

# STUDY

Strengthening language exchange platforms  
for employability and youth mobility in the  
Western Balkans



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# Introduction

The subject of this study is the impact of the **language exchange**, i.e. platforms and projects in which it is implemented, on **mobility** and **employability** of young people in the **Western Balkans** region. The study will strive to provide theoretically based, but also practical answers to the question of whether language exchange contributes to improvement of language competences of young people in the Western Balkans, and consequently, to the increase their personal and mobility capacities in the region and abroad.

The research so far, both of theoretical and empirical nature, indicates that young people in the Western Balkan countries do not possess sufficient language competencies, which they need for proper positioning in the labor market. Although there are clear indicators that informal education is positively influencing these competences, this problem has not been addressed at the regional level so far, i.e. taking into account the Western Balkan countries. Also, there is a lack of surveys on what role the language exchange is playing in the whole process, or on the manners in which it is realized. Therefore, this study will try to find an answer to the question of whether and to what extent the language exchange, as part of informal education, positively influences the potential of youth, both for participation in the labor market and for mobility. In other words, we will strive to point out the so far not recognized importance of language exchange in the process of gaining competencies in foreign languages, which are necessary in today's working conditions and employability, for the competitive positioning of each individual in the market. Our goal, in addition, will be to show how the language exchange is related to other skills that young people also need for

that purpose.

In the preparation of this study, dual methodologies were applied. The first methodological procedure in certain segments is related to the methodological concept of meta-analysis, but with somewhat emphasized qualitative character of the research. First, an analysis of the relevant research was conducted, which dealt with various aspects of the language exchange, particularly its influence on improving the language competences of those involved, as well as surveys that provide insight into the employability and mobility of young people in the Western Balkans region, but also wider, throughout the region of Southeast Europe. The findings and contributions of analyzed researches are both summarized and compared, in order to extract new conclusions applicable to the subject of this study, which will have it explained in a theoretically based manner. We consider that such a theoretical clarification of the specified subject is a necessary basis for the implementation of the second methodological procedure applied in this research, as well as for eventual future empirical based research.

The second methodological procedure applied in this survey is a qualitative analysis of statements taken from the participants in the language exchange. It is a sample of the total of 20 respondents, ten male and ten female, ages 17 to 29 (which is meeting the condition for all respondents to belong to the youth category, since this study for its subject has the impact of language exchange on their mobility and employability). All respondents are the inhabitants of Serbia and the native speakers of Serbian language, that have been taught at least two foreign languages through formal and informal education in the Republic of Serbia, and who, in some period

during the last two years (May 2017 – August 2019), participated in the language exchange meetings organized by Polyglot Club Serbia. They were asked to write and electronically send to the authors of the study their experiences regarding the participation in that language exchange and to point out whether and how it helped them in any segment of life. So, we carried out a qualitative analysis of the responses we received, and matched it with the analysis of the first methodological procedure. In the chapter of this study which relates to the discussion of the results of the analysis, we will provide parts of our respondents' answers that would serve us as the illustration of the statements outlined. To help protect the personal data of the respondents, we will not list their names and surname, but the label RE (= Respondent), the number we have assigned them for the purpose of organizing the collected material, and the designation for the gender (M/F).

We expect this theoretical-methodological study on language exchange in the Western Balkans to also represent a base for concrete practical steps of increasing efficiency and, in general, any improvement of this activity in this region.

In terms of structure, this study is divided into several chapters. Following these preliminary notes, there is the chapter dedicated to defining relevant terms. We will pay special attention to the terms of language exchange, employability and mobility, with the review and some other relevant terms. Then, in the third chapter, we provide a comprehensive examination of the previously published researches, whose results are directly relevant to this study. The fourth chapter can be considered a central part of the study in some way, because it brings a discussion of its own subject. In the last, fifth chapter, we

provide recommendations for further steps to effectively organize language exchange in the Western Balkans region, i.e. advice directed towards the competent institutions that should support its organization. At the very end of the study, it is attached the list of references that were used for its production.



**Младен Ћирић**

# Glossary

01





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This glossary refers to some of the most important terms used in this study. It's some basic terms related to knowledge of language, language learning and language teaching, as well as to the institutional policy concerning languages.

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This glossary refers to some of the most important terms used in this study. It's some basic terms related to knowledge of language, language learning and language teaching, as well as to the institutional policy concerning languages. The definitions of the terms in this glossary are formed based on the elements of meanings that are attributed to them in numerous relevant literature, from which we would like to highlight the following sources which we used in defining: Kristal (1998), ZEP (2003), Bugarski (2009), Filipović (2009), Durbaba (2011), Araújo et al. (2015).

**Bilingualism** – The ability of an individual to use two languages to a certain extent. Usually, a bilingual person means a person who is in nearly equally good at speaking two different languages. Furthermore, the term bilingualism may apply to social/societal bilingualism which is the presence of two languages in one territory, e.g., in one state or in an administrative area (province, city and etc.). A phenomenon that is related to social bilingualism is diglossia, but it also differs from it. Namely, while bilingualism implies that in some areas, two languages are spoken, without some necessary hierarchical relationship between them, diglossia usually implies that the same territory uses two

languages or two forms of a single language (two different dialects), but one of them has a prestigious status and role, while the other does not. The first one functions as an official language, it is used in official written communication and in the media, but the largest part of the population uses the other language as the mother tongue, which has no prestige and is limited to unofficial daily communication. There are many examples of diglossic environments in the world. That's, for example, the entire Arab world, in which there is a standard Arabic language, but each country has its own local dialect of Arabic. In Europe, an example of diglossia can be found in the germanophone environments, each with its own dialect of German, but only High German has a standard language function for all and possesses a special prestige.

**Monolingualism** – Ability to use only one language. A monolingual individual is one that speaks only his mother tongue and does not know any other language sufficiently to be able to actively use it. When it comes to social level, it is possible to say that the environment in which only one language is used are monolingual (compared with the term bilingualism).

**Multilingualism** – refers to the

ability of an individual to use several languages to some extent. Usually, a multilingual person means a person who speaks a certain number of different languages. In addition, the term multilingualism may also apply to social/societal multilingualism, which is a presence of multiple languages in one territory, for example, in one state or in an administrative area (province, city and etc., compare with the term bilingualism).

**Mother tongue**, sometimes mother language, abbreviated L1 – The language the person adopts first in life, in childhood, as a rule – at the age of up to 5 years. After that age, the languages are taught in a different way and cannot be considered mother tongues, but only as foreign languages. Each healthy person is capable of adopting several mother languages, so there are, not rarely, people who have two or even more mother languages in the world. This term does not imply the “mother’s language”, because the mother (or both parents) can have one mother tongue, and the child can adopt a completely different language as its mother tongue. Therefore, in the professional texts, this term is avoided and the term first language is used instead. Mother tongue is usually the language of the environment in which the child is



**Foreign language is any language that is not adopted as a mother tongue, but is learned after 5 years of age. Sometimes, the term foreign language implies a language that is not spoken in the environment where the person lives, but in other environments, primarily in foreign countries.**

raised.

**Native speaker** – a speaker of a particular language as his mother tongue. For example, an English native speaker is a person whose mother tongue is English.

**Foreign language**, abbreviated LF – any language that is not adopted as a mother tongue, but is learned after 5 years of age. Its adoption is fundamentally different from the adoption of the mother language (although there are also certain overlaps between the two processes). Sometimes, the term foreign language implies a language that is not spoken in the

environment where the person lives, but in other environments, primarily in foreign countries. This is not quite accurate, however, because the person whose mother tongue is, for example, English, can live in a non-English environment, so it will not be a foreign language, and for the most people from that environment, it will. In other words, the distinction between mother tongue and foreign languages should not be made according to the environment criteria, but according to the individual criteria.

**The second language**, abbreviated L2) –this term most commonly implies two different terms: 1)

language that is official or dominant in an environment, but is not the first language of a particular person, but this person adopts it later, usually through formal education. An example of this are the former colonies, where a majority of the population has its first language, mostly some of the local autochtone languages, and as a second language, the official language of the state, usually the former language of metropole (English, French, Portuguese, etc.). However, there are many more of these examples, and not only in former colonies. In Europe, national minorities often have their first language, and as a second

language, they speak the majority language of the environment (e.g. Hungarians in Vojvodina, Vlachs in Krajina, Albanians in Northern Macedonia, Turks in Bulgaria, Roma across Europe, etc.); 2) synonym for the concept of foreign language.

**Minority language** – the language of national minority in a State or other administrative-political entity, which is recognized with the appropriate status and whose speakers have the right to use it in certain domains (e.g. Hungarian, Slovak, Russian and German language

in Vojvodina, Bulgarian in Dimitrovgrad, Albanian in Northern Macedonia). Contrary to this term is the term of majority language, which is the official and primary language of a state or other administrative-political entity, which is spoken by the majority (Serbian in Serbia, Macedonian in Northern Macedonia, etc.). Minority languages are an extremely important phenomenon in the context of the European Union and its language policy.

**Official language** – a language that has a special legal status in a certain legal constitutional entity, such as a state or part of a state (province, region, or individual municipality, the city, etc.) and serves as administration language. Examples: English in Australia, Spanish in Argentina, German in Switzerland. Often one political-administrative entity can have more official languages, either at the level of their entire territory, or in its different parts. For example, Serbian is the official language of the Republic of Serbia, but its autonomous province of Vojvodina, alongside Serbian, has other official languages.

**Regional language** – a language that has the official status in only one limited part of a particular legally-structured political entity, most common - a state. For example, Basque is the official language in the Spanish Basque Autonomous Community, and it is one of the regional languages of the Kingdom of Spain.

**The official languages of the European Union** – languages used in European Union Member States, whose official status is recognized by the respective legal acts of the Union.



Photo above: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Future\\_enlargement\\_of\\_the\\_European\\_Union](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Future_enlargement_of_the_European_Union)

Photo below: <https://humanities.drury.edu/the-importance-of-language/>

**International language** – a language that is official or widely used in several countries. This term is usually associated with English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic and other languages spread across multiple continents, or with languages that have many speakers and are spoken in several countries in some part of the world, such as Russian. However, some medium-size languages can be regarded as international languages, or even smaller ones, that have official status, or are used in several countries, such as, for example, Swedish, Greek, Italian. In the context of the Western Balkans, Serbian and Albanian may be considered as international languages.

**Global language** – an international language that is widespread in most of the world, or at least in several countries on a few continents and which, apart from a large number of native speakers, also has many speakers to whom this is a foreign language or second language. It is the language of international communication in various spheres. The biggest and most prestigious global language is certainly English today, but this status can be attributed to some other big world languages, such as Spanish, French, Portuguese,

Arabic, Russian, and, ever more, Mandarin. There are, however, such opinions that argue that there can be only one language of true global communication, while any other in comparison to it would still be limited. If we follow such interpretations, the only language that could claim to be global would be English.

**Language learning/acquisition** – Process of mastering of using a language. Previously, the term of acquisition was used for the mother tongue, while learning was used for foreign language, but today the term acquisition is increasingly preferred for both. On the other hand, the term learning is more associated with the context of formal education (teaching language at school), and of acquisition for the process that takes place in an individual when he/she is in a way exposed to the language.

**Target language** – A foreign language that is the goal of the learning/acquisition process, either through formal education, or any other context.

**Working language** – a language given a unique legal status by a super-national entity, such as international organizations (e.g. the UN), in which it serves as a means of communication and as a language in which the administration is functioning. In addition to intergovernmental and governmental international organizations, large multinational companies, international societies and similar, can also have their working languages.

**Language policy and planning** – a set of institutional measures regulating the issues related to languages, primarily to their status, usage domains, form and presence in formal education. Most commonly, language policies and planning are divided to the status (choice of languages that will be given the status of official), the corpus (selection of language forms that will be considered standard – standardization of language) and educational (selecting the language that will be transferred through formal education and the manner of that transfer).



