex. Here, different studies have different requirements for pupils concerning language learning. In Sweden, there are six studies which can give access to higher education. In four study types a Swedish pupil is obliged to enrol in a second MFL course and for the remaining two study types a second MFL course is optional. In general, a pupil is free to choose their second MFL from the languages offered by their school. In Austria pupils have the option to enroll in a second MFL or depending on the chosen study programme Latin and/or Greek.

A **third modern foreign language** is not mandatory in any of the six analysed countries. There is one study programme in France for which it is mandatory for pupils to enrol for a third foreign language, which can be either a modern or a regional language. Most of the countries give all pupils the option to enrol in a third MFL programme as an optional subject. Some countries, such as Sweden and France, provide a choice to enrol in a third MFL for a particular study programme. Although this option exists for some study programmes, there are undoubtedly exceptions.

Table 3 provides an overview of the regulations concerning enrolling in MFL within the six countries.

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<sup>39</sup> 'Study-programmes' refer in this report to studies which have the same level but with different specific subjects. Usually, this provides access to a specific university studie.

**Table 3: Modern foreign languages in upper secondary education**

	<b>Austria<sup>40</sup></b>	<b>Sweden<sup>41</sup></b>	<b>Netherlands<sup>42</sup></b>	<b>UK (Scotland)<sup>43</sup></b>	<b>France<sup>44</sup></b>	<b>Hungary<sup>45</sup></b>
First modern foreign language	mandatory	English is mandatory	English is mandatory	Advised by national curricula	mandatory	English or German is mandatory
Second modern foreign language	Optional	For some studies mandatory for others optional	Mandatory to choose between MFL or one regional language for some study-programmes and others are required to choose Latin or Greek	Optional	Mandatory, but can be a regional language	mandatory
Third modern foreign language	Optional	Optional, for some study-programmes	Optional	Optional	Optional, for some study-programmes	Optional

The regulations depicted in table 3 apply only for enrolling in MFL courses and do not automatically mean that these languages are mandatory for examinations or other forms of assessment. For more information about examinations, see further on in this study (Section 4.1).

### 3.2. Current policy debates

In this section, the current policy debates concerning MFL learning are presented. The information that has been obtained concerning current policy debates on language learning policies also concerns modern foreign language learning in primary education, as it affects the proficiency level or possibilities for enrolling in modern foreign language learning programmes in secondary education.

The main topic in policy debates in the six countries is improving modern foreign language learning in education. In the current situation this means:

<sup>40</sup> Ministry of Education, the Arts and Culture and Ministry of Science and Research, Austrian Centre for Language Competence, Language and language education policies in Austria, 2008: [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Austria\\_CountryReport\\_final\\_EN.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Austria_CountryReport_final_EN.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> Skolverket, Upper secondary School 2011, Stockholm, 2012: <http://www.skolverket.se/om-skolverket/publicerat/visa-enskild-publikation?xurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww5.skolverket.se%2Fwtpub%2Fws%2Fskolbok%2Fwpubext%2Ftrycksak%2FRecord%3Fk%3D2801>.

<sup>42</sup> IB-groep, VWO staatsexamen, Dienst uitvoering onderwijs, 2013: [http://www.duo.nl/Images/Vakkenschema%27s\\_vwo\\_staatsexamen\\_tcm7-38178.pdf](http://www.duo.nl/Images/Vakkenschema%27s_vwo_staatsexamen_tcm7-38178.pdf).

<sup>43</sup> Education Scotland: [http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/all\\_experiences\\_outcomes\\_tcm4-539562.pdf](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/all_experiences_outcomes_tcm4-539562.pdf).

<sup>44</sup> Ministère éducation nationale : <http://eduscol.education.fr/cid46518/langues-vivantes-nouveau-lycee.html>

<sup>45</sup> Oktatáskutató és Fejlesztő Intézet, Nemzeti alaptanterv 2012 Nyilvános vitaanyag, 2012: [http://dokumentumtar.ofi.hu/index\\_NAT\\_2012.html](http://dokumentumtar.ofi.hu/index_NAT_2012.html).



- Early start of exposure to/learning of the first modern foreign language in the education system;
- Encouraging pupils to achieve better results and higher proficiency levels in modern foreign languages;
- Make a second modern foreign language obligatory.

In France, for instance, the Minister of Education stated that the modern foreign language learning outcomes of French pupils in several international surveys is considered 'alarming'. Therefore, the government decided to make a first modern foreign language mandatory in the first year of primary education. According to the French Ministry of Education **early exposure to modern foreign language learning** will increase the achievements of pupils in later stages of their educational career and life<sup>46</sup>. The same point is also emphasised by the Scottish government, advising schools to start with the first MFL in the first year of primary education<sup>47</sup>. The problem in Scotland is that, due to the autonomy of local authorities and head teachers, this advice is not considered a regulation. Therefore, there are doubts whether schools will implement this without any additional financial support. Moreover, there are concerns about the modern foreign language skills of primary education teachers. If schools do not follow-up the advice of the Scottish government, the government has two options to enforce this: either through providing financial support, or anchoring the obligation to start MFL learning in the first year of primary education in law. In addition to the emphasis on the early start of language learning, in France, the debate also concerns the choice of the first MFL that will be taught. As the minister did not prescribe which language should be taught, a discussion has arisen about the position of 'English' within education. Moreover, the parliamentary parties in the Netherlands are concerned about the attention paid to and the quality of the first MFL in primary education, which is English. The debate concentrates on how to improve the attention paid to and quality of the provision in primary education. Several studies and pilots related to this issue have already started to analyse the current situation and draw lessons for the future<sup>48</sup>.

**Encouraging pupils to achieve better results and higher proficiency levels in modern foreign languages** is a hot debate topic within the selected countries. Frequently the problem is how best to approach this. Some governments have drafted objectives and others have devised measures to promote better modern foreign language results. These objectives or measures are depicted in table 4 below.

<sup>46</sup> Ministère de l'éducation nationale : [http://static.lexpress.fr/pub/pdf/projet\\_de\\_loi\\_prerose.pdf](http://static.lexpress.fr/pub/pdf/projet_de_loi_prerose.pdf).

<sup>47</sup> The Scottish government, *Language Learning in Scotland: A 1+2 Approach*, The Scottish Government's Response to the report of the Language Working group, 2012: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0040/00408659.doc>.

<sup>48</sup> Ministerie van OCW, *Kamerbrief onderzoek Engels in het basisonderwijs*. Den Haag, 2011: <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten-en-publicaties/kamerstukken/2011/12/19/kamerbrief-onderzoek-engels-in-het-basisonderwijs.html>.

**Table 4: Objectives or measures to promote higher modern foreign language achievements**

Countries	Objectives or Measures
Austria	A new school-leaving examination with the aim to improve learning capacities <sup>49</sup> .
Sweden	Giving extra credits to pupils who enrol in foreign language courses which are not mandatory <sup>50</sup> .
Hungary	Increasing the requirements of modern foreign languages for access to higher education and for pupils who want to study a MFL at higher education level <sup>51</sup> .
The Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Started a pilot project to promote the use of German and French as an official language during the German and French lessons;</li> <li>Promoting bilingual education<sup>52</sup>.</li> </ul>
France	Improving the connection between modern foreign language learning of primary education and lower secondary education <sup>53</sup> .

For the measures that are implemented in Austria and Sweden, it is a matter of time to see if this leads to the desired results, as these measures have only been implemented recently. In Hungary, many challenges are expected in the implementation of the measures, as these plans currently only exist as a proposal to increase the requirements for MFL learning. One of the largest challenges is that there are many differences between schools in Hungary. This leads to the situation that some schools do not have the resources (material or qualified teachers) to offer MFL, while other schools have the required means. In addition, there are debates about the financing of this plan<sup>54</sup>. The Dutch and French governments have proposed objectives to pay more attention to the importance of MFL learning. In the case of the Netherlands the focus is on promoting bilingual education and within France the focus is on the connection of MFL learning between primary and secondary education. These are objectives which are currently not translated into concrete measures.

The Swedish and Scottish government have the intention to **make the second modern foreign language for pupils obligatory**. Similar to France, in Sweden a political debate started as a reaction to the international SurveyLang survey<sup>55</sup> which indicated that the learning outcomes of Swedish pupils in the subject of 'Spanish' which is taken as the second MFL mostly studied, are low. For that reason the debate is on whether a MFL other than 'English' should be obligatory in Swedish education. In Scotland, as a consequence of the Barcelona agreement which states that every EU citizen has to learn two other languages besides their mother tongue, the government

<sup>49</sup> Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur: <http://www.bmukk.gv.at/schulen/unterricht/ba/reifepruefung.xml#toc3-id1>.

<sup>50</sup> Universitets- och högskolerådet: <https://www.antagning.se/sv/Det-har-galler-for-dig-som-gatt/Gymnasieskolan/Gymnasieexamen-2014/Meritpoang/>.

<sup>51</sup> Ministry of Human Resources, A nemzeti idegennyelv-oktatás fejlesztésének stratégiája az általános iskolától a diplomáig, 2012: <http://www.kormany.hu/download/d/51/c0000/idegennyelv-oktat%C3%A1s%20feh%C3%A9r%C3%B6k%C3%B6nyv.pdf>.

<sup>52</sup> Ministerie van OCW, Kamerbrief onderzoek Engels in het basisonderwijs. Den Haag, 2011: <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten-en-publicaties/kamerstukken/2011/12/19/kamerbrief-onderzoek-engels-in-het-basisonderwijs.html>.

<sup>53</sup> Ministère de l'éducation nationale: [http://static.lexpress.fr/pub/pdf/projet\\_de\\_loi\\_prerose.pdf](http://static.lexpress.fr/pub/pdf/projet_de_loi_prerose.pdf).

<sup>54</sup> Ministry of Human Resources, A nemzeti idegennyelv-oktatás fejlesztésének stratégiája az általános iskolától a diplomáig, 2012: <http://www.kormany.hu/download/d/51/c0000/idegennyelv-oktat%C3%A1s%20feh%C3%A9r%C3%B6k%C3%B6nyv.pdf>.

<sup>55</sup> Eurobarometer, Europeans and their languages, European Commission. 2012: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/ebs\\_386\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/ebs_386_en.pdf).

set up a Language Working Group for advice to best implement this 'European Union 1+2 model'<sup>56</sup>. Within the official response<sup>57</sup> of the Scottish government on the 35 recommendations of the Language Working group, the government accepted starting with a first MFL during the first year of primary education and to introduce a second MFL during primary education. Problems which are expected are mainly practical problems, such as finance and MFL skills of teachers in primary education. As mentioned before, the government can enforce implementation by giving financial support or by anchoring these measurements in law.

### **3.3. Extent of implementation within policy documents**

In this section the extent to which the CEFR is implemented in policy documents which regulate modern foreign language learning in the selected countries is discussed. These policy documents have to respect the law concerning education regulations ('education acts') and are often indicated as the 'national curriculum', describing regulations concerning school organisation. Curricula for instance describe the (mandatory) subjects, the optional subjects, and the total volume of study load. In addition, in all countries except Scotland, the specifications of learning outcomes in terms of competences or skills for MFL are described in specific curricula for MFL or for some languages separately. The latter is mainly the case for English. Discussing the implementation of the CEFR will show that sometimes the scope of education acts and the power of policy documents differ across the six countries.

With regard to MFL learning, all the selected countries relate their programmes and policies to the CEFR. The extent to which this relation is implemented in education policy documents however, varies greatly. Table 5 provides an overview of the countries that have anchored the CEFR in law and the countries that refer to the CEFR in national and/or specific modern foreign language curricula.

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<sup>56</sup> The Scottish government: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2012/05/languages17052012>.

<sup>57</sup> The Scottish government, *Language Learning in Scotland: A 1+2 Approach*, The Scottish Government's Response to the report of the Language Working group, 2012: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0040/00408659.doc>.

**Table 5: Implementation of the CEFR in education policy**

	Education act	National curricula	Modern foreign language curricula
Austria	√ <sup>58</sup>	√	√
Sweden	-	-	-
Hungary	-	√ <sup>59</sup>	√ <sup>60</sup>
The Netherlands	-	-	√ <sup>61</sup>
France	√ <sup>62</sup>	√ <sup>63 64</sup>	√ <sup>65</sup>
UK (Scotland)	-	√ <sup>66</sup>	Not applicable <sup>67</sup>

According to the information provided in table 4, there are three different degrees of implementation of the CEFR in education policy:

- Statutory anchoring (AT and FR);
- Related to national and/or specific modern foreign language curricula (HU, NL, and UK - Scotland);
- Not implemented in education policy documents (SE).

**Statutory anchoring** of the CEFR in the education system of France and Austria means for both countries that the learning outcomes of modern foreign languages are attached to the proficiency levels of the CEFR. In France, the education act describes the exact learning outcomes in terms of the CEFR for the end of primary, compulsory, and upper secondary education. Thanks to the statutory anchoring curricula, schools, and teachers are thereby obliged to use these learning outcomes.

The manner in which the content of **national and/or specific modern foreign language curricula** are related to the CEFR differs. First, there is a curriculum which indicates that one MFL learning outcome is closely linked to a CEFR level; second, there are curricula in which the learning outcomes are based on the CEFR level descriptions; third, curricula in which the learning outcomes are described in terms of the CEFR. The first situation refers to just a correspondence of a CEFR level with the MFL learning outcomes in the national curriculum of UK (Scotland). There were no efforts made to base the curriculum on the CEFR, however there are signals that the new learning outcomes within the curriculum will be roughly benchmarked against the

<sup>58</sup> Verordnung der Bundesministerin für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur über Bildungsstandards im Schulwesen StF: BGBl. II Nr. 1/2009:

<http://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=20006166>.

<sup>59</sup> Oktatáskutató és Fejlesztő Intézet, *Nemzeti alaptanterv 2012* Nyilvános vitaanyag, 2012: [http://dokumentumtar.ofi.hu/index\\_NAT\\_2012.html](http://dokumentumtar.ofi.hu/index_NAT_2012.html).

<sup>60</sup> Oktatáskutató és Fejlesztő Intézet: <http://kerettanterv.ofi.hu/>.

<sup>61</sup> College voor examens, *Moderne vreemde talen VWO*, 2011:

[http://www.examenblad.nl/9336000/1/j9vvhinitagymgn\\_m7mvi7dmy3fq6u9\\_n11vg41h1h4i9qe/viaggk4u54jzd/f=/bestand.pdf](http://www.examenblad.nl/9336000/1/j9vvhinitagymgn_m7mvi7dmy3fq6u9_n11vg41h1h4i9qe/viaggk4u54jzd/f=/bestand.pdf).

<sup>62</sup> République

Française:

[http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichCode.do?sessionId=E0A77FFA6D72DD88D6E39D41B69724E5.tpdjo13v\\_3?idSectionTA=LEGISCTA000006182505&cidTexte=LEGITEXT000006071191&dateTexte=20130220](http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichCode.do?sessionId=E0A77FFA6D72DD88D6E39D41B69724E5.tpdjo13v_3?idSectionTA=LEGISCTA000006182505&cidTexte=LEGITEXT000006071191&dateTexte=20130220).

<sup>63</sup> Ministère éducation nationale: <http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid52692/les-enseignements-nouvelle-seconde.html#Enseignements communs>

<sup>64</sup> Ministère éducation nationale: <http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid52709/les-enseignements-de-premiere-et%20terminale.html>.

<sup>65</sup> Ministère éducation nationale: <http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid53320/mene1019796a.html>.

<sup>66</sup> Education Scotland: [http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/all\\_experiences\\_outcomes\\_tcm4-539562.pdf](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/all_experiences_outcomes_tcm4-539562.pdf).