**Official language is a language that has a special legal status in a certain legal constitutional entity and serves as administration language.**

# Definitions

02







## 2.1. Language Exchange

**Until the second half of the XX century, the learning of foreign languages did not contain any form of exercise of speech production or conversation with the native speakers or other individuals who mastered the student's target language, which is precisely the central item of each successful language exchange.**

Taking into account the whole history of learning and teaching foreign languages, the language exchange represents a relatively new concept. Namely, until the second half of the XX century, the learning of foreign languages did not contain any form of exercise of speech production or conversation with the native speakers or other individuals who mastered the student's target language (which is precisely the central item of each successful language exchange). During the major part of the history of learning and teaching of foreign languages, the so-called Grammar-Translation Method was prevalent (see Durbaba 2011: 92-93). This method was created according to the model of classical languages – Old Greek and Latin. They were taught in high schools in European countries with the aim of primarily providing students with a broad general education through them, and the basis for further dealing with the many prestigious subjects of that time, such as Law, Medicine, Philology and Theology, for example. Since these are the so-called “dead languages” (hence, the languages without the living native speakers), the goal of teaching was not to have the students to speak these languages, but primarily to read and understand the literature and related texts that were written in them, and translate better into their native languages. With such a goal, teaching had to be focused mainly on mastering

Photo: mundolingo.org





Photo: <https://www.facebook.com/PolyglotClubSerbia>

### – Language Exchange definition

On a popular web site that represents an online language exchange platform, it says that the process in which “two or more people who speak different languages interact in the language of another.” This illustrates the example of English speaker who learns French and who, consequently, is participating in a language exchange with a French speaker who learns English.

grammar rules. Due to the fact that the classes consisted of grammar lectures and translation exercises, this method was named Grammar-Translation Method. In such a framework, the studying was completely focused on the written language, while oral use of language, or speech, was not receiving any attention (Neuner & Hunfeld 1992, according to Durbaba 2011: 93).

The Grammar-Translation Method undoubtedly contributed to the mastering of classical languages and provided the basis for general education at the time when the environment posed some demands before young people, which are substantially different from the ones today. However, the more the acquisition of language competences of the living languages, especially those with global prestige and great market representation, increasingly became an imperative, the Grammar-Translation Method increasingly proved to be insufficient and inadequate. Yet, it sustained for long

in the formal learning of foreign languages, especially in our area, which meant that the concept of language exchange at that time was not even foreseeable. It is a special problem that the formal education, even today, has not completely freed itself of these obsolete and outdated paradigms, which again adversely affects the introduction and popularization of language exchange. As O. Durbaba claims, “The influence of the oldest

method in the teaching of foreign languages, called the Grammar-Translation Method, persisted in certain forms until today. Anyone who at least once learned a foreign language according to the following scheme, could testify: reading (literary or other) text, usually aloud → translation of text (sentence by sentence) → presenting and explanation of grammar rules → practicing grammar rules by translating sentences or entire texts



**Since the '70s of the XX century, the Communication Method gradually formed and affirmed itself in the teaching of foreign languages, which is a dominant approach in the field of Language Exchange.**

(usually into the foreign language) "(Durbaba 2011: 93).

In Western Europe and in North America, in the second half of the XIX century, a gradual realization occurred that the Grammar-Translation Method is not suitable for learning the living languages and, especially, for the practice of speech production, so it was slowly replaced with new methods, at least one small step closer to what is characterized as today's concept of language exchange. These are the Natural and Direct Methods (see Durbaba 2011: 94-96). Natural Method



was first implemented in the United States (Vuco 2009: 235-237) and implied the introduction of language speaking in education. In Europe, a similar method started being elaborated by the famous Maximilian Berlitz, who claimed he discovered it accidentally<sup>1</sup>. It was the first form of the so-called Direct Method, which was then further developed in France and Germany. Although in the Natural and Direct Method, there was still no language exchange, language learning had already started to get closer to it, because, for the first time, students had the opportunity to meet the native speakers of their target language, since they were exclusively the ones who taught it.

In the '40s of the XX century, the so-called Audiolingual Method arises, which later, with technology development, is modified to Audiovisual (see Durbaba 2011: 96-99). The basic characteristic of this method emphasized the speech over written language, as well as the use of the new technical means in education. However, instead of contact with the native speakers, the students were involved in practice which was too mechanical and uncreative (Durbaba 2011: 99). It could be said that it was actually moving them away from real communication situations in their target language, which is why the concept of language exchange had yet to have sufficient conditions to be developed and implemented.

Since the '70s of the XX century, the Communication Method gradually formed and affirmed itself in the teaching of foreign languages, which, to date, is a dominant approach in this field (see Durbaba 2011: 100-102). The basic feature of this method is emphasis on students' acquiring the communication competences,

**Photo above:** <https://polyglotclub.com/>

**Photo below:** <https://polyglotclub.com/>

<sup>1</sup> An interesting story about the creation of the Berlitz method, on whose basis, at least in some aspects, the work of the school he founded is still based today, can be read on: <https://www.berlitz.co.rs/berlitz-tradicija-istorija> (последњи приступ 24.5.2019).

which means practicing for foreign language communication in real situations. This objective governs both the concept of realization of classes (speech and writing exercises in addition to those of reading and hearing), and the concept of textbooks and other teaching assets (based on authentic materials). Only this method really paved the way for the introduction of the language exchange, since now learning is perceived as a social act, takes place in a group and requires cooperation with the environment (Durbaba 2011: 101).

In addition to teaching practice, in which the student is already actively engaged in obtaining the communicative competences, he is expected to engage in extracurricular activities, where he should come in contact with the native speakers and thus further strengthen and upgrade his competences, which is the basis of the language exchange itself. Therefore, by introducing the Communication Method in the teaching practice in formal and informal education, the terrain has been prepared for organizing and popularization of the language exchange.

In addition to the abovementioned methods, alternative methods of learning and teaching of foreign languages were also developed in the last few decades (see Durbaba 2011: 102-105). Some of them are Superlearning, Community Language Learning, Silent Way, Total Physical Response, Natural Approach and others. Analyzing basic assumptions of these methods, we can conclude that they do not contribute to the significant development of the language exchange, since they focus on some other aspects of learning. However, when it comes to one of these alternative methods, we can claim that it is exactly what we today call language exchange, or at least one type of language exchange. It is a method called Tandem (Durbaba 2011: 105, Funk et al. 2017).

Tandem is learning of foreign languages in a partnership; two students of different native languages who are interested in learning the language of the other, participate here (Brammerts 2009, According to Durbaba 2011: 105). This kind of learning can be made in real space, which is the so-called face-to-face tandem, or in virtual space, which is the so-called online tandem (Durbaba 2011: 105). According to H. Funk and associates (2017a: 32-33), tandem in real space has long been present in the learning of foreign languages and has allowed students to practice "one-on-one" dialogues, in situations where one student has mastered the language of the other student. The first structured forms of this type of learning were international meetings of French and German students in the '60s (Durbaba 2011: 105, Funk et al. 2017A: 33), which in a certain way represents a precursor of today's form of a platform for language exchange. Later, a scientific interest was developed for this type of learning of foreign languages, which was also performed under the EU project, which included 12 universities (Durbaba 2011: 105). Two basic principles of foreign language learning in tandem are: reciprocity and autonomy (Brammerts and Kleppin 2001, according to Funk et al. 2017A: 33, Durbaba 2011: 105). The first principle implies mutual consent to help another in learning; while one of the participants speaks in his target language, the other participant, whose mother tongue it is, gives him



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**Tandem is a method for learning of foreign languages in a partnership which involves two students of different native languages who are interested in learning the language of the other.**

a suitable feedback, points out to the omissions and helps him progress. The second principle implies that partners independently define the way of work, intensity, conversation topics, content, etc., but also to recognize their own responsibility for the learning process (Little 1991, according to Funk et al. 2017A: 33). Since the partners are not experts for methodology of teaching and/or the theory of adopting foreign languages, the appropriate institutions can provide them with help and support in the tandem learning (Durbaba 2011: 105). In this sense, we find it very important that the programs of the language exchange and platforms within which it is organized, receive appropriate institutional support, which will be discussed in the last chapter of this study.

We saw that the learning method called Tandem (both in real and in virtual space) is also considered a special method of learning and teaching of foreign languages, but it is important to emphasize that it is not necessary to replace all other methods today, but should serve as support. In other words, foreign language students can attend the lessons within formal education and learn their target languages, but in an extracurricular context, they can additionally exercise them through the language exchange platforms. Additional work in obtaining language competences in recent years is increasingly and scientifically recognized and analyzed, so students are encouraged to engage, in addition to

the lectures in which they are involved, in the so-called project work and blended learning (see Durbaba 2011: 130-132). Learning in the form of language exchange certainly carries great potential for such students' extracurricular activities, and for increasing their language competences, which this study, among other things, will strive to show.

Although the term tandem is more present in academic literature on teaching and learning foreign languages, in practice, using the term of language exchange is noticeable (most often abbreviated as LEX or LX). Its definitions are similar to the definition of tandem from academic literature. Thus, for example, on a popular web site that represents an online language exchange platform, it says that the process in which "two or more people who speak different languages interact in the language of another."<sup>2</sup> This illustrates

Photo: mundolingo.org



Photo: www.languagetrainers.com/blog/2014/09/02/what-is-polyglot-bar/



2) [https://www.mylanguageexchange.com/faq.asp#\\_a1](https://www.mylanguageexchange.com/faq.asp#_a1) (last visited on 23.4.2019)

the example of English speaker who learns French and who, consequently, is participating in a language exchange with a French speaker who learns English. The advantages of language exchange are highlighted over both language classes and total cultural immersion. In classes, namely, students do not often have contact with the native speakers, they do not have enough time to exercise speech production and do not get a chance to learn some informal language expressions. On the other hand, when it comes to full cultural immersion, the student does have the support of the native speakers,



who generally do not know how to help, can speak too quickly or colloquially, as well as with the local accents with which the student has not been introduced in the lectures. All that can discourage the student. A well-structured language exchange should precisely help the student overcome these difficulties.

At another highly influential, popular website for assisting individuals in foreign language learning, it is said that the language exchange has the following advantages: 1) through it, one can make friends from different cultures, 2) one can learn colloquial expressions that are often omitted in language classes, 3) it is free, 4) there is no homework or "boring" grammar content, 5) one can practice listening and speaking at the same time, and it is also possible to practice writing, if the partner agrees to the exchange of e-mails and 6) it is a fast and effective method of learning foreign languages. Roughly, we agree with the majority of these statements, but we would like to emphasize again the position that the language exchange should supplement, rather than completely replace, other forms of learning and teaching of foreign languages.

In the support guide for organizing of language exchange in Catalanian Universities (Pujol 2012: 5), it is said that the language exchange is a tool for practical use of languages. It implies that two people who speak different languages meet in a previously agreed manner, in order to teach each other their language and to exercise those languages. It also states that these meetings can be realized live or in virtual space, and can be a combination of these two types. It is also noted that the language exchange – as we have already mentioned – should be complementary to formal



Photo above: <http://newinbarcelona.com/next-event/saturday-language-exchange-in-barcelona-tandem-4/>

Photo below: <https://laemadrid.com/how-to-find-a-language-exchange-meetup-in-madrid/>



Photo: <https://www.facebook.com/PolyglotClubSerbia>

### – Polyglot Club Serbia

The basic features of the language exchange sessions within the Polyglot Club are that they occur in real space, according to the established schedule and regular dynamics, covering a large number of foreign languages for which there is interest and need in the modern labor market (English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Scandinavian Languages, Arabic, Turkish, Russian, Hebrew, Farsi, Chinese, Japanese, and many other world languages, including those represented in the Western Balkan region).

language learning. It also stresses that it should allow students to gain insight into other cultures.

We consider this to be a particularly important aspect of language exchange concept. Namely, in addition to helping students to learn and exercise their target languages, it allows them, through encounters with other cultures, to actively participate in intercultural dialogue, exchange experiences, convey the elements of their own culture and familiarize, that is, adopt elements of foreign cultures. The language exchange, among other things, can also be defined as “a form of learning language in which two people of different native languages work together to learn about the character and culture of the other” (Calvert 1999: 56, according to Acar & Kobayashi 2011: 1). Since the language and culture are inextricably connected (v. Filipovic 2009: 110-115), the language exchange necessarily enables participants, in addition to adopting foreign languages, to also adopt the relevant culture in a very direct way.

We have seen that all the above definitions of the tandem and language exchange share mentioning the participation of two people with different native languages, which mutually help each other master the language of the other, in real or virtual space, where these participants will necessarily enter intercultural dialogue. These are the features of language exchange that we adopt

for the needs of this research, but we add another important feature of theirs. Namely, the language exchange is not necessarily only performed between two people; it is possible to organize language exchange meetings with many more participants, who are speakers of different native languages. Such meetings give participants the opportunity to exercise more languages in one occasion, and offer other participants a



**The language exchange is not necessarily only performed between two people. It is possible to organize language exchange meetings with many more participants, who are speakers of different native languages.**

**One of the key goals of language exchange is the acquisition and enhancement of communicative competence in the target language, but, through language exchange activities it is aimed at improving communication skills as a broader term.**

all variants of the so-called BHMS language). This study will deal with the language exchange considering such a concept of its realization.

partnership in practicing various languages in which they themselves have the proper level of competences. The most suitable structure of these meetings is the organization of space in several smaller units (e.g. tables) where one particular language is exercised and, it is desirable, native speakers are available to the others, or at least those who, under the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, can be regarded as independent users of those languages (see ZEP 2003, Durbaba 2011: 135-138). This is precisely the basic method of realization of language exchange in the organization of the Polyglot Club<sup>3</sup>, which, as of 2017, has also been successfully applied in Serbia<sup>4</sup>. Although this type of language exchange leaves space for participants to be connected to each other in different virtual areas (such as, for example, the Facebook social network), the basic features of the language exchange sessions within the Polyglot Club are that they occur in real space, according to the established schedule and regular dynamics, covering a large number of foreign languages for which there is interest and need in the modern labor market (English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Scandinavian Languages, Arabic, Turkish, Russian, Hebrew, Farsi, Chinese, Japanese, and many other world languages, including those represented in the Western Balkan region and whose prestige and “market value” are limited to the region, such as Bulgarian, Slovenian, Macedonian, Romanian, Albanian, Greek and



3) <https://polyglotclub.com/> (last visited on 4.4.2019)

4) <https://polyglotclub.com/serbia/event> (last visited on 17.5.2019)

## 2.2. Mobility

**Mobility is “the possibility for an individual, group or social layer to move and make choices regarding the place of living, career, or access to resources.”**

According to the Study on the Mobility of Youth in the Western Balkans (Popovic and Gligorovic 2016: 6), mobility is “the possibility for an individual, group or social layer to move and make choices regarding the place of living, career, or access to resources.” It also mentions academic mobility, which enables students and teaching staff to change their institution, often going outside of their country, for the purpose of professional development.

In a dissertation dedicated to the intercultural and linguistic competency of participants in an international student exchange program, D. Zivanovic argues that mobility in education is “a time period spent in another country, organized for the purpose of knowledge, skills and attitudes acquiring” and that “the mobility program may be in a formal context (such as a study program) or in the context of informal education (such as youth exchanges and seminars)” (Zivanovic 2015: 59). We see, therefore, that the term mobility can be thought of as the possibility or activity itself, but also as the time period in which the activity is carried out. In this study, we will use the concept of mobility primarily to refer to the activity itself.

According to C. Berg and associates (Berg et al. 2013: 13-14), the connection between mobility and studies and

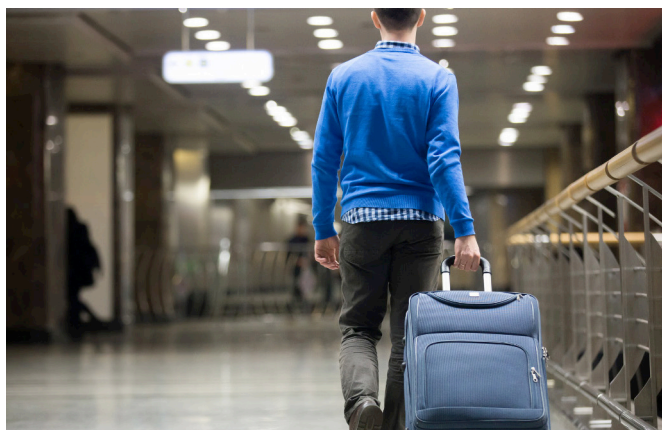


educational activities is not a new occurrence at all. Namely, Gete claimed that an intelligent man receives the best education when he travels. Young craftsmen have traveled in continental Europe to improve their crafts since the Middle Ages. The industrialization in the XIX century has ended the process, but it has certainly made it possible for the young people to constitute a relevant factor in European society. Another especially important thing, according to C. Berg and associates, is that such examples of mobility were not only a characteristic of higher social classes, but also

the youth from rural areas. In the United States, during the XIX century, the appearance of worker migrants occurred. After the Second World War, attitudes towards mobility have been changing in a thorough way. It is no longer marginal, but a central social occurrence of the core importance for the youth. In Europe, mobility increasingly meant overcoming the borders of one's own state and culture, building of intercultural tolerance and peace, and one of the basic elements of the constitution of the so-called European citizenship.

Today, mobility within the educational process is a regular practice in European countries, which is supported by the competent European institutions and enables young people to acquire the necessary experience of life abroad, familiarize themselves with other cultures and perfect their skills (v. Berg et al. 2013: 14).

Student mobility can be defined as a transnational mobility that is carried out in order to acquire new knowledge, skills and competences, through activities such as student exchanges, volunteer projects, international language courses or informal educational projects (Eurodesk 2015: 4). For the purposes of this study, we adopt the aforementioned features of student mobility, as well as mentioned claims that mobility should enable young people to make choices about their place of living, career and access to appropriate resources (Popovic and Gligorovic 2016: 6).





## 2.3. Employability

**As a general capability, employability cannot be regarded independently of the individual knowledge, skills and attitudes that comprise it, because right now, the candidate represents himself to prospective employers and thus seeks the proper employment.**

Employability is the ability to get a job, to keep that job, with the ability to change positions and progress within the same work organization, but also to move to another work organization as needed. As a general capability, however, employability cannot be regarded independently of the individual knowledge, skills and attitudes that comprise it, because right now, the candidate represents himself to prospective employers and thus seeks the proper employment (Hillage & Pollard 1998, According to Skiljevic 2017: 5). A total of 11 skills, which together form the concept of employability and that we accept in this study, are presented in the Study on Employability of Youth in the Western Balkans, and we are listing them here (v. Skiljevic 2017: 29-31):

**1) Communication skills** – they represent the ability of clear transfer of information and ideas through various media to individuals or groups in a manner that allows the listener to understand and retain information; They mean the ability of active listening, clear connecting of ideas and skills and strategies in order to efficiently work with others; It includes the ability to assess the effectiveness of formal and informal communication.

**2) Teamwork skills** – it is an active participation in





### – Teamwork skills

It is an active participation in the team towards fulfilling the objectives and ability to operate easily and efficiently within the group.

the team towards fulfilling the objectives; ability to operate easily and efficiently within the group; the skills of teamwork include the ability to provide decisions, determine objectives and limitations on the path of their achievement, risk assessment and alternative solutions; teamwork requires co-operation, leadership and readiness to follow others.

**3) Foreign language skills** – this skill is based on the ability of understanding, expression and interpretation of terms, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions, both in oral and in writing (listening, speech, reading and writing), in the appropriate range of social and cultural contexts (in education and training, at home and in free time), and according to one's own wishes and needs. Communication in foreign languages also calls for skills activation, such as mediation in communication (which includes translation) and intercultural understanding. This study is particularly considering the knowledge of foreign languages as

a skill that significantly affects the employability of young people and in a certain way puts it in the first plan. Therefore, we will deal more with this skill, as a component of employability, in the central part of the study.

**4) Desire for learning and self-perfection** – this skill implies actively identifying new areas for learning, regular creation and exploitation of learning

opportunities, using newfound knowledge at work and constantly learning through its application.

**5) Knowledge of information (IT) technology and computer skills** – digital competence includes reliable and critical use of the ICT (Information Society Technology) at work, in free time, and in communication. It is supported by basic skills in information and communication technology, i.e.



**Foreign language skills are based on the ability of understanding, expression and interpretation of terms, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions in the appropriate range of social and cultural contexts, according to one's own wishes and needs.**

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using a computer to find, evaluate, store, present, and exchange information, and to communicate and interact with collaboration networks via the Internet.

**6) Adaptability and flexibility** – maintaining efficiency even when major changes occur in work tasks or work environments, efficiently adjusting to working within new work structures, processes, requests or cultures.

**7) Problem solving skills** – these skills imply the recognition of long-term consequences of certain solutions to problems, as well as examination, design, implementation and evaluation of the action plan aimed at solving the problem. Individuals must be able to assess information or situations, break them into components and consider different approaches for their resolution, opting for the best.

**8) Work ethics** – this skill is actually a cultural norm that obliges personal responsibility towards one's own work and is based on the belief that this work has its value. Research has shown that numerous characteristics of work ethics can be summarized in three words: interpersonal skills, initiative and reliability.

**9) The ability to work under pressure** – it is

maintaining of a stable performance under pressure or before an obstacle (such as, for example, work in the conditions of time-limit or ambiguous work task); this skill also covers stress management in a manner that is acceptable to others, and to the working organization.

**10) Planning and organization skills** – establishment of direction of action, for oneself and others, and efficient management of time and resources, in order to ensure effective performance at the work.

**11) Entrepreneurial skills** – these skills apply to proactive project management, efficient representation and negotiation, the ability to work individually and in a team, the ability to identify and assess one's advantages and weaknesses, and to assess and assume risks. The entrepreneurial position is characterized by initiative, proactivity, independence, motivation and determination in fulfilling the goals.



## 2.4. Western Balkans

**The term Western Balkans implies Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, Northern Macedonia and Serbia.**

The term Western Balkans is a neologism used to reference the territory which consists of Albania and the former Yugoslav countries, excluding Slovenia.<sup>5</sup> Sometimes, in the framework of this term, Croatia is excluded, with explanation that it is an EU member, which is now different from the rest of the countries. Within this study, under the term of the Western Balkans we mean Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, Northern Macedonia and Serbia.



5) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balkans#Western\\_Balkans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balkans#Western_Balkans) (last visited on 22.4.2019)

# Europe and languages

03





**Almost every European state has several official languages, sometimes distributed in such a way that some are official at the level of the state, and some have regional language status.**

Europe can be claimed to be a continent less multilingual than the rest of the world (Bugarski 2009: 11–12). While in some regions in the world, such as for example, Oceania or Indian subcontinent, in small spaces, there are several hundred, and more than a thousand languages spoken, in Europe that number is much smaller. However, Europe is a multilingual environment, especially in the sense that there are practically no monolingual countries in it (Bugarski 2009: 12). Almost every European state has several official languages, sometimes distributed in such a way that some are official at the level of the state, and some have regional language status. It is enough to look at the example of Switzerland, which has four official languages, or Spain, where Castilian is official at the state level, but that status in certain areas also belongs to Catalan, Galician and Basque. In the Western Balkan region, there are no pure monolingual states, which can easily be determined when we look at how many minority languages there are in each Balkan country. Meanwhile, the language image of Europe is rapidly changing with the constant influx of immigrants from around the globe (Bugarski 2009: 12). Today, the great European metropolises represent the homes of the most diverse peoples and their languages. So, let's say, the city of London can have only one official language in legal terms – English, but literally hundreds of languages are spoken there,



which have been brought by immigrants. Similarly, this is also true for Paris, Madrid, Rome, Berlin, but to a certain extent, also for not so large European urban centers, and also for the urban environments in the Western Balkans.