<sup>67</sup> This document is not applicable because in the UK (Scotland) they do not work with specific curricula for MFL.

level descriptors of the CEFR. Whether official linkage between the levels of the Scottish national curriculum and the CEFR will be pursued, remains uncertain. However, if this happens it is no guarantee for implementation because the Scottish curriculum is not a legal document which schools are obliged to use<sup>68</sup>. Implementation of the CEFR in the MFL curricula of the Netherlands entails adaptation of the previous specifications of learning outcomes to the CEFR descriptions. Hungary goes one step further by describing the minimum MFL outcomes in terms of the CEFR at different times in the education system<sup>69</sup>. Because, the curricula of the Netherlands and Hungary are legal documents the content has to correspond with the MFL lessons of (upper secondary) schools.

Although **the CEFR is not included in Swedish law or in any other legal document**<sup>70</sup>, this does not mean that the CEFR has no influence on the Swedish education policy. The national curriculum is influenced by the communicative and intercultural skills and the holistic approach which relates to the framework's global assessment scales. According to documents called 'commenting materials' (in Swedish: Kommentarmaterial till kursplanen) which are developed to inform teachers and school directors about the selection, and position of the texts in the specific curricula for English<sup>71</sup> and other modern foreign languages<sup>72</sup>, these curricula are influenced by the CEFR. This influence implies that the learning outcomes are based on the CEFR. Because the Swedish specific curricula contain seven stages/steps and the CEFR has six levels, the level descriptions did not entirely correspond with each other. For that reason the CEFR is described with sub-levels which are linked with the Swedish stages, to fit into the Swedish context.

### 3.4. Difficulties and challenges

In the previous section it was noted that all the six selected countries implemented the CEFR to some extent within their education system. We saw that even in Sweden, where no direct link is provided between the CEFR and policy documents, the link is provided in the so-called commenting materials, which guide teachers and school directors in developing their curricula. In this section the difficulties and challenges in the implementation of the CEFR are discussed.

Although, difficulties and challenges regarding the implementation of the CEFR depend on the degree to which it is implemented in the education system, two main points can be distinguished:

- **Lack of empirical proof** for the link between the CEFR levels and learning outcomes, objectives of curricula, examination, and/or other (policy) documents which influence the education system;
- **Use of the CEFR by modern foreign languages teachers** in their lessons.

<sup>68</sup> European Commission: [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/United-Kingdom-Scotland:Fundamental\\_Principles\\_and\\_National\\_Policies](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/United-Kingdom-Scotland:Fundamental_Principles_and_National_Policies).

<sup>69</sup> Oktatásutató és Fejlesztő Intézet, *Nemzeti alaptanterv 2012* Nyilvános vitaanyag, 2012: [http://dokumentumtar.ofi.hu/index\\_NAT\\_2012.html](http://dokumentumtar.ofi.hu/index_NAT_2012.html).

<sup>70</sup> De Gruyter, W., *Sociolinguistica*, 2010: [http://books.google.nl/books?id=e-C1xt3vV2IC&pg=PA88&lpg=PA88&dq=CEFR+sweden+reception+production+interaction+skolverket&source=b&ots=OABKF4H6hl&sig=YoVrtYK5B6OOQvKA\\_JMutCHwv4U&hl=nl&sa=X&ei=to4LUYHaAufX0QXouICwCw](http://books.google.nl/books?id=e-C1xt3vV2IC&pg=PA88&lpg=PA88&dq=CEFR+sweden+reception+production+interaction+skolverket&source=b&ots=OABKF4H6hl&sig=YoVrtYK5B6OOQvKA_JMutCHwv4U&hl=nl&sa=X&ei=to4LUYHaAufX0QXouICwCw).

<sup>71</sup> Skolverket, *Kommentarmaterial till kursplanen i engelska*, 2011: [http://www.skolverket.se/om-skolverket/publicerat/visa-enskild-publikation?\\_url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww5.skolverket.se%2Fwtpub%2Fws%2Fskolbok%2Fwtpubext%2Ftrycksak%2FRecord%3Fk%3D2557](http://www.skolverket.se/om-skolverket/publicerat/visa-enskild-publikation?_url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww5.skolverket.se%2Fwtpub%2Fws%2Fskolbok%2Fwtpubext%2Ftrycksak%2FRecord%3Fk%3D2557).

<sup>72</sup> Skolverket, *Kommentarmaterial till kursplanen i moderna språk*, 2011: [http://www.skolverket.se/om-skolverket/publicerat/visa-enskild-publikation?\\_url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww5.skolverket.se%2Fwtpub%2Fws%2Fskolbok%2Fwtpubext%2Ftrycksak%2FRecord%3Fk%3D2560](http://www.skolverket.se/om-skolverket/publicerat/visa-enskild-publikation?_url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww5.skolverket.se%2Fwtpub%2Fws%2Fskolbok%2Fwtpubext%2Ftrycksak%2FRecord%3Fk%3D2560).

Both Sweden and Hungary mentioned the **lack of empirical proof**, because no research study has been conducted to underline the link between the CEFR and the documents and exams which use the CEFR. In the Netherlands several research studies, 'linking researches' (in Dutch: 'koppelingsonderzoeken')<sup>73</sup>, have been conducted to analyse the link, on the one hand between the examination programme and the CEFR and on the other hand the examination assignments and the CEFR. However, up to now there is no indication that the learning outcomes will be described in terms of the CEFR levels. Firstly, because there is no clear distinction felt between some of the CEFR levels and secondly; the level descriptions of the CEFR are too broad and therefore multi-interpretable. Regarding the first point, the Dutch research studies showed that the examination assignments of one exam include assignments which are linked to different CEFR levels. In the Netherlands, a points system is used to determine whether a student passes or fails, the CEFR levels are barely consistent with these points. For that reason, the Board of Examination decided that the manner of assessing performance on central exams gives no indication in terms of CEFR levels<sup>74</sup>. The conclusion that examination assignments within an exam or test include different CEFR levels was also shared by the Swedish University of Gothenburg which also studied the CEFR levels of examination assignments<sup>75</sup>.

The second point concerning the broad, and multi-interpretable level descriptions is also noted by the Austrian Ministry of Education, the Arts and Culture. Austria noticed that the range of Level B is too broad to differentiate between language competences. Therefore, the Austrian Ministry is currently working on developing level descriptors for sub-levels within Level B. In addition, the Austrian Ministry develops self-standing descriptors for the language skill 'language in use' (spoken interaction: language use in different contexts) because the CEFR level descriptors are lacking to determine the level for this competence.

The fact that Sweden and Hungary acknowledge that the lack of empirical proof for the link with the CEFR is a difficulty, does not mean that other countries have empirical proof for the link. In the Netherlands, the results of the latest 'linking research'<sup>76</sup> have been used to determine the CEFR levels for the final exams for modern foreign languages. This means that for the development of the exams, the descriptions of those CEFR levels have to be used. In Austria the link between curricula and exams with the CEFR is based on many tests and pilots. The educational standards for modern foreign languages which were meant for the curricula, have been tried-and-tested and illustrated by means of approximately 300 practical examples of usage which are also based on CEFR. The piloting of the examinations in order to link the exams with the CEFR, is explained later in box 4. Within France no research study has been done to prove the link. If UK (Scotland) decides to link the CEFR levels with the curricula, the link will be based on a rough benchmarking of the current learning outcomes and the CEFR levels. Hence, in general, the evidence base for attributing CEFR levels to the learning outcomes of exams remains scarce.

Implementating the CEFR within the teaching process of modern foreign languages requires a different approach to teaching. Teachers have to be capable of performing the action-oriented approach consistently and need to learn how to evaluate the learning outcomes of pupils in terms of the CEFR. In practice, this means that the

<sup>73</sup> See: <http://toetswijzer.kennisnet.nl/html/cef/home.htm>.

<sup>74</sup> College voor Examen. *Moderne vreemde talen* VWO. Utrecht. 2011: [http://www.examenblad.nl/9336000/1/j9vvhinitagymgn\\_m7mvi7dmy3fq6u9\\_n11vg41h1h4i9qe/viqgk4u54jzd/f=/bestand.pdf](http://www.examenblad.nl/9336000/1/j9vvhinitagymgn_m7mvi7dmy3fq6u9_n11vg41h1h4i9qe/viqgk4u54jzd/f=/bestand.pdf).

<sup>75</sup> Gudrun, E., SLUTREDOVISNING AV EN STUDIE AV ETT SVENSKT NATIONELLT PROV I ENGELSKA I RELATION TILL GEMENSAM EUROPEISK REFERENSRAM FÖR SPRÅK:LÄRANDE, UNDERVISNING, BEDÖMNING, Göteborgs universitet

<sup>76</sup> Noijons, J., Kuijper, H., De koppeling van de centrale examens leesvaardigheid moderne vreemde talen aan het Europees referentiekader, Enschede/SLO, 2006: [http://toetswijzer.kennisnet.nl/html/cef/leesvaardigheidsexamens\\_erk\\_volledig.pdf](http://toetswijzer.kennisnet.nl/html/cef/leesvaardigheidsexamens_erk_volledig.pdf).

teachers have to pay less attention to the grammar of the language, but train pupils how to use the language in practice. With regards to the **use of the CEFR by modern foreign languages teachers** there are some concerns. In France, there are concerns about whether teachers actually possess the required competences to use the CEFR as it is intended. A research study in the Netherlands concluded that there are major differences in knowledge of the CEFR among Dutch modern foreign languages teachers, thus also large differences in the degree of implementation within schools. Because schools in the Netherlands are free to decide their education programme, free interpretation of the CEFR by schools and teachers is possible and can lead to the risk of undermining the principles of the CEFR<sup>77</sup>. The latter could also apply for Sweden, where teachers also have the freedom to deliver their own course and learning content. For example, Swedish teachers do not need to take the examination results into account for their final decision about student performance. However, in Sweden, the main problem concerning the implementation of the CEFR is that teachers do not really use the CEFR as a tool in the classroom.

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<sup>77</sup> Corda, A., de Graaf, R., *Het ERK in het voortgezet onderwijs*, Universiteit Utrecht en Universiteit Leiden, 2012: <http://media.leidenuniv.nl/legacy/het-erk-in-het-vo.pdf>.





## 4. SPECIFIC MEASURES FOR IMPLEMENTING THE CEFR IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

### KEY FINDINGS

- Taking an exam or test in the first modern foreign language is mandatory in four (AT, SE, NL, and FR) of the six selected countries. In Austria, the Netherlands and France, passing of this exam or test is required for pupils to obtain their diploma to access higher education. An examination in a second *modern* foreign language is not required within any of the six selected countries;
- With regards to the implementation of the CEFR in final examinations and tests, the following situations can be distinguished: the final exams or tests are based on the CEFR (AT, HU, SE, and NL), the final MFL exams are currently not based on the CEFR (FR), no link is made between the CEFR and the final MFL examinations (UK - Scotland);
- Learning outcomes which give a CEFR level indication for examination are determined within five (AT, SE, NL, HU, and FR) of the six selected countries. Only two (AT and NL) of the selected countries determined different CEFR levels for different language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking);
- The implementation of the CEFR in MFL schoolbooks for the selected qualifications differs between countries. There are countries where publishers used the CEFR indirectly (AT, HU, and SE) via obligations set to national curricula; and countries where publishers either can decide themselves whether to use the CEFR, or whether not to use it at all (NL, FR and UK - Scotland);
- In all the selected countries except the UK (Scotland), the CEFR is included in in-service teacher training programmes. Compared to the situation of the pre-service teacher training, only three of the selected countries (AT, NL, and FR) use the CEFR;
- Due to the fact that teachers are free to plan and design their teaching, for example by choosing the material such as schoolbooks and didactic methods, it is difficult to conclude whether teachers actually use the CEFR in their lessons. However, for some of the selected countries it is assumed that these MFL teachers know the CEFR, because of the link within the curricula.
- In general, the CEFR is widely used by both private providers which offer modern foreign language courses and language assessment organisations. With regard to the reasons why persons want to obtain a language certificate (increasing their chances on the labour market, required for work, access to university, personal development), or in other words the 'social function', a CEFR level indication seems to be of added value as it increases transparency in the courses offered and recognition across borders of modern foreign language competence levels;

This chapter discusses the degree to which the CEFR is actually implemented and used in modern foreign language learning in education programmes of the selected qualifications in the six countries (see chapter 3.1). In the first section 4.1, the role of the CEFR within assessment of MFL learning outcomes by tests and examinations, will be discussed. The following section 4.2, will explain to what extent publishers of schoolbooks used the CEFR to develop the content. For implementation in the classroom section 4.3 focuses on the use of the CEFR within MFL teacher training and the current knowledge and use of the CEFR by MFL teachers. To provide a wider picture concerning the implementation of the CEFR within the selected countries,

section 4.4 discusses the use of the framework by private providers which offer modern foreign language courses and assessments. Furthermore, a perspective on the social function of the CEFR will be discussed. Section 4.5 provides concluding remarks on this chapter.

## 4.1. Tests and examination

In relation to tests and examinations, the 2008 Recommendation on the CEFR invited all relevant stakeholders to:<sup>78</sup>

“Ensure that all tests, examinations and assessment procedures leading to officially recognised language qualifications take full account of the relevant aspects of language use and language competences as set out in the CEFR, that they are conducted in accordance with internationally recognised principles of good practice and quality management, and that the procedures to relate these tests and examinations to the common reference levels (A1-C2) of the CEFR are carried out in a reliable and transparent manner”

In section 3.1, the regulations concerning the number of mandatory modern foreign languages, were discussed. This only concerns the regulations for enrolling in MFL courses and this does not automatically mean that these languages are mandatory for final examinations or tests. For that reason, this section first provides an overview of the MFL for which students are obliged to take an exam; and second, it provides descriptions of the aims of the final exams or tests within the selected countries. After that, the degree to which the examinations or tests within the selected countries are based on the CEFR is discussed.

### 4.1.1. Modern foreign language examinations or tests

In general, pupils in the selected countries are required to take final exams in order to obtain their diploma, however, there are exceptions. Although table 5 indicates that a final exam in a first MFL is mandatory for Swedish pupils, the results of the exams do not necessarily influence the final assessment concerning the pupil's performance. In Sweden, teachers are responsible for deciding whether a pupil graduates for a modern foreign language in relation to the requirements of the national and specific modern foreign language curricula. It is only mandatory that pupils take the national test for English. The national tests for French, German, and Spanish are available, but not mandatory<sup>79</sup>. In Hungary, taking a final exam in a foreign language is mandatory. However this can also be Hungarian (as a foreign language, a classical or regional language. Hungarian pupils can choose between 25 languages or Hungarian as a foreign language depending on what the school has to offer. With regard to the UK (Scotland), the situation concerning examination differs from the majority of countries because a modern foreign language exam is not required for obtaining a qualification which gives access to higher education. Pupils in Scotland, choose the subjects for their exams, which may include one or more modern foreign languages<sup>80</sup>.

<sup>78</sup> Council of Europe, *Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the use of the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the promotion of plurilingualism*, 2008:

[http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/SourceForum07/Rec%20CM%202008-7\\_EN.doc](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/SourceForum07/Rec%20CM%202008-7_EN.doc).

<sup>79</sup> Erickson, G., *National assessment of foreign languages in Sweden*, University of Gothenburg/Sweden, 2012: [http://www.nafs.gu.se/digitalAssets/1389/1389767\\_nat\\_assessment\\_of\\_foreign\\_lang\\_in\\_swe.pdf](http://www.nafs.gu.se/digitalAssets/1389/1389767_nat_assessment_of_foreign_lang_in_swe.pdf).