Multilingualism in the contemporary, globalized world, is much more of a rule than an exception (Bugarski 2009: 12, Filipović 2009: 88). There are no perfectly monolingual states, even in the "old" Europe, where the wider masses still have the prevailing notion that one nation has one language. As regards the level of individuals, things are not that simple either. There are many more multilingual individuals in the world than monolinguals (Trudgill & Cheshire 1998: 1, nav. According to the Bugarski 2009: 12). Majority of the world's population either has at least two native languages, or, at least, in addition to their one mother language, know several foreign languages to some extent as well. And this picture also refers to the Western Balkan countries, where there are mixed members of different peoples and different languages in some territories. Still, it must be taken into account that in the mentioned region, there is a large number of monolingual populations. If we take the Republic of Serbia as an example, we will see that there are members of a variety of national minorities who speak different languages as their mother tongues, but, at the same time, use Serbian (Hungarians, Roma, Albanians, Bulgarians, etc.), while the majority of the population is monolingual, because they speak only Serbian (Filipović 2009: 88). However, the monolingual population, depending on the level of education and other factors, is not entirely monolingual, as it learns and uses foreign languages to a certain extent.

Relations among the languages in Europe have very much changed through its history. R. Bugarski (2009: 12 – 13) highlights three different models of these relations. The first of them is called modular, because it gives a picture of coexistence between separate languages in separate entities. This model established itself in the XVIII century, but some of its elements, in ideological sense, can still be felt today. The second model, which occurs from the mid-XX century, is expansive. It is a model in which the great languages of powerful states spread to the expense of the smaller ones. The third model, interactive, appeared at the end of XX and at the beginning of this century, implies mutual cooperation

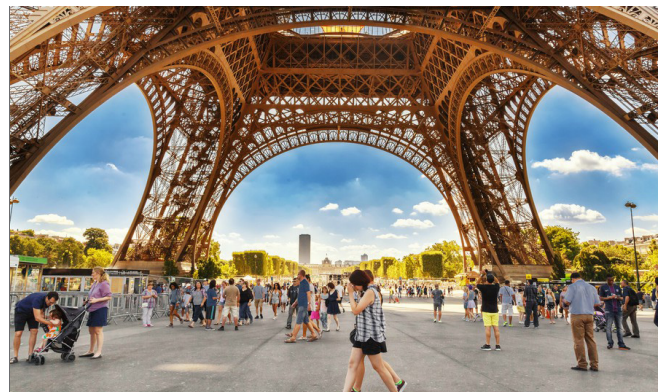
of speakers of different languages, which are generally equal in their rights. The European Union's language policy is mostly reflected in this model. Similar views related to the history of relations among European languages are provided by D. Geeraerts (Geeraerts 2002, According to Filipovic 2009: 60 – 64), claiming that European standard languages were first formed by a rational, and then by the romantic model. The rational model implied that one nation had its own unique state and one language, while the romantic model highlighted individual language differences. The elements of these two models later combined and, to a certain extent, today they continue to do so, when the modern socio-linguistic situation is comprehended, both in Europe and beyond.

The fact is that today there is much more awareness of linguistic differences and about multilingualism than in previous centuries and decades. This applies especially to more developed parts of the world, and perhaps the most to the European Union and its language policy, which will be explained further. The concepts of language ecology and human language rights (Skutnabb-Cangas 2006) oppose dominance of large, in the political and economic sense, powerful languages, and advocate equality among the languages and their speakers.

Multilingualism has always been a hallmark in the major part of the world (Bugarski 2009: 13). In Europe, multilingualism was once primarily a feature of certain social groups or professions (e.g. traders), whereas now, it is expanded to larger parts of the population. International exchange in contemporary Europe, as is

**Photo:** <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/articles/rome-tourist-rules-2018>





the establishment of its official institutions, would not be possible without language exchange, which certainly implies that participants in it are multilingual (Aronin 2007, According to Bugarski 2009: 13).

Different languages in contemporary Europe are subject to new situations in different ways, due to economic, political and cultural changes (Bugarski 2009: 14–15). Languages are interdependent in complex interrelationships, which sometimes take the characteristics of the conflict, a situation that L-J. Calvet called war among the languages, using even the metaphor of devouring, according to which big languages “swallow” the small ones (Kalve 1995). In such a dynamic, different groups of languages stood out, according to the status they managed to gain. The English language has become an undisputed language of global communication, so called global lingua Franca (Filipovic 2009: 94–98). Many other international languages, such as French, German, Russian, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Portuguese and other smaller national languages, however, are increasingly losing their roles before the big ones. Regional and minority languages

resist such tendencies to a greater or lesser extent. Due to these processes, some traditionally monolingual or bilingual environments in Europe are now becoming outstandingly multilingual, and the autochthonous languages, in a certain way, stop being dominant and subside before the new languages of immigrants. For example, in Switzerland, one of the official languages of the state, Romansh, has fewer speakers than other languages brought to them by immigrants, such as Turkish, Portuguese and different varieties of Serbian (Bugarski 2009: 14). In an increasingly intensive recent immigrant processes, we can expect similar developments in the Western Balkan countries.

As we mentioned, in these processes of fighting among the languages for their dominant position and the acquisition of roles, the most prominent is English, which, in the contemporary globalized world, and in Europe, becomes lingua franca – language of general communication (Bugarski 2009: 16–17, Filipović 2009: 94–98). Therefore, by taking such a role, English can no longer be considered as the ownership of only its native speakers (the English, Americans, Canadians, Australians, etc.), but of all people who use it as a second or foreign language. After all, estimates are that English now has more non-native speakers than native speakers (Crystal 2003:69, According to Bugarski 2009: 16).

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**Left photo:** [https://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/travel\\_news/article-7706819/Spain-set-tourism-record-U-S-visitors-counter-Brexit-blues.html](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/travel_news/article-7706819/Spain-set-tourism-record-U-S-visitors-counter-Brexit-blues.html)

**Right photo:** <https://www.propertyguides.com/france/news/paris-tourist-numbers-hit-ten-year-high/>

In linguistic circles, in the last two to three decades, the question has been raised about the identity of the global English language, the variety that has hundreds of millions of speakers, and a vast majority are non-native. Can we still say that there are only standard forms of English, what was once considered mainly only British and American, possibly with the addition of Canadian, Australian and some other? Does this global language have a standard that would apply to the whole world, for the entire global community of his speakers? According to D. Crystal, one of the major English authorities in

the world, today it is possible to claim that there is the World Standard Printed English, because the variability in the written media, in the English-language press in the large number of countries, almost completely negligible (Crystal 2000: 2, According to Filipovic 2009: 96). There are similar tendencies when it comes to the spoken language as well. In order to emphasize the essential international and global character of such a linguistic code, it is often called World English, Global English and International English today (Bugarski 2009: 16).

However, in addition to the claims of the uniqueness of the World English, there is also an observation that it shows a certain level of variability and that in a situation when it is used by millions of non-native speakers from so many different environments and with so many different own first languages, it necessarily manifests fragmentation, and instead of the term Global English and similar, it is better to use the term World Englishes, which emphasizes plurality (Filipovic 2009: 96). This emphasizes that the identity of the English language is not homogeneous today, but it is a set of more diverse identities, each of which has its own domain of use and to which members of different nations, cultures and

native languages provide something from their own identity.

English can certainly no longer be regarded as a foreign language in the same way as other foreign languages. It is beyond compare when it comes to presence in all domains, from education, through work, to culture and, especially, entertainment. That is why our linguists suggest that this special position of English should be emphasized by the use of special terms. R. Bugarski (2004) calls it an additional language and T. Prčić (2005) a domesticated foreign language. The privileged status of English in the language reality of the world and Europe directly affects language policy and planning, especially in the field of education, which will be discussed further within the European language policy review.

What is the fate of other languages before the global impact of English? On this issue, both in layman and in professional circles, there have been clashes for several decades. Often, the concern for the preservation of national languages is over-emphasized, and even the fear of their disappearance or drowning in English. However, it turns out that the overall use of English generally does not replace other languages, but it is added to them, which actually encourages multilingualism on the plan of societies and individuals (Bugarski 2009: 17). It is unlikely that any language used as lingua franca, including English, can fully suppress national languages, which in their countries have official status and firm foundation in their linguistic policies and plans (Filipovic 2009: 96). As regards minority and regional languages, they seem to be much more endangered by large national languages, for example, of the former colonial empires (Spanish, French, Dutch, etc.), than they are threatened by global English (Bugarski 2009: 17).

The world and European language reality, as can be seen, is not static, but is a dynamic relationship of opposing tendencies, which overlap on many levels. There are plenty of political, economic and cultural factors contributing to that, but two can be highlighted (Bugarski 2009: 18–19). The first is the separation of



**The widespread use of English generally does not replace other languages but is added to them, which in fact encourages multilingualism at the social and individual level.**



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### – Global language

Processes of globalization, which affect the intensified and dynamic relationships between languages and their speakers, are conducted at the same time with the regionalization and localization processes. On one hand, globalization of the market, leads to strengthening of the role of English as the primary global language. On the other hand, however, the regionalization of markets, strengthening of relations among countries, institutions and companies in particular regions, instigates the use of regional languages, so they become very important and, in a way, stand side by side with English.

languages from the nation and the state, caused primarily by the rise of mobility and the weakening of the national state's role. The languages no longer belong to nations or countries, but to all who use them, regardless of their nationality or place of living. The second factor is the language penetration into the virtual space, which is enabled by accelerated development of new technologies and the revolution created by Internet appearance. The internet does not only encourage the dominance of English, but also the use of many other languages in the virtual world, even the regional, minority and many endangered languages (Cunliffe 2007).

In the situation of globalization processes, when the boundaries are loosened and people are moving to the extent that it has never been possible before in history, international contacts are extremely intense and dynamic. They are further intensified by the constant development of new technologies, with which it has become possible to contact anyone from any end

of the world, by one click. All these factors, taken together, necessarily affect the views on the language or the models of language policy and planning. Previously dominant territorial models, which were oriented on the language and territory on which it is spoken, must give way to new, much more dynamic models, which will take into account primarily the language speakers, regardless of the territory or nation (Bugarski 2009: 19).

Processes of globalization, which affect the intensified and dynamic relationships between languages and their speakers, are conducted at the same time with the regionalization and localization processes (which is why, in social and humanistic sciences, the neologism glocalization has been made up). Their combined action has implications for language reality, but also for language policy and



**International contacts have been further intensified by the constant development of new technologies that have made it possible for one-click access to anyone from anywhere in the world.**

planning (Trudgill 2004). On one hand, globalization of the market, leads to strengthening of the role of English as the primary global language. On the other hand, however, the regionalization of markets, strengthening of relations among countries, institutions and companies in particular regions, instigates the use of regional languages, so they become very important and, in a way, stand side by side with English (Bugarski 2009: 19). So, in addition to one global language, individual regions or super-national organizations count on another international language and its irreplaceability in various

domain usage. For an individual, this practically means that in addition to their mother tongue, eventually, in some sphere, they will get acquainted with at least two other languages: one globally important (English) and one regionally important, which can be their native, but also some others, depending on their origin and background.

What one such contexture looks like, characterized by multilingualism, can be shown in various examples, which are today numerous in the world. Let's take, for example, the spaking area of the Portuguese language (more in Barbosa da Silva 2013). It is the nine countries in which this language is official, distributed to even four different continents (Africa, Asia, South America and Oceania). They are interconnected in an super-national organization called the Portuguese Language Community (CPLP). In addition to political, togetherness among these countries is primarily intense on the economic, educational, scientific and technological, cultural and entertainment plan. Among them, there is a constant exchange of economic goods, services, cultural and entertainment products, but also of people. For such a thing, it is necessary to have one language, common for these states, which has a privileged, super-national status. For most inhabitants of these states, this is the native language, but for many, it is not. Many individuals from African CPLP countries, for example, learn and acquire Portuguese language as the second language, through formal education, while their native languages are some of the local indigenous languages of Africa. For them, therefore, affiliation to CPLP automatically implies at least bilingualism. If we add to that the undisputed importance of knowledge of global English too, the bilingualism immediately turns into



**Photo above:** <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/484348134924588696/>

trilingualism.

These examples can be found all over the world. We will easily find them in every part of Europe. Many European states have minority and regional languages, which join national languages and English as global. A Swiss from Lugano, for example, uses Italian as a native language, but for participation in many domains of national and regional level, the knowledge of German is more important. For any successful participation in most of the domains of the modern globalized world, it is necessary for him, also, to know English. It turns out, therefore, that the trilingualism is the most realistic picture here.

If we take a look at the western Balkan region, we will also conclude that monolingualism today necessarily must be replaced by at least bilingualism, and in many cases, by trilingualism. Although the large super-national creation of Yugoslavia no longer exists with one official language on the federal level, there is a unified economic and cultural area, which many refer to as Yugosphere, in which the dominant role is still held by a once common language, today commonly known by the abbreviation BCMS. For the citizens of the Western Balkans, this

practically means that their participation in the optimum number of domains, on the regional and international plan, is necessary to master the BCMS language, in addition to their native language, with the necessary global English.

In any case, it becomes clear that for the contemporary Europe, if it wants to participate in global flows, on various plans, the following language form is required: Global language (English, possibly other more prevalent world languages) + national languages + regional and minority languages (Bugarski 2009: 21–22). Not even bilingualism, therefore, is enough for anyone, let alone a monolingualism. It seems that the new norm, which is already rising, means three languages for each individual (Bugarski 2009: 22).

In order to achieve this, it is necessary to shift the language policy and planning from the level of national State to the super-national level (Bugarski 2009: 22, Filipović 2009: 70–72). In this context, the language policy of Europe and the European Union has also been established, and we will now look at something more detailed, with an emphasis on those aspects that are relevant for linguistic mediation and education.

On the European continent, the issues of language policy and planning, in addition to the individual states, are also dealt with by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and the European Union (Filipovic 2009: 70–72). The language policy of the European Union is such that, above all, it must meet the super-national needs, that is, the needs of millions of speakers of different languages, living in different countries. There are different political, economic and cultural interests, as are strategic objectives (Filipovic 2009: 70). In this sense, the language policy of the European Union may, among other things, be called declarative, because it advocates to maintain a high-level novelty of multilingualism at the super-national level, super-state level, but also on the basis of individual Member States.

Two are the main directions in which the recommended high level of multilingualism is developed, with the accompanying specific linguistic activities: 1) learning or



**The language policy of the European Union is such that it must meet the super-national needs, that is, the needs of millions of speakers of different languages, living in different countries.**

teaching of languages and 2) language mediation, which implies different forms of translation (Filipovic 2009: 70). This can certainly be added to the language policy and planning in relation to two other important issues: 1) status and use of languages in European institutions and 2) protection of minority languages (Bugarski 2009: 24). Although the latter is of great importance, we will put it aside in this overview, since it is out of the narrow frame of the goals of the study that will be enclosed here. We will review first the questions concerning the use of languages in European institutions and the language mediation, so that the continuation of this



section will be devoted to us the most relevant issue – the educational language policy and the planning of the European Union.

There are international organizations whose member States have the same official language (e.g., CPLP, whose example we have already mentioned). However, most international organizations imply that their members are countries with different official languages, i.e. that speakers of different native languages are involved in their work. Therefore, it is the most rational and economical solution for such organizations to have one or several working languages (Bugarski 2009: 25). If we look at the example of the United Nations, let's say, we will see that it would be difficult to have all of the member languages of this Organization as the working languages at the same time. In such a scenario, there would be hundreds. Instead, the United Nations have six working languages: English, Spanish, Russian, French, Chinese, and Arabic. Organizations such as the OSCE, NATO and the Council of Europe generally have only two working languages – English and French (Bugarski 2009: 25).

The European Union is the first super-national organization to have taken a firm view from its founding, that all its members must be equal, and that this must be reflected in the use of working languages, so that all official languages of its members automatically obtained the status of official and working languages of the whole Union (Bugarski 2009: 26). What does this mean in practical terms? No Member State, no matter how big its population, its territory, or economic power in comparison to others, cannot be favored, and smaller, economically weaker and later admitted members must



not feel discriminated and marginalized. The official languages of all Member States receive an equal status in the Union, so that absolutely all official documents of the Union must be issued in all those languages. If a document is initially written in a single language, it is necessary to translate it into all others.

As the European Union grew for years and decades, the number of its working languages also multiplied, which increasingly caused problems in the massive administration and it led to suggestions to review the initial position that the members are absolutely equal on the language level too (Bugarski 2009: 26–33). The European Economic Community, established in 1957, had only six members and four working languages - French, German, Dutch and Italian. In 1973, it changed its name into the European Community, when three other states were included and three other working languages were added. The further extensions, which caused the increase in number of working languages, followed in 1981 and 1986. Then, in 1995, the Union formally changed its name to the European Union, and received three new members. The number of the States has risen to 15 and the number of working languages to 11 (some of the languages are common to several Member States, e.g. German). A new large expansion occurred in 2004, when as much as ten new members were admitted. The number of languages has increased to 20. In the year 2007, the Union was also joined by the first members from the Balkans - Romania and Bulgaria, so that their two languages become the official languages of the European Union. Meanwhile, full official status was also acknowledged for the Irish language, so the number of official languages reached 23. Finally, in 2013, Croatia was admitted to the European Union, so, with Croatian language, the current total number of 24 official languages is reached. The UK leaving the Union, popularly called Brexit, will not affect the status of English as one of the official languages of the Union and a very important working language for numerous bodies, since English is an official language in Ireland, which remains a member of the Union. It could eventually be discussed whether some other languages of the large and economically powerful members of the Union, primarily of Germany and France, may take the

primate that English had, at least in communication, within its various entities. We dare assume that for now, there are weak prospects of such a thing, since English enjoys an undisputed status at the global level. If the Union tried to force some other languages in its internal organization and communication, it would still have to turn to English every time the communication is channeled outward.

Given such a large number of official languages, it is clear that the issue of language mediation – translation, is a very complex issue at the level of the Union, because a translation needs to be provided from every individual language to all others. The initial four languages gave 12 translation pairs (4x3), but with each new official language the number of translation pairs grew (Bugarski 2009: 27). The Union's linguistic situation includes 24 official languages, which means there are 552 translation pairs. Given further plans for enlargement of the Union, increase in the number of official languages can be expected, and the consequentially, the increase of these combinations for translation. As regards the Western Balkans, if its countries' intentions - to join the "European family of peoples" come true, the Union will become richer for several more languages. In particular, it will be interesting to address the status of the former Serbo-Croat language - Serbian, Bosniak/ Bosnian and Montenegrin (Bugarski 2009: 27). It raises the question of whether the Union will accept to have four different official languages for Balkan countries (which Croatian already is), or it will in some way try to merge them into a single BCMS, as it was the case with some other international organizations, such as the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague. In addition, there are already demands



from countries that are already members of the Union in terms of giving official status to some of their regional languages (Bugarski 2009: 27). The most serious candidates for such a status are the Catalan, significant regional language of Spain (which, however, does not have an official status at the level of the Spanish State), and Russian, important second language for most of the population of the Baltic countries.

The European Union has the largest translation service in the world, whose cost of maintenance is extremely high and is taking a significant place in its budget, with a manifested entire series of problematic issues, for which various solutions have been considered (Bugarski 2009: 28–33). Should the declarative equality of all official languages be followed, the complete written and oral communication of all the Union's bodies would have to be conducted



Photo: <https://www.euronews.com/2019/05/17/european-parliament-who-are-the-most-influential-meps>

so that any document or oral statement would be translated from every official language to every other official language of the Union. Therefore, there would have to be provided qualified translators for each translation couple, which is very difficult to do (we could, for example, wonder whether it is feasible to find and engage a sufficiently skilled officer who will be able to translate from Estonian to Croatian and vice versa). The request for achieving this equality seems to be utopian and is far from the rational functioning of the Union's organs, so that for many years, the question is on the agenda as how to solve the language mediation, without be harming the ideological, and formally-legal principles of equality of the Members of the Union and their languages (Bugarski 2009: 28). Various possibilities have been suggested and reviewed as a solution to the mentioned problem (Bugarski 2009: 28–33). The first was to attribute to English, which has an undisputed advantage at the global level, the status of the Union's only working language.

This, however, was opposed by some big and proud members, such as Germany and France. An alternative solution in the form of acceptance of English and French as two equal working languages was resisted at least by Germany, and the assumption is that Spain would reach for the argument that Spanish language, of all European languages after English, has the highest international significance. Another proposed solution was to completely neutralize the international disagreement concerning the language, by the establishing as the working language of Union a language which is completely neutral and has no official status anywhere. It could be a classical language, most likely Latin, or the most famous artificial language of European Providence – Esperanto. It would be, however, futile to expect that the Union's employees could master these languages only for the needs of its functioning, not to mention any other implications that such a solution would have to have. Due to the inability to resolve, in one of two of the mentioned ways (and a





few more proposed), the language and national tensions and the specific communication problems in the Union, other solutions have been sought to maintain the principle of equality with somewhat free interpretations. In the end, two such solutions were found (Bugarski 2009: 30–31). The first implies free interpretation of the term of the working language. In the documents of the Union, it is not clearly defined what the difference is between official and working languages, so the languages of all Member States could remain official, but the communication in the Union's bodies and the preparation of documents, however, will be realized in fewer working languages. Another solution implies the languages that would be "pillars" in communication, which would mean that translation is not done from every language, but only from those "pillars" to all other languages and vice versa. This mediating role in the language mediation has been, as completely expected, taken over by English, and to a considerably smaller extent, some other languages, such as Spanish, Italian and Polish (possible mediator for Slavic languages, of the recently admitted members).

If we look at today's language practice of the European

Union, we will see that its de facto working languages are primarily English, German and French (Bugarski 2009: 30–31). Each of them has its trump cards for the position, and until recently, each of them was official to three members of the Union. However, there is also a hierarchy among them, because English still has a striking primacy. Another question can be asked, whether it will keep such a primacy after the Brexit, or French and German will be able to take advantage of the new situation and even a little bit of that primacy.

In any case, a large gap between the declarative language equality of the European Union members and the actual state of affairs is noticeable. Multilingualism, as one of the crucial values and the imperative of Europe, necessarily becomes very selective, but it is appropriate to emphasize that this is not the result of some special language policy and the planning of the European Union, but purely of practical needs (Bugarski 2009: 32).

What are the implications of the fact that it is impossible for all official languages of the European Union to be virtually completely equal in communication and in the work of the official institutions of the Union on individuals as speakers of those languages? As we have stated so far, citizens of the Union will have to strive for individual multilingualism, i.e. in addition to their maternal language, to master other languages of the Union. On the one hand, an important target language will be English because of its global privileged status, which we have seen, is firm within the Union, too. On the other hand, they will have more and more target languages. All of this will have to be supported by the appropriate institutional moves of educational language policies and specific linguistic and planning activities.

The European Commission's report from 2002, according to the analysis of data obtained from a survey conducted by Eurobarometer (the European Commission Public Opinion Examination Office), brings

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Left photo: <http://en.efhr.eu/2016/03/12/european-union-strategy-multilingualism-acquaintance-foreign-languages-lithuania/>

## Multilingualism is becoming a goal for every citizen of Europe, not just for the elite or privileged individuals in economically stronger positions.

Multilingualism in the contemporary, globalized world, is much more of a rule than an exception (Bugarski 2009: 12, Filipović 2009: 88). There are no perfectly monolingual states, even in the “old” Europe, where the wider masses still have the prevailing notion that one nation has one language. As regards the level of individuals, things are not that simple either. There are many more multilingual individuals in the world than monolinguals (Trudgill & Cheshire 1998: 1, nav. According to the Bugarski 2009: 12). Majority of the world’s population either has at least two native languages, or, at least, in addition to their one mother language, know several foreign languages to some extent as well. And this picture also refers to the Western Balkan countries, where there are mixed members of different peoples and different languages in some territories. Still, it must be taken into account that in the mentioned region, there is a large number of monolingual populations.

two important conclusions (European Commission 2002, According to Filipovic 2009: 70–71). The first conclusion is that most Europeans are bilingual or multilingual, and the other is that most adult Europeans consider the knowledge of other languages useful. In particular, 93% of parents think it is important for their children to learn other languages, 71% of Europeans believe that everyone in the European Union should speak at least one other European language, and the 56% of respondents claim that they are ready to dedicate some time every week to learn some language. However, when the data on competency in foreign languages of the Europeans is looked at, the situation is the following: 41% speaks English as foreign language, 19% French, 10% German, 7% Spanish, 3% Italian, while other languages do not reach 1% of the entire population of the Union (Filipovic 2009: 71). Therefore, the European Commission considers this small amount of knowledge of foreign languages to diminish the potential of European companies in the market that is multilingual



Photo: [theconversation.com/the-quiet-battle-to-save-multilingualism-in-europe-57921](https://theconversation.com/the-quiet-battle-to-save-multilingualism-in-europe-57921)



(European Commission 2002: 6, According to Filipovic 2009: 71).