<sup>80</sup> International bureau of education, *World Data on Education*, 2012: [http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/United\\_Kingdom\\_Scotland.pdf](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/United_Kingdom_Scotland.pdf).

**Table 6: Mandatory MFL exams or test**

	First MFL	Second MFL	Third MFL
Austria <sup>81</sup>	mandatory	optional	optional
Sweden <sup>82</sup>	English is mandatory	optional	Optional, for some study-programmes
Hungary <sup>83</sup>	Mandatory, but can be Hungarian (for non-native speakers) or a classical/regional language	optional	optional
The Netherlands <sup>84</sup>	English is mandatory	Mandatory to choose between a MFL or one regional language for some study-programmes and others are required to choose Latin or Greek	Optional
France <sup>85</sup>	mandatory	Mandatory, but can be a regional language	Optional, for some study-programme
UK (Scotland) <sup>86</sup>	optional	optional	optional

As mentioned in section 3.1 some countries include classical and regional languages within their language learning policies. In the Netherlands and France, a second foreign language is mandatory, but this is not always a *modern* foreign language. In the Netherlands, pupils of one study programme<sup>87</sup> within the selected qualification have to choose between two classical languages (Latin or Greek). The other study programme<sup>87</sup> requires pupils to choose between a MFL or one regional language (Frisian) for their exams. Usually, the regional language is chosen by pupils who live in the region where the language is spoken. In addition, in France, a second foreign language is mandatory but this can also be a regional language. This depends on the choice of the pupil. Furthermore, pupils in Austria, Hungary, and Sweden can choose between several languages depending on what their school has to offer. This choice does not have to be a MFL, but could also be a classical or regional language.

<sup>81</sup> Ministry of Education, the Arts and Culture and Ministry of Science and Research, Austrian Centre for Language Competence, Language and language education policies in Austria, 2008: [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Austria\\_CountryReport\\_final\\_EN.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Austria_CountryReport_final_EN.pdf); updated.

<sup>82</sup> European Commission, *National system overview on education systems in Europe, 2011*: [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/eurybase/national\\_summary\\_sheets/047\\_SE\\_EN.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/eurybase/national_summary_sheets/047_SE_EN.pdf)

<sup>83</sup> Loboda, Z., Balázs, É., Kocsis, M., Vágó, I., *Education in Hungary 2010*. Budapest: Hungarian Institute for Education Research and Development, 2012.

<sup>84</sup> Ministry of Education, Culture and Science: [http://www.duo.nl/Images/Vakkenschema%27s\\_vwo\\_staatsexamen\\_tcm7-38178.pdf](http://www.duo.nl/Images/Vakkenschema%27s_vwo_staatsexamen_tcm7-38178.pdf).

<sup>85</sup> Ministère éducation nationale: [http://www.education.gouv.fr/pid25535/bulletin\\_officiel.html?cid\\_bo=65827](http://www.education.gouv.fr/pid25535/bulletin_officiel.html?cid_bo=65827).

<sup>86</sup> International bureau of education, *World Data on Education*, 2012: [http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/United\\_Kingdom\\_Scotland.pdf](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/United_Kingdom_Scotland.pdf).

<sup>87</sup> Pre-university education (VWO in Dutch: Voorbereidend Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs) is divided into two types: athenaeum and gymnasium. Pupils enrolling in 'gymnasium' are obliged to take an exam in Latin or Greek. Pupils who enrol in 'athenaeum' have to choose between MFL or a regional language as their second foreign language.

#### 4.1.2. Implementation of the CEFR in examinations and tests

Regarding the implementation of the CEFR in final examinations and tests, the following situations can be distinguished:

- **The final exams or tests are based on the CEFR;**
- The final MFL exams are **currently not based on the CEFR;**
- **No link is made between the CEFR** and the final MFL examinations.

At the moment, within four (AT, SE, HU, and NL) of the six selected countries the requirements for **the final exams or tests are based on the CEFR**. This means that the final examination levels and the learning outcomes are described in terms of the CEFR. Within Austria and the Netherlands, a number of research projects have been conducted in order to determine these CEFR levels of the exams. An overview of experiences with these studies is presented in box 4 below. Generally, these studies use the CEFR level descriptions and compare these descriptions with the level of the examination assignments. The final CEFR levels are determined together with experts. The descriptions of these CEFR levels (can-do-statements) are used for the examination requirements. Only in Sweden, the national tests are based on the specific modern foreign language curricula which are inspired by the CEFR, but no direct link is provided. Hence, the link of the national tests with the CEFR is more indirect. However, in 2009 the University of Gothenburg, in cooperation with European experts, compared the CEFR levels with the national English tests. The results of this study made clear that in general, the content of the tests correspond with the CEFR level which corresponds in turn, with the Swedish learning outcomes of the qualification providing access to higher education<sup>88</sup>. The examination requirements in Hungary describe the learning outcomes, the level descriptions and terminology of the CEFR. Experts hired by the Ministry of Human Resources linked the levels with the CEFR.

#### Box 4: Experiences with linking exams to the CEFR levels in Austria and the Netherlands

**AT:** The linking of levels of the CEFR to exams is a difficult and an ongoing process. In fact, initially, when introducing the CEFR around 2004, there was no precise idea about the levels and it was not clear whether the use of sub-levels was consistent with the CEFR. In addition, there was no monitoring data available to build an argued link between the exams and CEFR levels. Through the piloting of the examinations, more information was obtained to link the examinations to levels of the CEFR. It appeared that in some cases (second MFL), the CEFR levels were set too high (B1+ and B2).

The procedures to link the school-leaving examination (in German: Standardisierte Reife- und Diplomprüfung (SRP)) to CEFR levels includes first, using the CEFR descriptors and related can-do-statements to determine the range of the assignments. Second, item-writers will develop assignments which test language proficiency in given contexts and attribute the CEFR level (B1 or B2); third, the assignments are tested in the field and finally, the standards are set through stakeholder consultation (including international experts, Ministry, native speakers, teachers and universities).

<sup>88</sup> Gudrun, E., SLUTREDOVISNING AV EN STUDIE AV ETT SVENSKT NATIONELLT PROV I ENGELSKA I RELATION TILL GEMENSAM EUROPEISK REFERENSRAM FÖR SPRÅK:LÄRANDE, UNDERVISNING, BEDÖMNING, Göteborgs universitet.

**NL:** In the study known as the 'Linking research'<sup>89</sup>, the National Institute of Educational Measurement (Cito) and the Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO) analysed the link on the one hand between the examination programme and the CEFR and on the other hand the examination assignments and the CEFR. This study was conducted in two phases. First, the relationship between the exams for German, English and French and the CEFR was mapped. Second, the relationship between the central exams for Spanish, Turkish, Arabic and Russian and the CEFR levels were studied.

The link between the **examination programme and the CEFR** was studied by comparing the specifications of the examination programme, which was valid until 2007, with the level descriptions of the CEFR. This method showed that the level specifications from this examination programme for the selected qualification had a CEFR level of B2/C1. These two CEFR levels refer to the examination programmes for Arabic, German, English, French, Spanish and Turkish.

For the link between the **examination assignments and the CEFR** the manual<sup>90</sup> which was published by the Council of Europe was used. This manual describes three distinct methods to substantiate the link between national exams and the CEFR terms. Cito decided to use two of the three methods. The first is called 'specification of the contents of the examinations' and the second method is called 'standardisation of judgements'. Besides the methods, the manual also distinguished four different phases within the methods. For this study they used the first three phases. The first phase is 'familiarisation' which mainly consisted of a joint session with representatives of Cito and SLO. All representatives have an academic degree in one or more of the modern foreign languages involved and each representative has a B2 level or higher in at least one modern foreign language. In the joint session, representatives gathered to discuss one common vision about the CEFR. The second phase included the qualitative analysis of the examination programmes (the specification method mentioned above), and a content analysis of the central exams. The third phase, was called the 'standardisation phase', where reviewers were shown a representative selection of examination assignments in order to determine the minimum CEFR level that candidates need to have for completing the assignment. For the purpose of validity, reviewers were recruited among the teaching professionals in secondary education, teaching professionals in institutes for higher and university education, representatives of the business world, representatives of private language institutes, politics, and Members of the Board of Examinations<sup>91</sup>.

The results of this study have been used by the Board of Examinations to determine the CEFR levels for the central exams for modern languages. This means that the descriptions of those CEFR levels have to be used to develop the exams. In general, the Board of Examinations used the same level standards as the existing exams.

It is important to note that the central exams are only related to reading skills. The school exams are related to listening, speaking, and writing skills<sup>92</sup>. After the

<sup>89</sup> In Dutch: het koppelingsonderzoek: Noijons, J., Kuijper, H., *De koppeling van de centrale examens leesvaardigheid moderne vreemde talen aan het Europees referentiekader*, Enschede/SLO, 2006: [http://toetswijzer.kennisnet.nl/html/cef/leesvaardigheidsexamens\\_erk\\_volledig.pdf](http://toetswijzer.kennisnet.nl/html/cef/leesvaardigheidsexamens_erk_volledig.pdf).

<sup>90</sup> SLO, *Handreiking MVT Du/En/Fr 2007 Havo/vwo*, 2007: [http://www.slo.nl/downloads/archief/Handreiking\\_20MVT\\_20Duits\\_2c\\_20Engels\\_2c\\_20Frans.pdf/](http://www.slo.nl/downloads/archief/Handreiking_20MVT_20Duits_2c_20Engels_2c_20Frans.pdf/).

<sup>91</sup> College voor Examens: <http://www.cve.nl/>.

<sup>92</sup> There are some differences in the use of names for skills between the Netherlands and the CEFR. The CEFR uses the following names listening skills, writing skills, spoken interaction, spoken production, and reading skills. In contrast, the Netherlands uses spoken interaction and spoken production as sub domains of the speaking skills. Besides, the name for listening skills is called the viewing and listening skills (or in Dutch: Kijk-en luistervaardigheden) in the Netherlands. This difference has no consequence because the listening skills of

examination programme was officially linked to the CEFR, the Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO) compared the examination programme with de school exams and the level descriptions of the CEFR. With the help of this comparison, the institute assigned CEFR levels to the learning outcomes derived from the examination programme. In addition, SLO elaborated the level specifications for each skill.

The final exams for modern foreign languages in **France** are **currently not based on the CEFR**, but this will soon change as the exams for the first and second modern foreign language will be based on the CEFR in 2013<sup>93</sup>. These 2013 final exams assess the listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Assessment of listening and speaking skills is new in France as the final exams of 2013 will include these skills for the first time. The emphasis on assessing these skills is influenced by the implementation of the CEFR and has led to an important change in modern foreign language programmes in France<sup>94</sup>.

In the examinations for the qualifications which give access to higher education in the UK (Scotland) **no link is made with the CEFR**. However, there are signs which indicate that the modern foreign language exams will be roughly benchmarked against the CEFR. For this purpose, the Scottish Qualification Authority conducted a study to compare the current Scottish levels with the CEFR levels. Although it must be emphasised that the comparative study<sup>95</sup> is not a formal and detailed analysis as it was a relatively small study, the comparison made, can be used as a first impression of what the Scottish levels could be in terms of the CEFR levels.

#### 4.1.3. The CEFR levels of the examinations and tests

Learning outcomes for examinations are determined in five (AT, SE, NL, HU, and FR) of the six selected countries. As mentioned in chapter 2, the CEFR level descriptions are outlined in 'can-do-statements' for five different language skills: listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production, and writing. These skills categories are not uniformly used in the national implementation and linking of the CEFR to the examinations. Table 7 first provides an overview of which skills categories are assessed in the examinations related to the qualifications that give access to higher education in the selected countries. Second, the table indicates which countries determine learning outcomes in terms of the CEFR for which language skill.

the CEFR also include listening or 'watching' to television and videos. For that reason we continue by using the following names: reading, writing, listening and speaking skills.

<sup>93</sup> Ministère éducation nationale: <http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid206/les-langues-vivantes-etranangeres.html>.

<sup>94</sup> Ministère éducation nationale: <http://eduscol.education.fr/cid60505/les-nouvelles-modalites-des-epreuves-de-langues-vivantes.html>.

<sup>95</sup> Templeton, B., *Guidance for Item Writers: Comparison of SCQF levels with those of CEFR*, Scottish Qualification Authority, 2012.



**Table 7: Language skills assessed in examinations or tests and the related CEFR**

	Language skills assessed in examinations or tests	Language skills for which the learning outcomes are related to CEFR levels	Learning outcome for the first MFL	Learning outcome for the second MFL	Learning outcome for the third MFL
Austria	Reading, writing, spoken interaction, spoken production, and listening.	Reading, writing, spoken interaction, spoken production, and listening	B2	B1	Not determined
Sweden	Reading, written production, written interaction, spoken production, spoken interaction, and listening <sup>96</sup> .	No distinction is made, a general CEFR level is indicated	B2.1	Depends on the level of the course	Depends on the level of the course
Hungary	Reading, writing, speaking, and speaking <sup>97</sup>	No distinction is made, a general CEFR level is indicated	B2	B1	Not determined
The Netherlands	reading, writing, speaking <sup>98</sup> , and speaking	Reading, writing, speaking, and speaking	B2 (for all the language skills <sup>99</sup> )	B2/B1 (depends on the language skills and the language)	B2/B1 (depends on the language skills and the language)
France	Reading, writing, speaking, and listening	No distinction is made, a general CEFR level is indicated for the exams of 2013	B2	B1	A2
UK (Scotland)	Reading, writing, talking, and listening <sup>100 101</sup>	A CEFR level is not indicated for any of the skills learning outcomes	Not determined	Not determined	Not determined

The stated learning outcomes across the six countries are comparable. For this first MFL the learning outcomes are set at level B2, for the second MFL in general at B1. Regarding the information provided in table 7, further details will be provided for each country separately in the following.

### 1) Austria

In Austria the level of the examinations are laid down in curricula and are strongly linked to the CEFR. These learning outcomes and the associated CEFR levels are described for each language skill, per year, and for first and second MFLs<sup>102</sup>. This is

<sup>96</sup> Erickson, G., *National assessment of foreign languages in Sweden*, University of Gothenburg/Sweden, 2012: [http://www.nafs.gu.se/digitalAssets/1389/1389767\\_nat\\_assessment\\_of\\_foreign\\_lang\\_in\\_swe.pdf](http://www.nafs.gu.se/digitalAssets/1389/1389767_nat_assessment_of_foreign_lang_in_swe.pdf).

<sup>97</sup> Oktatas, ÉLŐ IDEGEN NYELV, 2011: [http://www.oktatas.hu/pub\\_bin/dload/kozoktatas/erettsegi/vizsgakovetelmenyek2012/elo\\_idegen\\_nyelv\\_vk.pdf](http://www.oktatas.hu/pub_bin/dload/kozoktatas/erettsegi/vizsgakovetelmenyek2012/elo_idegen_nyelv_vk.pdf).

<sup>98</sup> In the Netherlands spoken interaction and spoken production are used as sub domains of the speaking skills.

<sup>99</sup> The four language skills are: reading, listening, speaking, and writing.

<sup>100</sup> Scottish Qualification Authority: <http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/47909.html>.

<sup>101</sup> Scottish Qualification Authority: <http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/48456.html>.

<sup>102</sup> See: <http://www.uibk.ac.at/srp/lehrplaene.html>; Lebende Fremdsprache (Erste, Zweite); (Englisch, Französisch, Italienisch, Russisch, Spanisch, Tschechisch, Slowenisch, Bosnisch/Kroatisch/Serbisch, Ungarisch, Kroatisch, Slowakisch, Polnisch): [http://www.uibk.ac.at/srp/PDFs/lebendefremdsprache\\_ost\\_neu0.pdf](http://www.uibk.ac.at/srp/PDFs/lebendefremdsprache_ost_neu0.pdf).

depicted in table 8. The distinction between the levels for first and second MFL is indicated by the forward slash (/), hence the level of the first MFL is the level before the forward slash and the second MFL is the level after the forward slash. However, the exit levels after the end of each school year are currently under discussion for the second modern foreign language.