The European Commission further concludes that it is not enough for the citizens of the European Union to speak only another foreign language in addition to their mother language, because it is the loss both for business individuals and the entire society. Although knowledge of the global lingua franca is important, we will directly accept and learn of other cultures through the learning of their languages (European Commission 2002: 7, According to Filipovic 2009: 71). Because of all

this, there has been a recommendation that the citizens of the Union must be able to communicate in at least two other languages of the Union in addition to their native language, which means to be trilingual. A similar position was taken by the Council of Europe. In its Guidelines for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe from 2003, the Council has warned that it is not sufficient to strive for multilingualism, but it is necessary to break prejudice on English as the most valuable foreign language, for which is necessary to use the political will and economic power (Filipovic 2009: 71).

Multilingualism, therefore, becomes a goal for every citizen of Europe, not only for the elite or privileged individuals in economically stronger positions. Such a goal in the individual plan, however, should be recognized at the institutional level and reflected appropriately on language policy and planning, especially in the sphere of education. According to J. Filipovic: "If this goal does not receive sufficient attention, unless it is explicated at the level of educational policies of relevant State institutions, multilingualism will remain the privilege of only the highly educated elite in European states" (2009: 71).

Today's efforts to increase the volume of language classes in mandatory primary and secondary education in the European Union Member States stem from the conclusions made at the Council of Europe meeting in Barcelona 2002 (Council of Europe 2002, According to Araújo et al. 2015: 14).

Since then, the Union and Council members have enacted appropriate measures to increase the number of target languages in education, but also to start learning them from an early age. For the period from 2000 until 2008, the number of foreign languages which





are taught in schools, increased by one third (Meyer, Boateng & Turchetii 2010, According to Araújo et al 2015: 14).

However, teaching of another foreign language is not compulsory in all Member States, and even in those in which it is, it is not taught before the age of ten years. As regards the number of students who learn foreign languages, the Euridyce study (2012, According to Araújo et al. 2015: 14) shows that the percentage of children aged 6 to 9 who do not learn any foreign language, in only five years, has declined by third, with a value of 32.8% to 21.8%, between school year of 2004/05 and 2009/10. Moreover, as regards the number of target foreign languages, the percentage of students who learn two or more foreign languages grew from 46.7% to 60.8% in the same period (Biadak et al. 2012, According to Araújo et al. 2015: 14).

The available data suggests that English is the most taught language at all levels of education in European Union Member States (Araújo et al. 2015: 14). This language is a mandatory subject in secondary education of almost every member of the Union (Mejer et al. 2010, According to Araújo et al. 2015: 14). According to Eurostat data (European Union Statistical Office), in several members of the Union, more than 90% of lower and higher secondary education was taught English (with the exception of Hungary and Portugal), while the percentage of higher secondary education students

who learn French And German were lower: 24% and 21% respectively (Eurostat 2015, According to Araújo et al. 2015: 15).

However, European Union language initiatives do not consider that English is the only language beneficial for the personal and professional development of the individual – the Union citizen (Araújo et al. 2015: 15). Its language policy and planning emphasize the importance of multilingualism and linguistic diversity. The Framework Strategy for Multilingualism stated that a number of important actions should be taken in this direction: to emphasize the importance of languages for personal and professional development, especially in the context of the job; to encourage citizens to learn and use more languages; to ensure that the citizens of the Union have access to legal procedures and information in their native languages (European Commission 2005, According to Araújo et al. 2015: 15).

As regards the connection between foreign language and employment, the European Commission has found that language skills increase the opportunity to get a job; competences in more foreign languages increase the competitiveness of individuals in the labor market, and companies who hire are increasingly paying attention to how many foreign languages the candidates use (European Commission 2008a, According to Araújo et al. 2015: 15). A review of some relevant knowledge about the connection of knowledge of foreign languages and employment will be given in the next section.

Finally, we can note that, in case that the countries of the Western Balkans region really want to join the EU, they must not only accept its values in words only, but they also have to systematically implement the guidelines arising out of its policy, and explicate them at the level of their institutions in an appropriate manner. Language policy and planning cannot be excluded from these directions and formatting.

# Languages and employability

04





In this section we will look at some relevant data on the relationship of language knowledge, primarily of foreign languages, and employability, with special emphasis on European Union countries, mainly using the European Commission's data published in the Languages for Jobs (European Commission 2010) study.

Employability, as a reason for gaining competences in foreign languages, is not an achievement of the XXI century, but it is a phenomenon that can be observed in previous centuries (Canning 2009: 3). The knowledge of language as a need of administration and business was a common topic of discussion in the *Modern Language Journal*, which has been issued in the United States, since the beginning of its release of 1916, although in the United States and Great Britain, modern foreign languages were observed as not particularly important for dealing with other disciplines, such as then far more



popular classical sciences (Starck 1957, According to Canning 2009: 3). At the time, the languages they which were studied were primarily classical Greek and Latin, and mastering them was considered a part of education and should have provided the basis for further education in other areas, such as law, medicine, philosophy, philology, theology, etc. (Durbaba 2011: 93). Living foreign languages, therefore, were not considered important for education, nor for dealing with individual professions. They were mastered only by members of individual professions that, at that time which was characterized by incomparably lower mobility than today, in direct contact with foreigners, such as, for example, traders (Bugarski 2009: 13).

But with beginning of the XX century, the knowledge of modern foreign languages became an important request for studying of a whole series of disciplines. Students at Oxford University, for instance, in the XIX century, had to read compulsory professional literature in French, which meant that in

addition to their native language-English, they were obligated to master French (Darby 1983: 19, According to Canning 2009: 3). In the nineteenth-century Germany, science was rapidly evolving, the results of scientists from the country became internationally relevant, so scientists from other countries, from various areas of knowledge, simply had to learn German, so they could follow the literature written in it and to be informed of new scientific achievements (Starck 1957: 811, According to Canning 2009: 3). It is known that today, for every scientist, it is necessary to master internationally widespread foreign languages, especially those that are relevant to their research field, but we see that even in the XIX century, it was absolutely necessary for the high-educated elite to devote themselves to learning languages.

Looking historically, the notion of individuals who possess the skills of knowledge of foreign languages versus those who are professionals for foreign languages (e.g. professors, translators,



etc.) has to do with gender differences (Canning 2009: 4). As L. Gaudin noticed, researching the job ads that were offered to graduate students in the USA in the 60's of XX century, the girls who finished foreign languages had very favorable opportunities for employment in the secretariat of the State Affairs (Gaudin 1960: 199, According to Canning 2009: 4). And some of the advertised jobs "for men" (engineers, economists and etc.) also demanded the knowledge of foreign languages, but even 147 ads for the work "for girls" required a mandatory knowledge of French.



This discrimination on the gender basis is no longer permitted in the United States, but it is interesting to notice that in the 60's of the past century there was the notion that women are primarily "experts for languages", while men are those who are only add languages to their basic occupations (Canning 2009: 4). This kind of notion, to a certain extent, survived until today. At universities in Great Britain, for example, in 2007, 72.1% of candidates for European language programs were women (Universities and Colleges Admission Service 2007, According to Canning 2009: 4). We can also notice similar tendencies in the Western Balkan countries today, at the threshold of the third decade of the XXI century. Students of philological and other faculties studying foreign languages are mostly women, and in popular belief, as if the idea still persists that languages are something that women should deal with. It is therefore important that all activities of language policy and planning among other parameters specifically take into account such potentially discriminatory ideas and to address them in a proper way.

Although some of the characteristics of the relation between the knowledge of foreign languages and employability from this brief historical review exist in some form today, most of the once important dichotomy in the field has vanished today. It's not just members of the highly educated elite who have to learn foreign languages. Women are not the only ones who deal with languages for their own business. In the modern world, language skills become one of the key elements for acquiring and maintaining work for each individual. Below, we will present some relevant data that illustrates this, according to the situation in this sphere in the European Union.

**Photo above:** <https://www.lingostan.com/en/articles/is-it-true-that-british-people-dont-like-to-learn-foreign-languages.php>

Employers from European Union countries believe that language skills are one of the most important preconditions for successful obtaining of employment by an individual, after the graduation (European Commission 2010: 13). A Eurobarometer study from ten years ago (Eurobarometer 304, 2010, According to European Commission 2010: 13), established that 40% of employees from the Human Resources Department of European companies, from the industrial sector, underline the importance of language skills for the employment of highly educated graduates. However, in Europe awareness of the importance of language skills is not the same in all countries. According to the data provided by Eurobarometer, it is lower in the United Kingdom than in the rest of Europe (European Commission 2010: 13). We can assume that the reason for this is that the country is certainly speaking English, which dominates the world market, and employers and employees believe they do not need multilingualism for successful international business, i.e. give it less

importance than their counterparts from other European countries. Yet, things have changed in this field in the United Kingdom, as the study of Mulkerne and Graham shows (2011, According to European Commission 2010: 13). These researchers have found 2000 requests for knowledge of as many as 20 different languages in employment advertisements for a period of three months.

Not only are the employers those who consider language skills an important precondition for obtaining a job. The candidates themselves are aware of how much their language skills will be necessary during employment. The conclusions of many studies show it clearly. As an example, we can specify one study conducted in Latvia (Grasmane & Grasmane 2011), in which students participated, graduated with the master and doctors of Science from Latvian Agriculture University. Respondents showed that they are aware of the importance of knowledge of foreign languages for mobility and employability in European Union countries. Those respondents who had lower levels of competences in foreign languages did not show the willingness to be employed in other countries of the Union, believing they lacked language skills and that it would be a restricting factor.

Requirements for possession of language skills with employees vary in relation to position and job in the company (European Commission 2010: 13).<sup>6</sup> The CEMS Group conducted a research on this topic (Diot-Cook et al. 2000, According to European Commission 2010: 13). The findings of the survey suggest that a great knowledge of at least English language is necessary for management positions in companies with international operations. For sales and marketing positions, multilingualism is important, but also the skills of negotiation and being fluent in several languages. For positions in production, logistics, economy and finances in terms of language skills, it is not required, in general, nothing more than good skills in English language. However, the mentioned study confirms that knowledge



**English is certainly the most important language for international exchanges of any kind and knowledge of English is increasingly considered one of the basic skills.**

6) Information of the European Commission on publishing its study Languages for Jobs, whose relevant conclusions are reviewed and cited in this chapter, indicate that the year of the publication of the study is 2010. However, we see that it occasionally quotes also some literature for which the year of publication is cited as 2011. This could lead to a conclusion that the EC's study Languages for Jobs was actually published later. We assume, however, that it is published in 2010, that the European Commission's information on its publishing is valid, and that the cited literature is from 2011. At the time of writing, the study was actually in the process of publishing, and then it was reliable that it would be published in 2011, so it was attributed to that year, instead of the label in press, forthcoming or similar.



of more than one foreign language is an indication of cultural openness and ability to adapt.

When smaller companies grow and slowly become international, they gradually begin to understand the importance of language barriers and what is necessary to overcome these barriers, and that is the knowledge of foreign languages (European Commission 2010: 14). European Commission study from 2011, for example, showed that small businesses must communicate with clients and suppliers in foreign markets too, which also requires that employees have language skills (European Commission 2011, According to European Commission 2010: 14).<sup>7</sup>

The importance of having a company language strategy is highlighted in the PIMLICO Report (European Commission 2010: 14). This report was the first phase in the European Commission's initiative, which concerned the promotion of greater and more efficient use of language management in small and medium enterprises in the European Union. The report highlighted the good practice of 40 European small and medium enterprises, which were selected to display data based on the growth of their business, which was the result of their successful language strategy, that is, employment of multilingual individuals.

English is certainly the most important language for international exchanges of any kind, including business, and knowledge of English is increasingly considered one of the basic skills (European Commission 2010:

15). However, according to the European Business Forum for Multilingualism Study, knowledge of English language only is not sufficient; competences in other foreign languages are increasingly making the difference between mediocrity and excellence, and significantly increasing competitiveness (European Commission 2008). In a large part of Europe, but also outside of it, the knowledge of English is only the basic skill, one of the basic components of education, which makes the knowledge of other foreign languages a significant advantage (European Commission 2010: 15).

The comprehensive study of ELAN (European Commission 2006, According to European Commission 2010: 15) analyzed nearly 2000 small and medium-sized enterprises in the European Union during 2006, and it determined that, besides the knowledge of the English language, what companies seek the most is the knowledge of French, Russian and Spanish. Globalization flows are rapidly changing the international trade and business scene, so that many markets are increasingly gaining importance – China, Japan, India, Brazil, Arab countries, etc. (European Commission 2010: 15). All these emerging markets are becoming very important for the European Union, which is directly reflected in the importance of the languages spoken in the territories of those States. Therefore, in addition to English, many other international languages (Chinese, Arabic, Russian, Spanish, Portuguese...) become very important for international business, and their knowledge becomes more sought.

One European study on the relationship of foreign languages and employability from several years ago (Beadle et al. 2015), it is determined that English is the most important foreign language for employment, but that many other foreign languages are also very important. Between a fifth and a quarter of employers surveyed, said other languages are even more important

<sup>7</sup>) See previous footnote.

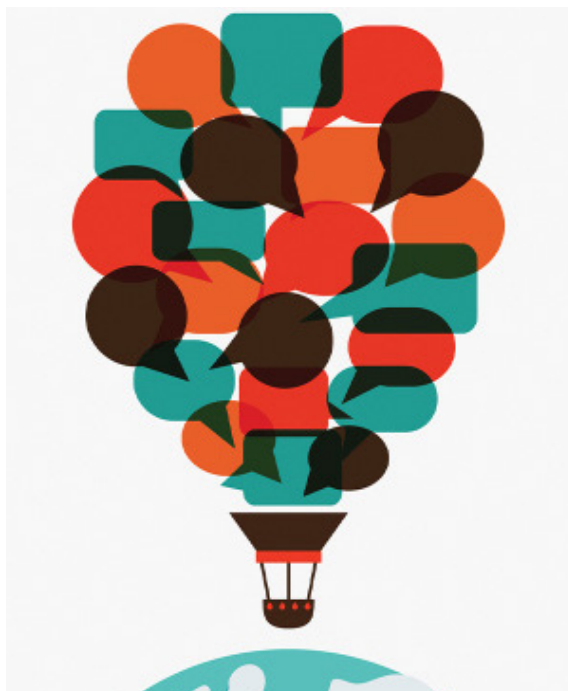


Photo: <https://blogs.ibo.org/blog/2019/09/25/learning-another-language/>

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### – The importance of multilingualism

Between a fifth and a quarter of employers surveyed, said other languages are even more important than English. Among them, the most commonly mentioned are German, French and Russian.

than English. Among them, the most commonly mentioned are German, French and Russian. When asked about which foreign language is their second most important, employers commonly cited German, Russian, English, French, Spanish, and Italian. Many cited also the languages of smaller countries, which have fewer speakers, but that can be of great regional importance.

One more recent study on the relationship of foreign language and employability in Portugal, specifically – in the city of Vize and the surroundings (Costa Lopes et al. 2018), shows that the knowledge of foreign languages is an element that can create good opportunities for employment. This knowledge is an added value for employment candidates and a positive factor for career advancement. When candidates have the same competences, knowledge of foreign languages can make the difference between them. English is certainly the most wanted foreign language, but other languages are also highly appreciated, in the

first place French, German, Dutch and Italian. Knowledge of two or more foreign languages may be particularly appreciated. Language skills allow candidates to become employed in better positions, and for those who are already employed in the company, to advance. The positions which require the knowledge of foreign languages the most, are management, company's administrative committees, consultancy services, commercial

and so-called back office sectors.

In general, the requirements of knowledge of different foreign languages in the European Union vary from country to country, depending on the needs of the market. M. Kelly (2013: 266) provides examples of different representation of foreign languages in schools of different European countries, which he is connecting to market needs. In Denmark, all

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**Companies that require employees to possess language skills also require employees to be able to put those skills into practice across a range of situations in work.**

schools must offer German lessons, and French is added starting from 13 years of age. In Sweden, as a second foreign language, French, Spanish or German are taught in schools. In Cyprus, high schools must offer classes of French, German, Italian, Spanish, Turkish and Russian. High schools in Malta must offer Italian, French, German, Spanish, Arabic and Russian. Students in Lithuania can choose between French and German during primary education. In England and Wales schools, schools have a high level of autonomy and can offer lessons in any greater European or world language.

The abovementioned PIMLICO Report (European Commission 2010: 14) lists many examples of companies that have strategically used the knowledge of languages in order to expand their international business. These companies have penetrated a large number of markets at the same time, thanks to multilingualism. In order to achieve this goal, they employed the original speakers of various languages, or experts who speak those languages, whether permanently or only for a limited time, for the purpose of doing some specific work.

Members of the European Union report on the growing demand for bilingual specialists in border areas, with the aim of developing cross-border trade, but also ensuring social services to citizens living on the relation between neighboring countries (European Commission 2010: 17). As an example, reports of the Austrian Institute for Education for Business (Institute für Bildungsforschung der Wirtschaft 2008, According to European Commission 2010: 17), dealing with the needs of Austrian business and foreign trade in the future, can be cited here. These reports clearly show that the English language will not be enough for business in Central and Eastern Europe, but also German and Russian will have to be added to it, and certainly Czech, Slovak, Hungarian and Slovenian will be welcomed.

In addition to European languages of regional importance, increasingly important for the European Union market will also be the languages immigrants bring with them. Estimates from the previous decade indicate that at least 175 nationalities live in the Union

(European Commission 2010: 18), and the assumption is that this number has grown over the past years and can be expected to grow further. Therefore, the workforce in European countries is becoming more multilingual. One of the illustrative examples of this is London's Heathrow International Airport, as demonstrated by the research of relevant British and London institutions (European Commission 2010: 18). A sample of 150 employees at the airport identified 27 of their native languages, and during interviews the respondents spoke in even 45 different languages. The survey also includes recommendations on how to use that huge resource of multilingualism. The awareness of the multilingualism potential and the ability to use the language strategically, can serve as a good example to many other working organizations with workforce that is varied in terms of language (European Commission 2010: 18).

Companies requiring employees to have language skills at the same time require that employees be able to effectively apply these skills in a whole series of working situations, but also to necessarily possess excellent communication skills, regardless of the language they speak (European Commission 2010: 19). Because of such requests, the European Union had to standardize the evaluation of language skills. The various mechanisms have been handed and adopted for these purposes, but the most widely spread is the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (ZEP 2003, European Commission 2010: 19). The document, prepared by the Council of Europe, served as a common basis for the development of foreign language curriculum, examinations and tests, textbooks



**When it comes to foreign language that employers consider to be the most important for their company, candidates are required to have a high (C1 – C2) or intermediate level of competences (B1 – B2).**

and other didactic materials, etc. It clearly presents what students need to know in order to achieve a certain level of competencies in the foreign language, and what every specific level allows them to achieve in communication terms. In some European Union members, this framework has been further developed in such a way that the standards of language competence for certain types of jobs have been established (European Commission 2010: 20).

The abovementioned European study on the relationship between foreign languages and employability (Beadle et al. 2015) has also demonstrated specifically the level of competences in foreign languages, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, required for the jobs. First of all, employers tend to require a higher level of oral than written language skills, especially for those working positions related to processing of clients' demands and communication with them (customer service). When it comes to foreign language that employers consider to be the most important for their company, candidates are required to have a high (C1 – C2) or intermediate level of competences (B1 – B2). The employees are expected to communicate with the native speakers of those languages. When it comes to foreign language which is the second most important for an employer, the intermediate level of competencies (B1 – B2) is usually required, both in oral and written expression. However, a significant number of employers in this case are satisfied with the lower level of competences (A1-A2),

expecting from the employee only to transfer short and simple written and oral messages in a foreign language.

From this review of information on the relationship of knowledge of foreign languages and employability in the European context, we see that, for the employability, language skills are one of the crucial factors and that the need for diversity of foreign languages is far beyond being satisfied with the knowledge of only one of them – English. Our study, in the following section, will address the importance of the knowledge of foreign languages for the employability and mobility of young people in the Western Balkan countries, with the aim of emphasizing the significant role of language exchange in the sphere.





**First photo on the left:** <http://erfarail.eu/news/a-single-language-for-the-single-european-railway-area>



# Literature Review

05





The impact of language exchange on improvement of the language competences of youth, and subsequently, improving of their mobility and employability, has not been a topic of research in the Western Balkan countries. Yet, some aspects of that topic, such as the language exchange (elsewhere in the world), and the mobility and employability of young people in the Western Balkans, on the other hand, were the objects of individually published studies. In this chapter, we will present an overview of some of these researches, whose conclusions are relevant for the analysis that we carried out during this study.

According to Beaven and associates (2017: 128-129), the method of learning foreign languages known as tandem or language exchange has been subject to numerous researches.<sup>8</sup> This is also related to the tandems organized in the

real, but also in the virtual space (see Cziko 2004, Lewis & Walker 2003, Vasallo & Telles 2006). Some researchers have analyzed the language exchange as a situation in which intercultural learning is conducted (see Brammerts 2003, Guth & Helm 2010, O'Dowd 2007). The topic of some researches was also the interaction between the exchange participants and the feedback which they provide to each other (see Bruen & Sudhershnan 2015), then the motivation and engagement of the participant (see Also Bruen and Sudhershnan 2015), and the impact of language exchange on improvement of language, intercultural and digital skills of the participants (see Gajek 2014, mention & Gil-Salom 2016). A possible reason for the language exchange researchers' interest is that it represents a phenomenon that provides possibilities for the advancement of language competences and for improvement of digital literacy (see Dooly and O'Dowd 2012).

Beaven and associates (2017) have dealt primarily with the speech skills of the participants in the language exchange. The subject of their study was the twelve-week exchange program that enabled participants to practice precisely that skill. They were undergraduate students who have a A2 level of competences in foreign languages and who have agreed to participate in the online language exchange program with partners. The mentioned survey focused on their motivation for participation and engagement in the exchange process. The authors of the study claim that the language exchange program allows participants to feel that their learning belongs to them and to personalize it in a certain way, and that the whole process is a bridge between formal and informal education. However, as the authors conclude, despite interest and even enjoyment in this kind of experience, it is not completely free of stress and requires determination and autonomy, if a positive and sustainable learning result is to be achieved.

A. Acar and H. Kobayashi (2011) surveyed primary factors affecting the activities of the language exchange, with the aim of demonstrating which of them are correlated to its success. A sample of their research consisted of 64 English students who created profiles on the language exchange webpages. The research has shown that partners in the process of language exchange are changing languages during communication, rarely follow a pre-defined lesson



8) We cite all the researches in this paragraph according to Beaven et al. 2017.

plan and almost never correct each other with speech and grammar errors. The results of the survey also point to a narrow link between topics that are discussed with the exchange partner and the feeling of satisfaction with that partner.