**Table 8: First MFL (5.-8. years of MFL learning) and second modern foreign language<sup>103</sup>**

Skills:		5 <sup>th</sup> year (already having 4 years of MFL learning in lower secondary education)	6 <sup>th</sup> year	7 <sup>th</sup> year	8 <sup>th</sup> year
Reading		B1 / A2	B1 / A2	B2 / B1	B2 / B1
Writing		B1 / A2	B1 / A2	B2 / B1	B2 / B1
Speaking	spoken interaction	B1 / A1	B1 / A2	B2 / B1	B2 / B1
	spoken production	B1 / A1	B1 / A2	B2 / B1	B2 / B1
Listening		B1 / A1	B1 / A2	B2 / B1	B2 – B1 / B1

**Source:** Universität Innsbruck

## 2) The Netherlands

As described in box 4, in the Netherlands, the relationship between the levels of the examination programme and assignments and the CEFR levels were analysed. In this analysis, the CEFR levels related to reading skills were determined, as depicted in the table below. Concerning the other skills, there is a small difference between the skills categorisation in the Netherlands and the CEFR. The CEFR uses the following skills classification: listening skills, writing skills, spoken interaction, spoken production, and reading skills. In contrast, the Netherlands uses spoken interaction and spoken production as sub-domains of the speaking skills. In addition, table 9 shows the CEFR levels for the speaking, listening, and writing skills for English (first MFL), German and French (second or third MFL). Since, this research study focuses on English, German and French these languages are depicted below, however there are also CEFR levels determined for Arabic, Turkish, Russian, Spanish, and Italian<sup>104 105 106</sup>.

**Table 9: CEFR levels for examination of the reading skills in the Netherlands**

Languages	Reading skills (central exam assignments)	Listening skills	Speaking skills	Writing skills
<b>English</b>	Predominately B2 assignments, supplemented with C1 assignments	B2	B2	B2
<b>German</b>	Predominately B2 assignments, supplemented with B1 and C1 assignments	B2	B2	B1
<b>French</b>	Slightly more B1 than B2 assignments	B2	B1+	B1

**Source:** Institute for curriculum development (in Dutch: SLO) and the Board of Examinations (in Dutch: College van examens)

<sup>103</sup> For pupils following a second MFL course, already having two years of MFL in lower secondary school, the CEFR levels related to the 8th year are: Reading : B2, for the others it is B1.

<sup>104</sup> SLO, *Handreiking MVT Ita/Rus/SP 2007 havo/vwo*, 2007:

[http://www.slo.nl/downloads/archief/Handreiking\\_20MVT\\_20Ita\\_2cRus\\_2cSp.pdf/](http://www.slo.nl/downloads/archief/Handreiking_20MVT_20Ita_2cRus_2cSp.pdf/).

<sup>105</sup> SLO, *Handreiking MVT Arabisch/Turks 2007 havo/vwo*, 2007:

[http://www.slo.nl/downloads/archief/Handreiking\\_20MVT\\_20Arabisch\\_Turks.pdf/](http://www.slo.nl/downloads/archief/Handreiking_20MVT_20Arabisch_Turks.pdf/).

<sup>106</sup> College voor Examens. *Moderne vreemde talen VWO*. Utrecht. 2011:

[http://www.examenblad.nl/9336000/1/j9vvhinitagymgn\\_m7mvi7dmy3fq6u9\\_n11vg41h1h4i9qe/viqgk4u54jzd/f=/bestand.pdf](http://www.examenblad.nl/9336000/1/j9vvhinitagymgn_m7mvi7dmy3fq6u9_n11vg41h1h4i9qe/viqgk4u54jzd/f=/bestand.pdf).



### 3) Hungary

The learning outcomes expressed in relation to the final exam in a MFL (for the studied qualification) are referenced to a CEFR level. No distinction is made however with regard the different skills (reading, writing, speaking, and speaking). On the other hand, in Hungary distinctions are made in accordance with the level of the exam, as pupils have the choice to take their exams at two different levels; namely standard and advanced level. The examination of the standard levels are mandatory for all pupils; examinations related to the advanced level are for pupils who want to receive additional points which are required for admission to some higher education institutes<sup>107</sup>. Although the examination for both levels consists of a written exam and an oral exam which assesses four language skills (reading, listening, speaking and writing) the learning outcomes in terms of the CEFR are not described for each skill separately. The minimum or standard CEFR level for the school-leaving examination for a modern foreign language is B1 and for the higher level, i.e. the advanced level the CEFR level is set at B2<sup>108</sup>. In 2008, the Hungarian Ministry of Education analysed the levels of the exams for English and German of secondary education (see box 5 below)<sup>109</sup>.

#### Box 5: Proficiency levels of Hungarian pupils for English and German examinations

For English the exams of 49,000 students were analysed, showing that 1 per cent achieved A1 or lower, 60 per cent achieved A2, 39 per cent achieved B1, and 6 per cent achieved B2. A total of 28,000 exams in German were analysed of which 1 per cent achieved A1 or less, 62 per cent achieved A2, 37 per cent achieved B1, and 4 per cent achieved B2. These results showed that the student performance of 2008 for English and German were fairly similar. The focus of these analyses on German and English were based on the fact that most students (80 per cent) graduate in these modern foreign languages.

### 4) Sweden

The situation in Sweden is different from the others, because the Swedish education system for English and other MFL is organised along seven courses or stages. Each course or stage corresponds with a Swedish level. A comparison between the descriptions of the seven Swedish levels and the six CEFR levels made clear that the Swedish stages do not entirely correspond with the the CEFR levels. For this reason, sub-levels are used to link the CEFR with the Swedish levels<sup>110</sup>. The seven Swedish courses are meant for primary and secondary education<sup>111</sup>. Hence, a pupil in upper secondary education who starts with course/stage 1 for Spanish, starts at the same course/stage 1 as a pupil who begins with Spanish in primary education. This situation is different for English, as English is compulsory both at primary and secondary education level. For each course, pupils can achieve five passing grades (E, D, C, B, and A)<sup>112</sup>. The lowest passing grade (E) which a pupil can achieve for a course is linked to a CEFR level, as depicted in table 10. Thus, a pupil who enrolls in course 1 of

<sup>107</sup> Loboda, Z., Balázs,É., Kocsis, M., Vágó,I., *Education in Hungary 2010*. Budapest:Hungarian Institute for Education Research and Development, 2012.

<sup>108</sup> Oktatas, ÉLŐ IDEGEN NYELV, 2011: [http://www.oktatas.hu/pub\\_bin/dload/kozoktat/erettsegi/vizsgakovetelmenyek2012/elo\\_idegen\\_nyelv\\_vk.pdf](http://www.oktatas.hu/pub_bin/dload/kozoktat/erettsegi/vizsgakovetelmenyek2012/elo_idegen_nyelv_vk.pdf).

<sup>109</sup> Ministry of Education, Felmérés a 2008-ban Magyarországon érettségizettek idegennyelv-tudásáról. 2008: [http://www.nefmi.gov.hu/letolt/kozokt/nyelvkuatas\\_090622.pdf](http://www.nefmi.gov.hu/letolt/kozokt/nyelvkuatas_090622.pdf).

<sup>110</sup> Nyman, I., Wester, K., Handledning: Europeisk sprakportfolio 6-16 ar, Skolverket

<sup>111</sup> Skolverket, Kommentarer till uppbyggnad av och struktur för ämnena engelska, moderna språk och svenskt teckenspråk för hörande, 2011: [http://www.skolverket.se/polopoly\\_fs/1.145557!/Menu/article/attachment/Strukturkomm\\_en\\_modsprk\\_sv\\_tec\\_kenspr\\_hr.pdf](http://www.skolverket.se/polopoly_fs/1.145557!/Menu/article/attachment/Strukturkomm_en_modsprk_sv_tec_kenspr_hr.pdf).

<sup>112</sup> Skolverket, *Upper Secondary school 2011*, Stockholm, 2012: [http://www.skolverket.se/om-skolverket/publicerat/visa-enskild-publikation?\\_xurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww5.skolverket.se%2Fwtpub%2Fws%2Fskolbok%2Fwpubext%2Ftrycksak%2FRecord%3Fk%3D2801](http://www.skolverket.se/om-skolverket/publicerat/visa-enskild-publikation?_xurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww5.skolverket.se%2Fwtpub%2Fws%2Fskolbok%2Fwpubext%2Ftrycksak%2FRecord%3Fk%3D2801).

Spanish and achieves a grade higher than passing grade E should at least command A1.2 level.

**Table 10: CEFR levels of MFL stages/courses in Sweden**

CEFR levels	A 1.1	A 1.2	A 2.1	A 2.2	B 1.1	B 1.2	B 2.1	B 2.2
Swedish stages		1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Source:** Skolverket, Kommentarmaterial till kursplanen i engelska och Kommentarmaterial till kursplanen i moderna språk, 2011

According to table 10, as pupils are obliged to succeed at the Swedish equivalent level (stage 6) for English, Swedish pupils need to be able to achieve at least CEFR (sub) level B2.1. The learning outcomes of modern foreign languages other than English are more difficult to indicate as these MFL are mandatory in some study programmes and not in others. For example, those who enrol in a study programme which requires one course of a modern language, will have to command that MFL at least at level A1.2, when a passing grade is achieved for the course.

## 5) France

In France learning outcomes are determined within the law and curricula for the first MFL (B2), for the second foreign language (B1), and for the third foreign language (A2)<sup>113</sup>. In 2013, the final exam for the first and second foreign language will be linked to the descriptions of these learning outcomes in terms of the CEFR. The 2013 final exams assess the listening, speaking, reading and writing skills<sup>114</sup>, however, until now no different CEFR levels for these languages skills have been determined.

## 6) UK (Scotland)

As has been mentioned earlier in this study, in the UK (Scotland) no link is foreseen between the CEFR levels and the examination. However, for the two selected qualifications in the UK (Scotland), a comparative study was conducted by the Scottish Qualification Authority comparing (informally) the Scottish levels with the CEFR levels. This study concluded the following:

- 'Higher' qualifications for modern languages (SCQF level 6): mainly B1 and aspiring to B2;
- 'Advanced Higher' qualifications for modern languages (SCQF level 7): mainly B2 and aspiring to C1.

This comparison is used as a first impression of what the CEFR levels of the selected qualifications could be, it can be used as a guidance note, but does not include any legal consequences<sup>115</sup>.

### 4.1.4. In conclusion

All in all, in this section we saw in section 4.1.1 that pupils in four (AT, SE, NL, and FR) of the selected countries are obliged to take an exam in at least one MFL. A second exam in a (modern) foreign language is mandatory for some pupils, but optional for others. This exam, however, can also be a regional or classical language instead of a MFL. Furthermore, in section 4.1.2, we identified several situations regarding the implementation of the CEFR in final examinations and tests: final exams

<sup>113</sup> Ministère éducation nationale: <http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid53320/mene1019796a.html>.

<sup>114</sup> Ministère éducation nationale: <http://eduscol.education.fr/cid60505/les-nouvelles-modalites-des-epreuves-de-langues-vivantes.html>.

<sup>115</sup> Templeton, B., *Guidance for Item Writers: Comparison of SCQF levels with those of CEFR*, Scottish Qualification Authority, 2012.

or tests are based on the CEFR (AT, SE, HU, and NL), final exams are currently not based on the CEFR (FR), and final exams which have no link with the CEFR (UK - Scotland). Finally, in section 4.1.3 we saw huge differences in the extent to which countries established CEFR levels for their exams or tests. Although, all six selected countries assess at least four different language skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening), only two countries (AT and NL) describe separate CEFR levels for the assessed skills in their exams. Sweden and Hungary determine CEFR levels in accordance with the level of the exams or course. France has different CEFR levels for the first, second, and the third foreign language just like Sweden. Austria only has different CEFR levels for the first and second modern foreign language. The Netherlands has different levels for first MFL (English), and separate CEFR levels for several MFL which could be the second or the third MFL. Finally, in one country (the UK - Scotland) no CEFR level is determined for the examinations.

Therefore, in relation to the invitation of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers, to those national, regional and local education authorities who decide to use the CEFR, it can be concluded that a majority of the selected countries implemented the CEFR in tests or examinations and made this link clear by a transparent display of the modern foreign language learning outcomes in CEFR levels.

## 4.2. Schoolbooks

In relation to tests and schoolbooks, the 2008 Recommendation on the CEFR invited all relevant stakeholders to:<sup>116</sup>

"Encourage authors and publishers of language textbooks and other course materials, wherever appropriate (for example as a criterion for official recognition), to: 1) take full account of the aspects of language use and competences presented in the CEFR, and to situate them – in a reliable and transparent way – with reference to the common reference levels of language proficiency; 2) give due consideration to the development of the learners' plurilingual capacities"

In this section the focus is on the implementation or use of the CEFR by publishers of MFL schoolbooks, intended for the education programmes related to the selected qualifications. In relation to publishers of schoolbooks, a distinction can be made between countries where the development of the schoolbooks and the content is bound by State regulations and countries where there are no State regulations concerning the development and content of schoolbooks. With regard the first situation, the market for publishers of schoolbooks within Austria and Hungary is bound by State regulations. Regarding the latter, in the other four countries, the publishers of MFL schoolbooks operate in a competitive, commercial market, not bound by State regulations concerning the content. With regard the second situation, although there are no State regulations enforcing them to use the CEFR, it is particularly interesting to see whether these publishers use the CEFR, and for what (commercial) reasons.

Table 11 provides an overview of the countries in which publishers use the CEFR and those that do not use the CEFR. In addition, if the CEFR is used, it indicates on which link between the MFL schoolbooks and the CEFR is based.

<sup>116</sup> Council of Europe, *Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the use of the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the promotion of plurilingualism*, 2008:  
[http://www.coe.int/t/dq4/linguistic/Source/SourceForum07/Rec%20CM%202008-7\\_EN.doc](http://www.coe.int/t/dq4/linguistic/Source/SourceForum07/Rec%20CM%202008-7_EN.doc).

**Table 11: Use of the CEFR by publishers of schoolbooks**

	Use the CEFR		State-regulated
	Indirectly by the national curricula	Based on their own judgment	
Austria	√ <sup>117</sup>	o	√
Sweden	√	o	o
Hungary	√ <sup>118 119</sup>	o	√
The Netherlands	o	√	o
France	o	√	o
UK (Scotland)	o	o	o

In the following, we will provide details on how the CEFR is used by publishers. The countries are divided in two groups: countries in which publishers use the CEFR indirectly (Section 4.2.1); and countries in which publishers can either decide themselves, or where it is not used at all (Section 4.2.2).

#### 4.2.1. Countries in which publishers used the CEFR indirectly

As depicted in table 11 publishers of MFL schoolbooks within Austria, Sweden and Hungary **use the CEFR indirectly** for the content of their MFL schoolbooks by taking the national curricula that are linked to the CEFR into account. In Austria and Hungary, the market for publishers of schoolbooks is bound by rules concerning the content, as mentioned earlier. Within both countries a Ministry<sup>120</sup> determines a number of criteria for reviewing schoolbooks. If a schoolbook meets these criteria, teachers are allowed to use the schoolbooks in education; otherwise the schoolbooks are not permitted. In both countries, these criteria include that the content of the schoolbooks should correspond with the national curricula. Since these national curricula of both countries use the CEFR, it follows directly that the content of the schoolbooks is linked with the CEFR. In the box 6 the situation in Austria and Hungary is presented, concerning the evaluation of schoolbooks by State authorities.

<sup>117</sup> Council of Europe: [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Austria\\_CountryReport\\_final\\_EN.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Austria_CountryReport_final_EN.pdf).

<sup>118</sup> The ministry of Human Resources, 16/2013. (II. 28.) EMMI rendelet, Jogtar, 2013: [http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hiegy\\_doc.cgi?docid=A1300016.EMM](http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hiegy_doc.cgi?docid=A1300016.EMM).

<sup>119</sup> European Commission: [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Hungary:Teaching\\_and\\_Learning\\_in\\_Single\\_Structure\\_Education](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Hungary:Teaching_and_Learning_in_Single_Structure_Education).

<sup>120</sup> In Hungary: the ministry of Human Resources, and in Austria: the ministry of Education, the Arts and Culture.

**Box 6: The evaluation of schoolbooks by State authorities in Austria and Hungary**

**AT:** A Ministerial committee is in charge of validating the schoolbooks used. School textbooks are evaluated with regard to their compatibility with curricula, through certification or licensing procedures (by a Begutachungskommission, an assessment commission at BMUKK, the Ministry of Education): those textbooks should therefore accompany language acquisition in a continuous way, and their aims should be transparent for all concerned. Most teachers put their trust in textbooks as well as in guidelines (in the teachers' manual) about methods to use, including the area of pupils' changes of school or new entries – which is all about continuation of language teaching, and where the curriculum requires that pupils' previous skills and knowledge should be taken into account.<sup>121</sup>

**HU:** Schoolbooks that are used in public education are included in an official list of textbooks. The Ministry of Human Resources is responsible for this list, however, the National Public Education Council is consulted to make the decision whether a schoolbook may be included in the list or not. Within 'a ministerial decree on textbooks'<sup>122</sup> the Ministry outlined which criteria the National Public Education Council has to use by evaluating schoolbooks. This is arranged first, to control the quality of schoolbooks and second, to make sure that price of the schoolbooks does not exceed the annual price limit. The procedure assesses whether the schoolbooks cover the content and requirements of the National Core Curriculum. This concerns assessing whether first, the content ensures an appropriate level, second, whether it is based on an appropriate pedagogical method, and third, whether it guarantees that the content is based on a specialised branch of study in a scientific, authentic and objective way<sup>123</sup>. With respect to schoolbooks for modern foreign language learning, there are no specific requirements or direct links with the CEFR. Notwithstanding, publishers use the CEFR, because the national Core Curriculum uses the CEFR levels and descriptions<sup>124</sup>.

Despite the evaluation of schoolbooks in Austria, it does not prevent the different degrees to which the CEFR is implemented in MFL schoolbooks. In recent years, developments have taken place concerning this issue in Austria. Generally, the CEFR is used in the English schoolbooks as well as in textbooks for French, Italian, and Spanish. While the use is more advanced for English textbooks, it is becoming more and more commonly used in the schoolbooks of other MFLs. The way publishers in Austria used the CEFR at the beginning of its release, was obviously not in line with the general idea underlying the CEFR. For instance, they indicated a level for the school book and supported that with 'can do' statements, such as 'can do the past perfect'.

Sweden differs from Austria and Hungary, there is no State regulation concerning evaluating schoolbooks, also, there is no direct obligation to use the CEFR in schoolbooks. Given this fact, however, the CEFR is often used indirectly by Swedish publishers of MFL schoolbooks. Currently, the use of the CEFR in MFL schoolbooks in Sweden varies per publisher. In most cases, teachers want to follow the specific MFL curricula so publishers concentrate on these curricula. As we have seen earlier, the specific MFL curricula are influenced by the CEFR and thereby the schoolbooks which base their content on these curricula, indirectly take into account the CEFR. To provide some examples of the Swedish situation: Liber Publishing House confirmed they would work this way. Another publisher named 'Studentlitteratur' outlined in a schoolbook

<sup>121</sup> [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Austria\\_CountryReport\\_final\\_EN.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Austria_CountryReport_final_EN.pdf).

<sup>122</sup> The ministry of Human Resources, 16/2013. (II. 28.) EMMI rendelet, Jogtar, 2013: [http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy\\_doc.cgi?docid=A1300016.EMM](http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy_doc.cgi?docid=A1300016.EMM).

<sup>123</sup> European Commission: [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Hungary:Teaching\\_and\\_Learning\\_in\\_Single\\_Structure\\_Education](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Hungary:Teaching_and_Learning_in_Single_Structure_Education).

<sup>124</sup> Oktatas, Tájékoztató az iskolai tankönyvellátás 2013, 2013: [http://www.oktatas.hu/pub\\_bin/dload/kozoktatask/tankonyv/tajekoztatask\\_a\\_tankonyvellatas\\_valtozasairol.pdf](http://www.oktatas.hu/pub_bin/dload/kozoktatask/tankonyv/tajekoztatask_a_tankonyvellatas_valtozasairol.pdf).

for Spanish<sup>125</sup> which CEFR level a pupil can achieve by using this schoolbook and mentioned on their website that a schoolbook for English<sup>126</sup> that they produce is based on the CEFR. Besides these two publishers who use the CEFR to different extents, the publisher named 'Gleerups' which sells schoolbooks for English<sup>127</sup>, French<sup>128</sup>, Spanish<sup>129</sup>, Italian<sup>130</sup>, Chinese<sup>131</sup>, and German<sup>132</sup> pays no attention to the CEFR according to their book descriptions. However, this does not necessarily mean that the content of these schoolbooks is not based on the CEFR, because the content could be based on the national curricula (which, in turn is related to the CEFR). Moreover, modern foreign language teacher trainers acknowledge that the use of the framework by publishers has increased.

#### 4.2.2. Countries in which publishers either can decide themselves, or where the CEFR is not used at all

Besides the countries where publishers make the link with the CEFR indirectly, there are three countries where even a more distant link is established (FR, NL and UK - Scotland).

In France and the Netherlands, there is no State-enforced link between the CEFR and schoolbooks, either direct, or indirect. Publishers of MFL schoolbooks within France and the Netherlands, however, **use the CEFR and base the link of the CEFR and the levels of their schoolbooks on their own judgement**. Publishers within these two countries participate in a commercial market and are not bound by State regulations concerning the content. Nevertheless, there is evidence that at least some publishers in France and the Netherlands use the CEFR for their MFL schoolbooks. According to the analysis of three French publishers (Bordas, Hachette<sup>133</sup>, and Hatier<sup>134</sup>) the CEFR level descriptors are used in MFL schoolbooks which are intended for the selected qualification. All three publishers indicate the CEFR levels which would be reached when pupils comply with the instructions of the schoolbooks. However, Bordas suggested that the content of the schoolbooks for German<sup>135</sup> supports pupils to assess their performance on the CEFR level descriptions. The Spanish<sup>136</sup> schoolbook of Bordas is based on the CEFR and focuses on stimulating pupils to show some initiative in the learning process. In France differences are recorded concerning how the CEFR is used in schoolbooks. The CEFR is used to indicate the level of a schoolbook and/or used as a basis for the development of the content. Moreover, in the Netherlands the three publishers that are included in the analysis (Malmberg<sup>137</sup>, Intertaal<sup>138</sup>, and Noordhoff uitgevers<sup>139</sup>), use the CEFR to determine the content and the level of each MFL schoolbook. In order to link the CEFR to the MFL schoolbooks, Malmberg asked the Dutch Institute for Curriculum Development<sup>140</sup> to translate the descriptions of the CEFR levels into goals for each year of secondary education. In consultation with

<sup>125</sup> Studentlitteratur: <https://www.studentlitteratur.se/#33628-01>.

<sup>126</sup> Studentlitteratur: <https://www.studentlitteratur.se/#33775-01>.

<sup>127</sup> Gleerups: [http://www.gleerups.se/gy-vux/gy\\_vux\\_engelska](http://www.gleerups.se/gy-vux/gy_vux_engelska).

<sup>128</sup> Gleerups: [http://www.gleerups.se/gy-vux/gy\\_vux\\_franska](http://www.gleerups.se/gy-vux/gy_vux_franska).

<sup>129</sup> Gleerups: [http://www.gleerups.se/gy-vux/gy\\_vux\\_spanska](http://www.gleerups.se/gy-vux/gy_vux_spanska).

<sup>130</sup> Gleerups: [http://www.gleerups.se/gy-vux/gy\\_vux\\_italienska](http://www.gleerups.se/gy-vux/gy_vux_italienska).

<sup>131</sup> Gleerups: [http://www.gleerups.se/gy-vux/gy\\_vux\\_kinesiska](http://www.gleerups.se/gy-vux/gy_vux_kinesiska).

<sup>132</sup> Gleerups: [http://www.gleerups.se/gy-vux/gy\\_vux\\_tyska](http://www.gleerups.se/gy-vux/gy_vux_tyska).

<sup>133</sup> Hachette: <http://www.enseignants.hachette-education.com/>.

<sup>134</sup> Editions Hatier: <http://www.editions-hatier.fr/>.

<sup>135</sup> Bordas: <http://www.editions-bordas.fr/ouvrage/welten-neu-1re-manuel-avec-cd-audio-eleve>.

<sup>136</sup> Bordas: <http://www.editions-bordas.fr/ouvrage/enlaces-1re-manuel-de-leleve-ed-2005>.

<sup>137</sup> Malmberg: <http://www.malmberg.nl/Malmberg.htm>.

<sup>138</sup> Intertaal: <http://www.intertaal.nl/>.

<sup>139</sup> Noordhoff uitgevers:

[http://www.noordhoffuitgevers.nl/wps/portal/wnvo/lut/p/b1/04\\_SjzQ0MDUzMDM2MrTQj9CPyKssy0xPLMnMz0vMAfGizOKDqk1CHZ0MHQ3cfZxdDDwDzHdzjUz9vcJMTIAKInErMHA0JU6\\_AQ7gaIBPv4GhIUX6QfaH60fhtcLViIACKBfBCvC4wc8iPzdVPzcqx83N0jPLxFFREQAxUhaT/dl4/d5/L2dJQSEvUUt3QS80SmtFL1o2X0U3MEk4QjFBMDBUUQwSUo2NDgxTUoxME81/](http://www.noordhoffuitgevers.nl/wps/portal/wnvo/lut/p/b1/04_SjzQ0MDUzMDM2MrTQj9CPyKssy0xPLMnMz0vMAfGizOKDqk1CHZ0MHQ3cfZxdDDwDzHdzjUz9vcJMTIAKInErMHA0JU6_AQ7gaIBPv4GhIUX6QfaH60fhtcLViIACKBfBCvC4wc8iPzdVPzcqx83N0jPLxFFREQAxUhaT/dl4/d5/L2dJQSEvUUt3QS80SmtFL1o2X0U3MEk4QjFBMDBUUQwSUo2NDgxTUoxME81/).

<sup>140</sup> SLO: <http://www.slo.nl/>.



experts, Malmberg analysed these 'intermediate goals' which were formulated by the Institute for Curriculum Development, and determined the content of their textbooks. Malmberg developed two ways of linking the CEFR to the schoolbooks. The first describes the learning goals for each chapter in terms of CEFR; the second is more task-oriented, where exercises are linked to the CEFR level.

Regarding the use of the CEFR in policy documents and examination in Scotland, it comes as no surprise that the **Scottish publishers do not use the CEFR**. The following Scottish publishers of MFL schoolbooks were included in the analysis:

- Bright Red Publishing Ltd: According to correspondence with the director, the CEFR is not used in schoolbooks for secondary education;
- Leckie & Leckie: offers two French schoolbooks for the selected qualifications which do not provide an indication of the relation with the CEFR<sup>141 142</sup>;
- Hodder Education: offers schoolbooks for Spanish, Italian, German, and French for the selected qualifications. These books do not contain a reference to the CEFR.

#### 4.2.3. In conclusion

The fact that Scottish publishers do not use the CEFR is probably a result of the lack of attention for the CEFR in the national curriculum. In the other countries the national and/or specific MFL curricula are influenced by the CEFR and also, the publishers use the CEFR to develop their MFL schoolbooks. The reason for publishers to use the CEFR seems to be a result of the use of the CEFR in curricula. Hence, the use of the CEFR in schoolbook development appears to be strongly influenced by the attention expressed by the government.

Whether there is expressed attention for the CEFR by the government, appears to be an explaining factor for using the CEFR in schoolbook development.

Therefore, in relation to the invitation of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers, to those national, regional and local education authorities who decide to use the CEFR, it can be concluded that some governments enforce publishers of MFL schoolbooks to use the CEFR and some stimulate publishers to use the CEFR in national and/or specific MFL curricula.

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<sup>141</sup> Leckie & Leckie:  
[https://secure.leckieandleckie.co.uk/products/buy\\_online.asp?css=1&area=212&lvl=4&id=1954](https://secure.leckieandleckie.co.uk/products/buy_online.asp?css=1&area=212&lvl=4&id=1954).

<sup>142</sup> Leckie & Leckie:  
[https://secure.leckieandleckie.co.uk/products/buy\\_online.asp?css=1&area=212&lvl=4&id=1730](https://secure.leckieandleckie.co.uk/products/buy_online.asp?css=1&area=212&lvl=4&id=1730).

### 4.3. Knowledge and use of the CEFR by teachers

In relation to knowledge and use of the CEFR by teachers, the 2008 Recommendation on the CEFR invited all relevant stakeholders to:<sup>143</sup>

“Encourage all institutions responsible for pre-service and in-service education of language teachers to assist the latter in using the CEFR effectively through appropriate training programmes and support, and in particular to:

- *familiarise them with the aims, principles and possible implementation of a plurilingual education;*
- *familiarise them with the full range of language use and language competences at progressive levels of proficiency as a basis for nurturing the language development of pupils and students across the entire curriculum;*
- *familiarise them with the principles of good practice in language testing and assessment and the options regarding aims, types and methods, so as to inform their classroom practice and to enable them to support students in their learning process through formative assessment and to prepare them appropriately for formal examinations;*
- *familiarise them with ways to transmit the CEFR-based concept of plurilingualism to learners, for example by using the European Language Portfolio, as recommended by the Committee of Ministers in its Recommendation No. R (98) 6 and by the 20th session of the Standing Conference of the European Ministers of Education (Cracow, 2000)”*

Before the current knowledge and the use of the CEFR by MFL teachers is discussed (in Section 5.3.2), this section focuses on the implementation of the CEFR in teacher training (Section 5.3.1).

#### 4.3.1. Attention for the CEFR in teacher training programmes

This study takes into account both ‘pre-service’ and ‘in-service’ teacher training for MFL teachers. With pre-service teacher training we mean the education and training provided to student teachers before they enter the classroom as a fully responsible teacher. In-service teacher training is meant for teachers to enhance their proficiency and/or didactic skills. By looking into the way the CEFR is used in pre-service and in-service teacher training, it becomes clear whether or not teachers have the possibility to learn about the framework to use it within their lessons in the first place. Furthermore, the implementation of the CEFR in teacher training programmes gives an indication of how important the framework is for education related to the selected qualifications in the selected countries. Table 12 indicates in which countries the use of the CEFR is included in the curricula of pre-service and/or in-service teacher training.

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<sup>143</sup> Council of Europe, *Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the use of the Council of Europe’s Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the promotion of plurilingualism*, 2008:  
[http://www.coe.int/t/dq4/linguistic/Source/SourceForum07/Rec%20CM%202008-7\\_EN.doc](http://www.coe.int/t/dq4/linguistic/Source/SourceForum07/Rec%20CM%202008-7_EN.doc).



**Table 12: Use of the CEFR in teacher trainings**

	Use of the CEFR	
	Pre-service teacher training	In-service teacher training
Austria	✓	✓
Sweden	There is not a clear picture	✓
Hungary	Not known	✓ <sup>144</sup>
The Netherlands	✓ <sup>145</sup>	✓
France	✓ <sup>146</sup>	✓
UK (Scotland)	o	o

As can be concluded from table 12, in all countries except the UK (Scotland), the CEFR is included in in-service teacher training programmes. Compared to the situation of the pre-service teacher training, for just three countries (AT, NL, and FR) it appears clear that the CEFR is used during training. Hence, differences in the use of the CEFR in teacher training among the selected countries are most clearly identified for pre-service teacher training. Four different situations concerning this issue can be identified: First, **trainers of MFL pre-service teacher training programmes are obliged to use the CEFR** in their programme; second, **the CEFR is embedded in the curricula** of pre-service teacher training programmes for MFL. Third, **no advice or requirement is set to use the CEFR** in pre-service teacher training for MFL, and therefore the situation of whether the CEFR is included in programmes is unclear. Finally, **no link is made** within the MFL pre-service teacher training and the CEFR. These four situations are discussed more in detail below.

Trainers of MFL pre-service teacher training in Austria and France are **obliged to use the CEFR in their programmes**. In Austria, this requirement is operationalised by the fact that teachers must follow the curricula for higher education institutes and universities which are based on the CEFR. Since 2012 France requires primary and secondary teachers to obtain a certificate<sup>147</sup> which proves that the teacher masters a modern foreign language at level B2 of the CEFR<sup>148</sup>. In that way, the trainers of MFL pre-service teacher training are obliged to adopt and use the CEFR in their lessons.

Since 2011, curricula in the Netherlands for English, German, French, and Spanish pre-service teacher training describe the learning outcomes in terms of the CEFR levels. Hence, **the CEFR is embedded in the curricula** of MFL pre-service teacher training. On the other hand, however, this curriculum is not obligatory for pre-service teacher training, and therefore it is not certain whether the curriculum is actually used. In the Netherlands there is a division of two kinds of curricula for the selected qualifications: one for the first three years and one for the last three years. Institutes for pre-service teacher training confirm that they use the curricula, which takes into

<sup>144</sup> Oktatas: [http://www.oktatas.hu/tovabbkepzes/beszamithato\\_tanulmanyok/tajekoztato](http://www.oktatas.hu/tovabbkepzes/beszamithato_tanulmanyok/tajekoztato).

<sup>145</sup> HBO-raad: <http://10voordeleraar.nl/kennisbases/master>.

<sup>146</sup> Ministère éducation nationale, *L'enseignement des langues vivantes étrangères dans le système scolaire français*, 2012.

<sup>147</sup> Ministère éducation nationale: <http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid56907/certificats-exiges-a-la-titularisation-des-laureats-des-concours-de-professeurs-des-ecoles.html>.

<sup>148</sup> Ministère éducation nationale, *L'enseignement des langues vivantes étrangères dans le système scolaire français*, 2012.

account the CEFR for the first three years of the selected qualification<sup>149</sup>. The use of the curricula for the last three years is not known.

In both Sweden and Hungary **no advice or requirement is set to use the CEFR** in MFL pre-service teacher training. Institutes for pre-service teacher training are responsible for the content and organisation of MFL teacher training. In Hungary, the government sets some general guidelines, but no requirements are established for teacher training in specific subjects. In addition, the situation in Sweden is not very clear. For example, one university<sup>150</sup> provides MFL teacher training in which the CEFR is taught, but another university<sup>151</sup> does not indicate the CEFR within their programmes<sup>152</sup>. For these reasons it appears difficult to make an assessment of the extent to which the CEFR is incorporated into pre-service teacher training in Sweden and Hungary.

According to the requirements<sup>153</sup> of the Scottish government for pre-service teacher training there is **no link with the CEFR** in MFL pre-service teacher training in the UK (Scotland). This is confirmed by one of the Universities<sup>154</sup>.

As depicted in table 12, **MFL in-service teacher training** which includes the CEFR is offered in five of the six selected countries. Mostly, it concerns training programmes or refresher courses which provide MFL teachers with an introduction to the framework and teaches them how it works and how they should use the CEFR in their lessons. Other in-service teacher training programmes concentrate especially on how to evaluate the learning outcomes of pupils in terms of the CEFR. In Hungary, the system of in-service teacher training is considered more important than the pre-service teacher training. For the purpose of professional development, teachers have to participate in at least one in-service teacher training every seven years<sup>155</sup> <sup>156</sup>. In contrast to the pre-service teacher training programmes in Hungary, the in-service teacher training programmes are obliged to take the CEFR into account<sup>157</sup>.

#### 4.3.2. Current knowledge and use of the CEFR by teachers

In most of the selected countries (AT, SE, HU, NL, and FR) MFL teachers have the possibility to enrol in an in-service teacher training which teaches them about the CEFR. Thus, the knowledge of the CEFR by teachers could depend on their own motivation to obtain information about the framework or by requirements of the government. Due to the fact that teachers are free to plan and design their lessons, for example by choosing the material such as schoolbooks and didactic methods, it is difficult to conclude whether teachers actually use the CEFR in their lessons.

Concerning the situation of MFL teachers in Hungary, France, and Austria **it is assumed that these MFL teachers know the CEFR**, because the national curricula and the specific curricula for MFL that are mandatory for these teachers are based on, and described in the terms of the CEFR. In France and Austria the learning outcomes described in terms of the CEFR levels are even included in the education law, as

<sup>149</sup> HBO-raad: [http://www.hbo-raad.nl/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&catid=34&id=776](http://www.hbo-raad.nl/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&catid=34&id=776).

<sup>150</sup> The University of Gothenburg.

<sup>151</sup> The University of Uppsala.

<sup>152</sup> University of Uppsala:

<http://www.uu.se/utbildning/utbildningar/selma/utbplan/?pKod=UGY2Y&planId=386&lasar=13/14>.

<sup>153</sup> The Scottish government: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/03/10112435/6>.

<sup>154</sup> The University of Glasgow confirmed that there is no link with the CEFR in MFL pre-service teacher trainings programmes.

<sup>155</sup> Loboda, Z., Balázs,É., Kocsis, M., Vágó,I., *Education in Hungary 2010*. Budapest: Hungarian Institute for Education Research and Development, 2012

<sup>156</sup> Ministry of National Resources of Hungary & the Hungarian Eurydice Unit, *The system of education in Hungary*, Ministry of National Resources/Budapest, 2010:

[http://english.tpf.hu/upload/docs/angol/Magyar\\_oktatasi\\_rendszer\\_en.pdf](http://english.tpf.hu/upload/docs/angol/Magyar_oktatasi_rendszer_en.pdf).

<sup>157</sup> Oktatas: [http://www.oktatas.hu/tovabbkepzes/beszamithato\\_tanulmanyok/tajekoztato](http://www.oktatas.hu/tovabbkepzes/beszamithato_tanulmanyok/tajekoztato).

mentioned in section 3.3. In Hungary a website<sup>158</sup> has been designed to support MFL teachers and language learners to navigate between the CEFR level descriptions. An initiative which increases both the awareness of, and thus the use of the CEFR among MFL teacher, see box 7 for a short introduction to this initiative.

**Box 7: Presentation of a Hungarian initiative to help MFL teachers to learn about the CEFR**

**HU:** For modern foreign language teachers and learners who are interested in learning about the CEFR, a Hungarian website<sup>159</sup> has been launched with information about the framework. Teachers and learners can find information about the framework and make exercises or do tests which are based on the underlying approach of the framework. At the moment it is only possible to practice with exercises in English and German, but soon French exercises will be available<sup>160</sup>. The website has been developed by the Hungarian Educational Authority (Oktatas)

With respect to MFL teachers in the Netherlands there is more evidence to conclude that a majority of the teachers know the framework. More than 60 per cent of the MFL teachers who participated in a study of the University of Utrecht and the University of Leiden<sup>161</sup> intend to adapt lessons and tests to the CEFR within a year. In box 8 below, conclusions of this study are summarised.

**Box 8: Conclusions of a Dutch study on the knowledge and use of the CEFR by teachers**

**NL:** The study 'CEFR in secondary education'<sup>162</sup>, analysed the knowledge and use of CEFR among modern foreign language teachers, teacher trainers, school managers and publishers. All respondents noticed that the knowledge of the CEFR has increased in the period 2008-2010. This would be due to the 'Masterplan CEFR'. According to this report, attention for the CEFR increased; over 60 per cent of the teachers have the intention to adapt lessons and tests to the CEFR within a year. Among schools there are however large differences concerning awareness of the CEFR; some schools barely use the CEFR, others only for specific parts of their educational programme, and a few included the CEFR in their curricula. In general, with a few exceptions, despite the increased awareness and intention to use the CEFR, schools have not begun to implement the CEFR.

Compared to teachers in lower secondary education, teachers in upper secondary education have more knowledge and experience with using the CEFR<sup>163</sup>. A possible explanation for this could be that teachers of upper secondary education are more focused on the examination requirements than the teachers of lower secondary education. The comparison of teachers of different modern foreign languages shows that teachers of French have the most advanced knowledge and experience in using the CEFR, followed by the teachers of German and finally, teachers of English. The explanation for this could be that French and German are less obvious topics nowadays, which makes teachers more alert to innovations. Teachers, who use the CEFR in their lessons, mostly use methods and tests which are related to the CEFR. The teachers who were categorised as teachers with a lot of experience, use the CEFR mostly for developing exercises and assessing speaking and listening skills. The tests for assessing these skills are mostly developed by the teachers themselves which could explain their advanced knowledge and experience in using the CEFR.

<sup>158</sup> Oktatas: <http://www.keronline.hu/>.

<sup>159</sup> Oktatas: <http://www.keronline.hu/>.

<sup>160</sup> Oktatas: [http://www.oktatas.hu/nyelvvizsga/nyelvtanaroknak/tovabbkepzes\\_eu\\_referenciakeretrol](http://www.oktatas.hu/nyelvvizsga/nyelvtanaroknak/tovabbkepzes_eu_referenciakeretrol).

<sup>161</sup> Corda, A., de Graaf, R., *Het ERK in het voortgezet onderwijs*, Universiteit Utrecht en Universiteit Leiden, 2012: <http://media.leidenuniv.nl/legacy/het-erk-in-het-vo.pdf>.

<sup>162</sup> Corda, A., de Graaf, R., *Het ERK in het voortgezet onderwijs*, Universiteit Utrecht en Universiteit Leiden, 2012: <http://media.leidenuniv.nl/legacy/het-erk-in-het-vo.pdf>.

<sup>163</sup> Corda, A., de Graaf, R., *Het ERK in het voortgezet onderwijs*, Universiteit Utrecht en Universiteit Leiden, 2012: <http://media.leidenuniv.nl/legacy/het-erk-in-het-vo.pdf>.

The MFL lessons in Sweden are indirectly influenced by the CEFR as MFL teachers are obliged to use the specific MFL curricula which are influenced by the CEFR, see section 3.3. Due to the fact that the CEFR levels and descriptions are not described in these specific MFL curricula **it is expected that in general MFL teachers will not be familiar with the CEFR**. In addition, for the Scottish MFL teachers it is expected that their knowledge of the CEFR will be low. Although it is not known whether the CEFR is used in the local curriculum, the framework is in any case currently not used in the national curricula, teacher training and schoolbooks. Furthermore, the organisation named 'Scotland's National Centre for Languages' (SCILT)<sup>164</sup> which was established to promote learning other languages and which provides modern foreign language teachers and learners with information that could help them to learn or teach foreign languages, pays little attention to the CEFR. For that reason, the chance that teachers know and use the framework will be low. On the other hand, one of the recommendations on the website of SCILT for resources which Spanish teachers in upper secondary education can use during their lessons, use the CEFR to indicate the levels of the Spanish texts that are published online<sup>165</sup>.

#### 4.3.3. In conclusion

MFL teachers in five (AT, SE, HU, NL, and FR) of the six selected countries have the possibility to enrol in an in-service teacher training to enhance their knowledge of the framework. For four (AT, HU, NL, and FR) of these countries we assumed that at least the majority of the MFL teachers knows about the framework. Their knowledge seems to be a consequence of the attention paid to the CEFR within mandatory policy documents. Also given the fact that there is no attention paid to the CEFR in policy documents within Sweden and the UK (Scotland) it is expected that MFL teachers will not know the framework. Thus, in spite of the attention paid to the CEFR in Swedish in-service teacher training it seems to have no effect on the knowledge of the CEFR among MFL teachers.

Therefore, in relation to the invitation of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers, to those national, regional and local education authorities who decide to use the CEFR, it can be concluded that the implementation of the CEFR in pre-service and in-service teacher training is enforced within a few selected countries by the government.

#### 4.4. Use of the CEFR by private institutes

Information is provided in this section concerning the use of the CEFR by private providers to obtain a broader perspective on this use of the CEFR and the social function of obtaining a MFL certificate with a CEFR level indication. With 'social function' we refer to the purpose people have for obtaining a 'formal' language certificate which is linked to the CEFR. First, we discuss these issues in relation to private providers who offer language courses. After this, the focus will shift to language assessment organisations.

##### 4.4.1. Language courses by private providers

The participating private providers provide courses for English or other modern foreign languages. MFL courses for business and general courses are offered at all levels: from beginners to advanced learners. Only a few private providers indicate that the focus of their foreign language courses is on learning the grammar. The majority focuses on the action-oriented language skills (reading, writing, listening, spoken interaction, and spoken production), within the courses. This is what their costumers

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<sup>164</sup> SCILT: <http://www.scilt.org.uk/AboutUs/tabid/1301/Default.aspx>.

<sup>165</sup> SCILT: <http://www.scilt.org.uk/SeniorPhase/Recommendedclassroomresources/RecommendedclassroomresourcesSpanish/tabid/1521/Default.aspx>.

or 'students' indicate that they want to learn. In general, there is not so much difference in the way the courses are taught; usually courses are provided in a classical way (face-to-face) or in a blended way, combining on-line learning and classroom-based methods. According to the private providers, students give the following reasons for achieving a MFL certificate:

- A language certificate is required for their work;
- A language certificate is needed to access university;
- A language certificate increases their chances on the labour market;
- A language certificate is pursued for their own personal development.

Although different kinds of reasons are indicated, the reason 'increasing the chances on the the labour market' was mentioned by almost all the participating private providers.

#### **4.4.2. Use of CEFR levels by private providers of language courses**

A majority of the studied private providers indicates CEFR levels on the MFL certifications. The level-indication of the courses in terms of the CEFR is mainly justified by the assessment of the experienced MFL teachers. Only one private provider declared that the levels of tests for obtaining a certificate are assessed by different external experts. An internal 'academy' is established by this one private provider for their MFL teachers. This academy provides lessons concerning the CEFR to ensure that the knowledge of these teachers is up to date. For example, teachers learn how they can differentiate between the CEFR levels. The private providers indicate that they use the CEFR because it is widely implemented and therefore, it provides a good level indication for potential learners. In contrast, however, one private provider does not see the use of providing an indication of the corresponding CEFR level on its certificates as the CEFR levels are not required to be stated in the standardised diploma formats. This private provider stated that it will only indicate the CEFR levels if the government decides to make the framework mandatory for diplomas of the regular education system. Other reasons for not using the CEFR are: not knowing the CEFR; the traditional level indications (i.e. beginner, pre-intermediate, advanced, etc.) are of greater interest.

With regard to examinations and materials used, the following can be concluded. Regarding the **organisation of the assessment or examination** which leads to certificates on which a CEFR level is indicated, most private providers use a mix of external exams and tests made by MFL teachers. The **materials** used for the MFL courses provided by private institutes, are schoolbooks, teachers' own material or a mix of these two. For both the schoolbooks and teachers' own materials, private providers indicate that the CEFR is included. However, it is remarkable that some private providers who do not indicate the CEFR on their MFL certificates note that often the CEFR level indication is included in the used material. It seems that although some private providers do not indicate the CEFR levels, the framework does have influence on their courses in the end.

In order to assure the quality of the MFL courses, a majority of the participating private institutes provide training programmes for their teachers. Within these training programmes the CEFR is introduced, even when it concerns private providers who do not indicate the CEFR level on their MFL certificates. These training programmes are in-service teacher training programmes provided by the private providers themselves. For that reason, it is estimated that most MFL teachers are familiar with the CEFR.

According to the private providers, the value of the CEFR is that it is a useful tool to assess the language competences of learners. Only one private provider indicated that assessing language skills is an "art which can not be evaluated by categorised discrete

skills". However, according to the private providers the great benefit of the CEFR concerns the transparency which ensures that MFL certifications are comparable and recognised within Europe. The main point mentioned regarding how the CEFR could be improved concerned the development of a more simplified version of the framework, because the full version is far too comprehensive. A simplified version of the CEFR would make it more user-friendly for private providers and their students.

#### 4.4.3. Language assessment organisations

The language assessment organisations, such as Cambridge English (UK), Goethe Institute (DE), and Alliance Française (FR), provide 'formal' language certificates which are all strongly related to the CEFR. A CEFR level is determined for each certificate and examinations of these institutes are aligned with the levels described by the CEFR<sup>166 167 168</sup>. In order to be able to underline this link, both Cambridge English and the Goethe Institute contributed to the development of the Council of Europe's 'Manual for Relating Language Examinations to the CEFR'<sup>169</sup>. As we have seen earlier, this manual is intended to support providers of examinations to develop their tests and assignments related to the CEFR. Therefore, the manual offers a guide with practical procedures in order to validate the claims made concerning the attributed CEFR levels to examinations. The Alliance Française language courses are structured according to the CEFR. The Alliance offers multiple courses within each CEFR level, and provides an indication of the 'can-do-statements' for each level as starting point.<sup>170</sup>

According to the language assessment organisations, the value of the CEFR lies in the transparency that it provides concerning the description of learning outcomes (can-do-statements), which provide the possibility to compare and interpret modern foreign language qualifications and certificates of different institutes. The institutes underline that the framework is not only accepted within Europe but also internationally, whereby the CEFR plays a central role in language and education policies. In addition, for the students the framework has benefits, as a certificate with a CEFR level indication is not only recognised within their own country but also abroad.

#### 4.4.4. In conclusion

In general, the CEFR is widely used by both private providers which offer modern foreign language courses and assessment organisations. The MFL certificates of language assessment organisations and the MFL language courses provided by most of the private providers state a CEFR level indication. Regarding the multitude of reasons for people to obtain a language certificate (increasing their chances on the labour market, required for work, access to university or, personal development), a MFL certificate with a CEFR level indication could be an extra motivation or reason to achieve a language certificate as the level indication is more widely recognised, accepted and makes the language proficiency level of the learner comparable to others. In addition, it provides an easy indication of what level of language course the student will be able to follow after obtaining a certificate.

<sup>166</sup> Cambridge English: <http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/about-us/what-we-do/international-language-standards/>

<sup>167</sup> Goethe institute: <http://www.goethe.de/lrn/prj/pba/bes/enindex.htm#ger>.

<sup>168</sup> Alliance française: <http://www.francedc.org/Learn-French/Certifications.aspx>.

<sup>169</sup> Council of Europe, *Relating Language Examinations to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR)*, 2009: [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/ManualRevision-proofread-FINAL\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/ManualRevision-proofread-FINAL_en.pdf).

<sup>170</sup> Alliance française: <http://www.francedc.org/Adults/CEF-Fluency-Levels.aspx>.



## 4.5. Overall concluding remarks

In this final section some summarising statements and remarks are provided on chapter 4.

Major differences are found regarding the degree in which the CEFR is implemented and used in modern foreign language learning in education programmes of the selected qualifications within the six selected countries. Table 13 provides an assessment on how the countries perform in relation to the implementation of the CEFR in specific measurements (implementation in policy documents, examinations, schoolbooks and teacher training). For each specific measurement the table gives a value (++, +, +-, -, --) and to indicate the overall degree of implementation, for each country a final assessment is provided. The degree to which the CEFR is implemented within policy documents is included because of the impact of these documents on the specific measurements. Although this assessment is not the result of 'exact science', it does provide an overview of the extent to which countries use and implement the CEFR. Below the table, we will discuss the main points concerning the implementation of the CEFR of each of the selected country.

**Table 13: Implementation degree of the CEFR**

	Use of the CEFR							Degree of implemen- -tation <sup>171</sup>
	Policy documents <sup>172</sup>			Examinations or tests	schoolbooks	Teacher trainings <sup>173</sup>		
	Law	NC	SC			Pre	In	
Austria	++	++	++	++	++	++	++	++
Sweden	--	--	--	++	++	--	++	-
Hungary	--	++	++	++	++	--	++	+-
The Netherlands	--	--	++	++	++	++	++	+-
France	++	++	++	+	++	++	++	+
UK (Scotland)	--	++	x <sup>174</sup>	--	--	--	--	--

### Austria

Right from the start, the CEFR received attention in Austria. At an early stage in the development of the CEFR, the education system adopted the principal key concepts, i.e. a focus on action-oriented learning and actually using languages in context. Although the implementation led, and still leads to difficulties (predominantly with regard to applying levels and sublevels), the implementation can be considered to be at an advanced level. The CEFR is first of all linked to the learning outcomes and the examination assignments; secondly, it is translated in curricula and year plans; thirdly, teachers are educated in using the CEFR, both the levels as more importantly, the action-oriented approach; fourthly, textbooks are more and more taken into account the CEFR.

<sup>171</sup> Explanation of the allocated implementation degrees: 14 pluses= ++, 13/12/11 pluses= +, 10/9/8 pluses= +-, 7/6/5 pluses= -, four or less pluses= --.

<sup>172</sup> Law: education acts; NC: National Curricula; SC: Specific foreign language Curricula.

<sup>173</sup> Pre: pre-service training; In: in-service training.

<sup>174</sup> This document is not applicable because in the UK (Scotland) they do not work with specific curricula for MFL.

Particular difficulties in the implementation concerned:

- Actually changing people's minds about the action-oriented approach: teachers, policy-makers, test developers, and publishers, all had to adjust their way of working. For instance, at an early stage, in textbooks included 'can-do-statements' which took the form of being able to apply a grammatical construction.
- The lack of data made that linking of the CEFR level to exams was considered more an estimation than a justified link. This database for linking improved (under influence of the introduction and development of the standardised examination).
- The levels are not detailed enough to facilitate the development of intermediate stages (i.e. yearly achievement levels). Especially with regard to the B levels, more differentiation is required to monitor progress in language proficiency. As can be seen, everything needs to fit in basically two levels, B1 and B2. Increasing the use of the CEFR for monitoring progression would require asking for a further development of the CEFR levels into smaller components/sub-levels.

### **Sweden**

Although, there is no legal document which outlines the relation between foreign language learning in secondary education and the CEFR, a lot of effort was put into making the CEFR levels fit into the Swedish education system. This effort resulted in sublevels of the CEFR levels which would agree with the seven Swedish levels. However, these CEFR sublevels are only outlined in documents, explaining by which content legal documents are influenced. As several legal documents of the Swedish education system are based on the CEFR, the National tests, schoolbooks, and even teachers use the CEFR, at least indirectly.

Still there are some concerns about the implementation of the CEFR in Sweden:

- The relation between the legal documents for education and the CEFR is not empirically substantiated by any research study;
- Swedish teachers are fully responsible for the assessment of student performance and hence for implementation of the CEFR, it is important that they have knowledge of the CEFR and that legal documents are available that are well-based on the CEFR. Both of these points are critical, and moreover schoolbooks and foreign language teacher training do not pay much attention to the framework.

### **Hungary**

In Hungary, the law (the 'Public Education Act') which determines the structure and organisation of the education system does not prescribe the use of the CEFR. However, this law prescribes that schools have to use the national core curriculum which defines minimum learning outcomes in terms of the CEFR level indication for the first and second foreign language. The specific foreign language curricula and examination requirements provide more detailed descriptions of the mandatory CEFR levels. For the final secondary education examination two different CEFR levels are determined, because pupils can choose to take their foreign language exam on a higher level.

In addition, the CEFR has an effect on supporting resources for education such as in-service teacher training programmes and at least indirectly on modern foreign language schoolbooks. The latter refers to the requirements for books which takes the national core curriculum into account and thereby the CEFR. Despite these resources there are still concerns about the awareness of teachers of the CEFR. Teachers use the CEFR but do not really know the framework; moreover the links between the curricula and the CEFR are not substantiated by empirical proof.



### **The Netherlands**

The implementation of the CEFR in the Netherlands started with several research studies to analyse the link between the CEFR within examination programmes and examination assignments. Finally, these studies resulted in the linking of the CEFR with the requirements for foreign language examinations. This implies that the CEFR level descriptions which are indicated as learning outcomes are used for the development of examinations. Further no other obligations with regards to the use of the CEFR in education, are required by policy documents.

Problems encountered concerning the implementation of the CEFR are that there are differences in knowledge of the CEFR among MFL teachers resulting in different degrees of implementation within schools. However, massive attention and use of the CEFR among publishers of MFL schoolbooks and pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes might have positive effects on the implementation within schools.

### **France**

The CEFR is used in France to describe the foreign language learning outcomes of pupils. These learning outcomes in terms of the CEFR are anchored in law and have to be used for the content of methods and curricula (in other words study programmes). It is important to note the fact that these learning outcomes are used as objectives and not as requirements for entering higher education. In 2013, the foreign language exams for upper secondary education will be based on the CEFR.

Although the CEFR is adopted in policy documents, the implementation is not fully completed. Teachers seem to appreciate the framework, though there are some concerns about the adaptation of the framework into the teaching process. The framework requires a different approach of teachers to foreign language learning and different evaluation skills to be able to assess learning outcomes in terms of the CEFR. However, there are several courses offered to teach teachers how to teach a foreign language according to the CEFR.

### **UK (Scotland)**

In UK (Scotland) the CEFR is hardly used. Only the national curricula indicate a relation between the highest foreign language learning outcome and a CEFR level. However, this curriculum is not mandatory for schools to use. There are some signs that the Scottish levels will be roughly benchmarked against the CEFR level descriptions for the development of the new curriculum. The same could be done for the Scottish qualifications and thereby for examinations. At the moment no modern foreign language schoolbook or teacher training programmes for modern foreign languages pay attention to the CEFR.

As the CEFR is not implemented in the Scottish education system, some difficulties are expected, for instance, that the CEFR is only explained with English examples and descriptions which would make it difficult to use the CEFR in language learning education for other languages than English.



## 5. FOREIGN LANGUAGES PROFICIENCY AND THE CEFR

### KEY FINDINGS

- From the different data sources a coherent picture emerges when it comes to a general assessment of MFL proficiency levels of the selected countries. The following ranking can be proposed: Group 1: Very high performers (Sweden and the Netherlands). Group 2: High performers (Austria). Group 3: Medium performers (Hungary and France). Low performers (UK - Scotland).
- Although differences occur, in general there is a relationship between the degree of CEFR implementation and proficiency levels. It cannot, however, be concluded that this is a causal link.
- Factors other than the degree of CEFR implementation impact the MFL proficiency levels, such as general traditions towards languages and whether the language is widely used abroad or not. In general, in countries where the national language is widely used elsewhere (English, French), the need to learn another language is lower than in countries where the national language is less widely used (Dutch, Swedish).
- Finally, the linguistic landscape of the country might explain the particular situation of a country with regard to the MFL proficiency levels.

Chapter 4 discussed the degree of implementation of the CEFR in different actions related to modern foreign language education for the selected qualifications. In order to gain (some) understanding of the influence of using the CEFR on the foreign language learning outcomes, this chapter focuses on European-wide studies on foreign language proficiency levels and compares these results with the degree of implementation of the CEFR in the selected countries.

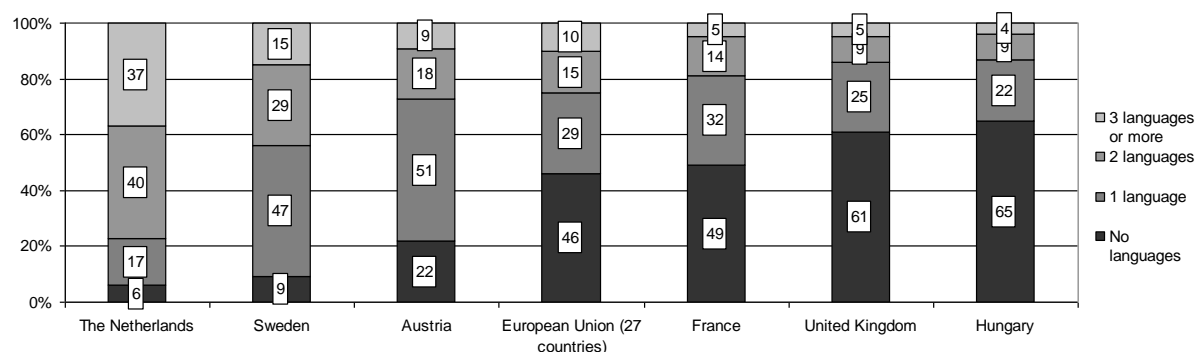
### 5.1. Foreign language proficiency

There are a number of data sources available which describe foreign language proficiency of the European population. In this section, the following data sources will be discussed: the Eurobarometer 'Europeans and their Languages' (2006; and 2012) (Section 5.1.1); the European Survey on Language Competences (Section 5.1.2) and the EF EPI English Proficiency Index (Section 5.1.3).

#### 5.1.1. Eurobarometer 'Europeans and their Languages'

The Eurobarometer surveys on 'Europeans and their Languages' are carried out periodically (2001, 2006, and 2012). The 2012 key findings are that Europeans have a very positive attitude towards multilingualism: 1) almost all Europeans (98 per cent) think that mastering foreign languages is useful for their children's future; 88 per cent see it as useful for themselves; 2) almost three quarters (72 per cent) agree with the EU objective that everybody should learn at least two foreign languages, while 77 per cent think that improvement in language skills should be a policy priority; 3) 67 per cent see English as one of the two most useful languages for themselves. Among the others most frequently cited as useful are German (17 per cent), French (16 per cent), Spanish (14 per cent) and Chinese (6 per cent).<sup>175</sup> Figure 3 provides an overview of how the selected countries score in relation to the number of languages people are able to communicate in.

<sup>175</sup> European Commission, Special Eurobarometer 386 Europeans and their languages, 2012, see: [http://ec.europa.eu/languages/languages-of-europe/eurobarometer-survey\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/languages/languages-of-europe/eurobarometer-survey_en.htm).

**Figure 3: Number of languages you speak well enough in order to be able to have a conversation (D48T2), 2012.**

**Source:** Eurobarometer 386, calculations authors.

There are huge differences between the countries studied. In the Netherlands, only 6 per cent of the population speaks no other languages. In the UK and Hungary, this is more than 60 per cent.

The 2006 edition of the Eurobarometer allows breaking down the language competences by level of educational attainment. When looking at the distribution of the number of languages spoken by the population by the highest level of education attained (Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education: ISCED [International Standard Classification of Education] 3 and 4; First and second stage of tertiary education: ISCED 5 and 6)<sup>176</sup>, it can be concluded that there is clearly a difference between the ISCED levels. People with a higher education attainment level in general, speak more languages. In addition, huge differences can be identified between the countries. In Hungary, at upper secondary education level almost 80 per cent of the population speaks no other languages than the mother tongue, while in Sweden; this is only 4 per cent. The situation in the United Kingdom is substantially different from the other countries. At ISCED 3-4, in the UK 67 per cent of the population speak one other language than the mother tongue. At ISCED 5-6 this is even 83 per cent. The European (27) average is 39 per cent (ISCED 3-4) and 36 per cent (ISCED 5-6).

### 5.1.2. European Survey on Language Competences

Another data set provides a bit more information on the issue of competence levels. The 'First European Survey on Language Competences' provides an overview of the proficiency levels of students across 14 European countries<sup>177</sup>. It makes use of the CEFR to identify the competence levels. In relation to the six countries which are analysed in this study, only France, the Netherlands, and Sweden participated in the survey. Their average performance, as a total of their performance on the three languages competences (reading, listening, and writing) that was tested is depicted in table 14.

<sup>176</sup> Eurostat: Number of foreign languages known (self-reported) by the highest level of education attained (%) [edat\_aes\_123], Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (levels 3 and 4) and First and second stage of tertiary education (levels 5 and 6).

<sup>177</sup> Participating countries are: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, England, Estonia, France, Greece, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden.

**Table 14: Percentages of students at a CEFR level**

1 <sup>st</sup> target language	Pre-A1	A1	A2	B1	B2	2 <sup>nd</sup> target language	Pre-A1	A1	A2	B1	B2
France (English)	31	<b>40</b>	15	9	<b>5</b>	France (Spanish)	21	<b>51</b>	17	8	<b>3</b>
Netherlands (English)	2	14	18	30	36	Netherlands (German)	2	23	27	<b>28</b>	<b>20</b>
Sweden (English)	1	6	11	25	57	Sweden (Spanish)	36	<b>50</b>	10	3	<b>1</b>

**Source:** European Commission, First European Survey on Language Competences, 2012

What can be seen is that there are large differences between the three countries which are selected in the current study. For the first language (English in all three countries), the language competence in Sweden is highest as more than half of the respondents perform at level B2. In the Netherlands, 36 per cent performs at a similar level. In France, only 5 per cent reaches B2 level and 40 per cent achieves the A1 level. With regard to second target language, the Netherlands outperform both France and Sweden; having the highest share of the respondents achieving level B1 in German. In Sweden and France, Spanish is selected as second language and in both countries, 50 per cent of the respondents perform at A1 level.

### 5.1.3. EF EPI English Proficiency Index

The Education First English Proficiency Index tested the English skills of adults across 54 countries using a sample of just under 2 million people. For each country it indicates a proficiency level ranging in five steps from very high proficiency to very low proficiency. In general, European countries score high on the index, where the Nordic countries and the Netherlands are the five countries labelled as very high proficiency level. Austria and Hungary are positioned a bit lower than the Nordic countries, and France is labelled as moderately proficient.<sup>178</sup>

### 5.1.4. In conclusion

A coherent picture emerges from the different data sources when it comes to a general assessment of MFL proficiency levels of the selected countries. The following ranking can be proposed:

- **Group 1: Very high performers (Sweden and the Netherlands).** These countries score highest in all data sources. In these countries the lowest percentage of people only speaks their mother tongue; the proficiency in English is highest in the world. Finally, a large share of the respondents of the European Survey on Language Competences can use English at CEFR level B1 and B2.
- **Group 2: High performers (Austria).** Austria, scores in all fields below Sweden and the Netherlands, but still has a relatively low percentage of people who do not speak another language and a high English proficiency.
- **Group 3: Medium performers (Hungary and France).** These two countries show mixed pictures concerning language proficiency. Of the selected countries Hungary has the largest share of people who do not speak another language. On the other hand, the English proficiency is considered high. France's English proficiency is considered moderate, and the percentage of people not speaking another language is around the EU 27 average.

<sup>178</sup> Sweden: 68.91 (Very High Proficiency); Austria: 62.14 (High Proficiency); United Kingdom: - (Non applicable); France: 54.28 (Moderate Proficiency); Hungary: 60.39 (High Proficiency); The Netherlands: 66.32 (Very High Proficiency). See: Education First, *EF English Proficiency Index*, Education First. 2012: [http://www.ef.com/~media/efcom/epi/2012/full\\_reports/ef-epi-2012-report-master-lr-2](http://www.ef.com/~media/efcom/epi/2012/full_reports/ef-epi-2012-report-master-lr-2).

- **Group 4: Low performers (UK (Scotland)).** Probably due to the fact that English is the lingua franca at this moment, people in the UK do not feel the urge to learn another language. This is reflected in the data sources: a large share of the UK population does not speak any other language beside their mother tongue<sup>179</sup>.

Clearly a relation can be found between, on the one hand, the countries that have a national language that is widely used (large language area) and countries that have a national language covering a small area (e.g. one country); and on the other hand the foreign language proficiency: the more widely the national language is used, the lower the foreign language proficiency. Austria and Hungary are a bit peculiar in this respect.

## 5.2. Relating degree of implementation and proficiency levels

Although no direct causal link exists between the language proficiency, the implementation of the CEFR and the attention paid to language learning in upper secondary education, still some general relations can be sketched on the basis of the comparative analysis of the six selected countries. First a summarising table is provided after which some differences and commonalities are outlined.

**Table 15: Summarising overview**

Country	Degree of implementation	MFL proficiency levels
<b>Austria</b>	++	High performer
<b>France</b>	+	Medium performer
<b>The Netherlands</b>	+-	Very high performer
<b>Hungary</b>	+-	Medium performer
<b>Sweden</b>	-	Very high performer
<b>UK (Scotland)</b>	--	Low performer

What can be seen is that there are common patterns and differences with regard to the relationship between degree of implementation of the CEFR and the MFL proficiency levels. This relationship is most clear when it concerns extremes: Austria has a high degree of implementation and is a high performer concerning MFL proficiency levels. The UK (Scotland) on the other hand has a low degree of CEFR implementation and is considered a low performer on foreign language proficiency. A mixed picture occurs when considering the countries with an average degree of implementation (+ to -). No clear relationship is apparent between the degree of implementation on the performance level of MFL proficiency: France for instance has a high degree of implementation (+) but a medium performance level, while Sweden has a low degree of implementation (-) and is a very high performing country concerning MFL proficiency. Therefore, factors other than the degree of CEFR implementation impact the MFL proficiency levels, such as general traditions towards languages and whether the official language is widely used or not. In general, in countries where the official language is widely used abroad (English, French), the need to learn another language is lower than in countries where the national language is less widely used (Dutch, Swedish). For Austria and Hungary however the situation is a bit different since Austria is a high performer and their national language 'German' is widely used, Hungary is a medium performer while Hungarian is not widely used. A factor that might explain this could be the fact that the linguistic landscape in Hungary is far more diversified than in the other countries. The number of languages protected under the Charter for regional and minority languages<sup>180</sup> is fourteen; including many languages from different language families<sup>181</sup>.

<sup>179</sup> Note that according to a survey commissioned by language learning specialists of Rosetta Stone in 2008 (see: HBL Media: <http://www.responsesource.com/news/38184/scotland-tops-the-charts-in-foreign-language-skills?export=pdf>), 41 % of the Scottish people dispose of second or third language skills. This was the highest percentage in comparison with other countries of the UK.

<sup>180</sup> See: Public Foundation for European Comparative Minority Research : Database for the European Charter for regional or minority languages: <http://languagecharter.eokik.hu/byStateParty.htm>. Accessed April 2013. Except for France.

<sup>181</sup> Armenian, Beas, Bulgarian, Croatian, German, Greek, Polish, Romanian, Romany, Ruthenian, Serbian, Slovak, Slovenian, Ukrainian.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1. Conclusions

The previous chapters discussed the relevance of the CEFR; the implementation in general; the implementation of the CEFR related to examinations, schoolbooks and teacher training in upper secondary education; and the degree of implementation compared to foreign language proficiency levels in the six countries studied (AT, FR, NL, SE, HU, UK (Scotland)). This final chapter, based on the previous chapters, includes the conclusions drawn and subsequent recommendations for the future use of the CEFR in developing language learning policies and practices in Europe.

**Key conclusion 1:** Countries implement and use the CEFR to different degrees, ranging from anchoring the CEFR-related learning outcomes in law to no reference to the CEFR whatsoever. In general it can be concluded that the more the CEFR is implemented and used in policy documents (laws, national curricula), the more the CEFR is used in examinations, schoolbooks and teacher training.

**Key conclusion 2:** Major challenges in the implementation concern first, the lack of empirical evidence to establish links between learning outcomes and the CEFR levels and second, the ability of MFL teachers to use the CEFR in their lessons as intended.

**Key conclusion 3:** There is general agreement concerning the CEFR indication of learning outcomes of MFL in upper secondary education. The stated learning outcomes across the six countries are generally similar. The level of learning outcomes related to the first MFL is usually set at level B2, for the second MFL in general the related level is B1.

**Key conclusion 4:** A majority of the selected countries implemented the CEFR in tests or examinations; however the links between MFL learning outcomes to CEFR levels lack in general empirical evidence.

**Key conclusion 5:** In general, the CEFR is used in schoolbook development. Whether the CEFR is used, depends to a large extent on whether the CEFR is implemented and used in curriculum development and is mentioned in (legal) guidance material (national curricula).

**Key conclusion 6:** There are huge differences between countries on whether the CEFR is used in pre-service teacher training programmes. The situation with regard to in-service teacher training is much better, where five of the six selected countries offer training programmes which include the CEFR.

**Key conclusion 7:** Whether teachers know about the CEFR depends on the emphasis placed on the CEFR in curriculum and in teacher training within the country.

**Key conclusion 8:** There is a relationship between the degree of CEFR implementation and proficiency levels recorded; the degree of implementation appears to be higher in countries with higher proficiency levels. However, first of all the causal relationship between the two is unclear and secondly, other (contextual) factors play a more important role in explaining the proficiency levels (such as whether the official language is widely used outside their home country, and the linguistic landscape as such).

**Key conclusion 9:** In general, the CEFR is well embedded in the private providers' practices and procedures which provide MFL certificates. The CEFR is reflected in MFL



certificates by a CEFR level indication, included in the used material, and teachers are aware of the CEFR by in-service training programmes.

**Key conclusion 10:** For learners, private providers and language assessment institutes, the CEFR provides transparency and creates possibilities to make comparisons of the courses offered. The reason for individuals to obtain a formal certificate is mostly for the increased chances it provides on the labour market. In addition, although the manuals and guidelines on the CEFR are considered helpful, still the complexity of the CEFR hampers its use by private providers. There are calls for more simplified versions of the CEFR.

## 6.2. Recommendations

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) was developed by the Council of Europe to promote transparency and coherence in the learning and teaching of modern languages in Europe. The CEFR tries both to facilitate the comparability between countries (on the basis of a shared conceptual framework for language learning) and to respect national traditions and systems in language proficiency standards. In order to let the CEFR fulfil this envisaged role in the future, strengthened by European Unions actions, the following recommendations are provided to the European Parliament and the Member States concerning the above-mentioned key conclusions:

### **Recommendation 1 (to the European Parliament): Embracing of the CEFR by the European Parliament and Commission as the tool to stimulate policy development in the Member States on foreign language learning**

The CEFR has existed for more than ten years and major developments have taken place during that time. The implementation however, could use a renewed impetus, more at a political level via the European Community actions in supporting the Council of Europe's framework. It is therefore recommended to:

- Further develop the SurveyLang initiative by including more countries and more languages (not only the first two most widely taught languages, but a broader range to prevent narrowing down policy attention to the first or second language only).
- To stimulate sharing experiences at national level of reforming language learning policies towards a more action-oriented approach and creating unity in assessing and indicating competence levels of pupils. This could take the form of peer learning activities, compendia of practices, unified formats to report on developments.
- More pronouncedly require European programmes such as the follow-up of the Lifelong Learning Programme to support the use of the CEFR and the action-oriented approach and stimulating the use of the Europass CVs. In addition, the European Qualifications Framework, which has a similar base, should be linked more clearly to the CEFR to enhance the transparency and awareness of both the action-oriented approach and the CEFR level indications.

### **Recommendation 2 (to the Member States and the European Parliament): Endorsement of links between systems and the CEFR by countries**

Although links are made between MFL learning outcomes and the CEFR levels, these links are not endorsed by other Member States. As such this is not necessary, but when it comes to trusting in each others' qualifications and accredited learning outcomes, the procedures applied to substantiate the links should be understandable and possibly acceptable for Member States. It is therefore recommended to:



- Establish principles for linking language learning in national education systems to the CEFR. These do not necessarily have to cover technical aspects, but should be used for stimulating the political/social debate on language learning. Principles could be for instance: involving all relevant stakeholders (policy makers, experts, teachers, schools, publishers); make use of external expertise; establish a common action plan for the referencing to the CEFR to establish agreement concerning the scope for linking to the CEFR.
- Facilitate the involvement of other countries in making links between language learning in national education systems and the CEFR. Key question is whether other countries trust the links established. Have peers (also on the level of policy makers), preferably of different countries, to reflect on the links established, in order to increase the reliability of the link for other countries.
- Stimulate peer learning and peer review among policy makers from different countries to stimulate the establishment of clearer links between language learning in national education systems and the CEFR and hence using the CEFR as a reform agenda for language learning policies.

### **Recommendation 3 (to the Member States): Increase the actual use of the CEFR in schools**

As we have seen, the use of the CEFR at ground level is stimulated by higher level policy actions, such as including the CEFR in law, or using the CEFR in determining the National Curricula. In addition, further actions are required to stimulate teachers to use the CEFR and to stimulate publishers as well. It is therefore recommended to:

- Create credibility and a best-fit of the framework in the national context by making use of experiences and discussions with other European countries, consult experts, and making use of the manual of the Council of Europe. In addition, for the purpose of unambiguous use, the CEFR should be anchored in the national curricula and the MFL specific curricula to embed firmly the action-oriented approach in language learning.
- Stimulate the use of the CEFR levels to set yearly target levels to monitor progression. It could be necessary to provide guidance to set sublevels to have the possibility for more incremental stages.
- Either stimulate the alignment of schoolbooks with national curricula, or make teachers/schools knowledgeable in making use of existing material to adopt an action-oriented approach. This can for instance be done via stimulating exchange of learning material more widely.
- Enhance the emphasis of the action-oriented approach in pre-service and in-service teacher training.

### **Recommendation 4 (to the European Parliament): Further research is needed**

Although this study covered a wide area, many issues surrounding the CEFR are still unclear. This concerns predominantly social/political issues related to language learning. Hence, it is recommended to further study the following issues:

- What are up-coming languages, and is the CEFR broad enough to deal with non-European languages, such as Chinese?
- What is the impact of the European language indicator on language policies in Europe? Establishing an indicator is a valuable tool to further stimulate policy debates, however, it should not result in a more narrow focus on language learning.
- How can the CEFR be used to strengthen the position of minority and regional languages?
- Investigate the possibility of having a supra-national body or advisory group in which countries review each others' references between their own language

learning policies and the CEFR. This supra-national body could function as a platform to exchange experiences, monitor developments, provide practical guidelines, create mutual trust in each others' references of MFL qualifications and CEFR levels, and finally, set/develop the policy agenda.

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ISBN 978-92-823-4636-5  
doi: 10.2861/29796