A. Brinckwirth (2012) explores the language exchange in the form of tele-tandem involving students from the University of the United States (native English language speakers) and from Brazil (native speakers of Portuguese language). This author shows that tele-tandem can be a good way to use computer technology in the process of language learning by the tandem method. His research shed light on a number of factors affecting the implementation of this kind of learning, such as the pedagogical process. In this study, the case states that small schools and faculties in the United States and in Latin America are adequately equipped to implement

such activities, but that good international cooperation between individual institutions can be a good example and encourage others to be interested in similar activities and undertake the necessary steps to implement them. The results of the study indicate that the efficacy of the tele-tandem varies from student to student. The factor that affects this is primarily the student's readiness and openness to cooperate with the partner in the tandem. Some students initially demonstrated resistance to such activities, but then gradually, during the ten weeks that the program lasted, they opened and increasingly became interested in the active participation in the exchange. The study revealed that students with partners have achieved solid communication, in which they have considered numerous culture specific topics, thus introducing the cultural characteristics of the culture and in a certain way involved in the process of transculturality – a



A. Brinckwirth

This author shows that tele-tandem can be a good way to use computer technology in the process of language learning by the tandem method. His research shed light on a number of factors affecting the implementation of this kind of learning, such as the pedagogical process.



**Beaven and associates**

*"The method of learning a foreign language known as tandem or linguistic exchange has been the subject of numerous studies so far."*



**Dooly and O'Dowd 2012**

*"This book provides a guide to interacting with an online environment to improve your foreign language skills."*



Director of Applied Intercultural University, include language teaching and citizenship of Applied Intercultural University

**Bruen & Sudhershan 2015**

*"Bruen & Sudhershan's research topic was the interaction between exchange participants and the feedback they provide to each other."*

**In recent years, language exchange has become an increasingly relevant subject of research in glottodidactics, applied linguistics, and various other fields of L2 adoption.**

phenomenon that occurs when two different languages and their related cultures come in direct contact.

K. Nishizumi and S. Morikawa (2018) report on the language exchange program that started at Shiba University in April 2017. More than 100 university students participated, as did two professors and a member of the university staff. In total, fourteen languages were in use in the exchange process, including those which are not taught at Shiba University (Japanese, Chinese, Korean, English, German, French, Portuguese, Arabic, Greek etc.). The report focuses on the first semester of exchange, particularly on the motives for launching the program, on its background and its most important features, the steps taken to implement it, but also to the students' responses to the questionnaire regarding their experience of participation in the program. The report also provides recommendations for future organizing of the language exchange program and their research. The authors conclude that the program has started well, but additional steps must be taken for the purpose of its maximization. They believe future research should focus on factors affecting the motivation of students to participate in the program, or to the question of how to get students to feel more independent and aware of their roles in the language exchange process.

In recent years, the language exchange has become a more relevant subject of research in Glottodidactics, Applied Linguistics and various other areas dealing with

L2, so, apart from individual articles, several thematic proceedings have been published of interdisciplinary character dedicated to linguistic exchange. One of the most comprehensive and most reviewed publications of this type were organized by H. Funk and associates (2017). In it, several different but mutually complementary articles set up theoretical fundamentals and offer terminology solutions of the language exchange, especially in virtual space, but also give concrete practical advice for successful organizing of language exchange platforms. The first part of the proceedings is aimed at pedagogical guidance and principles of organizing exchanges, the second presents texts about various aspects of the interaction between the participants in the exchange, while the third part deals with concrete virtual platforms for language exchanges in contexts of certain universities, as with experiences and recommendations. Although the subject of this, as well as of some of the related, more important thematic proceedings (v. Dooly & O'Dowd



2012), is the language exchange in virtual space, the results of the research presented in them were a good theoretical basis for structuring of this study.

As regards the term of employability (one of the central terms of this research, in addition to the term of mobility, language exchange and youth), especially placed in the context of the Western Balkans, the research we have relied on the most is the one that was conducted in 2017 and published by the team of Belgrade Open School (Skiljevic 2017). It is a Portfolio that summarizes the results of the analysis conducted in the six Western Balkan countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, Northern Macedonia and Serbia), which relate to the key skills necessary for the successful inclusion of youth in the labor market, i.e. methods for the development of these skills. In the next chapter, during the discussion of the results of our analysis, we will refer to the relevant findings of this



portfolio in appropriate places.

When it comes to the term of mobility, we rely on theoretical and terminology solutions made in the study by the authors of C. Berg and associates (2013), the conclusions on the mobility of youth in the Western Balkans (Popovic and Gligorovic 2016), as the insights of the connection of mobility and employability of young people, provided by Eurodesk's Research (2015). The latter research is especially relevant for our analysis, since it brings an overview of a large number of relevant European studies on projects of student mobility and their influence on the employability of young people.



# Discussion

06





**In all six countries of the Western Balkans, communication skills, teamwork and foreign language skills are the most important employability skills.**

As we have cited in the second chapter of this study (see Section 2.3), in the Portfolio on Youth Employability in the Western Balkans published by the Belgrade Open School, a total of 11 skills that together form the concept of employment, i.e. the skills necessary for each individual who pretends to be competitive in the labor market (v. Skiljevic 2017: 29-31). The list of these 11 skills was targeted by the analysis of relevant studies on employability and various aspects of employability in the Western Balkan countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, Northern Macedonia and Serbia). The basic question of analyzed studies has been the skills and competences needed for young people to find and maintain employment (Skiljevic 2017: 25). Some studies have asked the employers, while others focused on obtaining responses from the unemployed young people themselves. The methodological practices of these studies were varied, but most of them used questionnaires in which employers cited what they expect from their future employees (Skiljevic 2017: 25).

From a variety of obtained data (which were later used to form 11 key skills), in all six Western Balkan countries, **the communication skills** were cited as the absolutely most important skills for employment, followed by **teamwork skills** and **knowledge of foreign languages** (Skiljevic 2017:





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### – The communication skills

The communication skills or communicative competence becomes a central place in the teaching and learning of foreign languages since the seventies of the XX century, since the gradual forming of the communicative method in teaching.

25–28). Unemployed young people in the Western Balkan countries, as well as their potential employers, believe that these three sets of skills are at the top of all that together makes the ability to find and retain the job.

If we assume that the language exchange positively affects these three skills, then it means that it directly improves the employability of young people. This assumption is the starting point of our research, so we will continue to discuss its results, arguing in addition to the positive impact of the language exchange on the employment of young people in the Western Balkan countries. The results of our research are partly based on empirical data obtained from respondents from Serbia, but we will strive to expand the discussion to the entire Western Balkan context.

Communication skills, as stated in the Belgrade Open School Portfolio, are the ability to clearly transfer information and ideas through various media to individuals or

groups in a manner that allows the listener to understand and retain information; it means the ability of active listening, clear connecting of ideas and skills and strategies in order to efficiently work with others; it includes the ability to assess the effectiveness of formal and informal communication (Skiljevic 2017: 29).

**The communication skills** or communicative competence becomes a central place in the

teaching and learning of foreign languages since the seventies of the XX century, since the gradual forming of the communicative method in teaching (v. Durbaba 2011: 100–102). The organization of teaching content, activities and tasks, and the whole concept of lessons is dedicated to the purpose of students' obtaining the communicative competences, i.e. their training to communicate in the target language, in real life situations

“

**When we talk about communication skills, we mean not only communication in foreign languages, but also improving communication skills as a much broader term.**

and with the native speakers of the target language. All this fits into the so-called “communicative twist”, which occurred in the seventies of the XX century in the studies of man and society (Durbaba 2011: 100), when communication became an essential integral aspect of the social action. Given the fact that communication skills are placed at the top of the list of the competences necessary for acquiring and maintaining employment, we can conclude that communication maintained the importance that the so-called “communicative twist” brought it until today.

It is necessary, however, to stress that when talking about communication skills, we are not only thinking of communicating in foreign languages. Although one of the key objectives of the language exchange is acquiring and strengthening of communication competencies in the target language, through activities that make language exchange one works on improving communication skills as a much wider notion, which, aside from the communication skills in foreign language, also improves the quality of communication in the mother tongue. In other words, through inclusion in language exchange activities, young people improve their overall communication skills, which contributes to improving their mobility and employability in the final.

How does language exchange influence the positive development of communication skills? First of all, the language exchange itself is a communicational phenomenon par excellence, communication is one of its core features. Each participant in the language exchange, whether he engages in 1-on-1 with the other participant, whether he is involved in a multi-member group in which the language exchange occurs, simply cannot not communicate.<sup>9</sup> Even those participants who come to the language exchange meetings and sit at a table dedicated to a specific language, but decide not to participate actively in the conversation – communicate. With their presence and showing interest in the language exchange, they send out the other participants a specific message and communicate with them.

Communication is, therefore, mandatory integral element of language exchange. Consequently, participants in it are necessarily engaging their



9) In the social and humanistic sciences, it has long been established that it is simply impossible not to communicate. Every individual by his or her appearance is involved in communication (Watzlawick 2007: 53; cited by Koch 2017: 124).

communication skills and have the opportunity to practice, modify and improve them.

The previous studies on language exchange, as we saw in the chapter on the literature review, were more engaged in other aspects than the communication skills of the participant in exchange in the broadest sense of the word. However, our analysis of the answers we received from the participants explicitly shows that they themselves believe that they have greatly improved their general communication skills by participating in language exchange. As much as fifteen out of the twenty of our respondents said that in their answers. For the purpose of illustration, we cite several examples:

RE 1, F:

The participation in the Polyglot Club, among other things, helped me improve the way I communicate with people...

RE 13, F:

... and I became much freer in communication, whatever language I speak...

RE 19, M:

The communication keeps flowing, which is very

important to me too.

Communication skills are known to be a complex set of skills which, inter alia, is related to the structure of personality. Introvert personalities, generally speaking, have more challenges to build and improve their communication skills. The testimonies of some of our respondents show that a language exchange has helped them overcome their introversion and engage in working on their communication skills:

RE 2, M:

These events also helped me break some of the barriers in socializing with other people...

RE 14, F:

I finally came out of my comfort zone, and I dared to communicate with people, although I consider myself a pretty shy person...

RE 20, M:

I have always had problems with socializing, so Polyglot helped me gradually overcome this...

Although the basic purpose of the language exchange is acquiring communication competences in the target language, our analysis indicates that the benefits of participation in it greatly exceed that purpose and enable participants to acquire and/or improve their general communication skills, freeing themselves from some factors that were limiting them.

Since the communication skills are at the very top of the list of skills necessary for employability in all western Balkan countries (Skiljevic 2017: 25-28), we can establish that organizing language exchanges in these environments would provide the opportunity for young people to acquire and improve these skills, as it is already the case of Serbia, i.e. the language exchange organized under the umbrella of "Polyglot Club Serbia". Namely, as it is noted in the Belgrade Open School Portfolio (Skiljevic 2017: 11 et passim), formal education in the Western Balkan countries does not give young people the opportunity to develop skills necessary for employment, so that organizing informal programs that would address these skills more than welcome. In some of the previous programs of youth training in order to strengthen their employability in the Western Balkan



**By engaging in language exchange activities, young people improve their overall communication skills, which contributes to improving their mobility and employability.**

**The language exchange itself is a communicational phenomenon par excellence, communication is one of its core features.**

countries (e.g., PRAKSAM in Montenegro, Skiljevic 2017: 47), certain attention has also been dedicated to communication skills.

These programs, however, were intended for relatively limited groups of young people, organized in only one country, i.e. the city, and were on one-time basis. In addition, they included a very wide range of skills needed to improve employability. On the other hand, organizing language exchange within the Polyglot Club could represent a regular and long-lasting supplement to such and similar future programs, bringing many advantages: it would be open to all interested young people, informal (admission to the program is not needed, nor any kind of registration), regularly organized, etc. Moreover, in contrast to other programs, the language exchange under the umbrella of the Polyglot Club would focus, as we have already mentioned, primarily to three groups of skills – communication skills, teamwork skills and knowledge of foreign languages – so young people would have more room to work specifically on these skills than they would in other programs.

As regards the teamwork skills, as stated in the Belgrade Open School Portfolio, those are the skills of active participation in the team with the purpose of its directing towards fulfilling the objectives and the ability to act easily and efficiently within the group. These skills also include the ability of decision-making, defining objectives and limitations on the path to their

achievement, risk assessment and alternative solutions. Teamwork also requires co-operation, leadership and readiness to follow others (Skiljevic 2017: 29).

Just as the language exchange in its nature represents a communicative situation, it also necessarily involves participation in the team and, consequently, requires engaging of the teamwork skills of their participants. The positive influence of language exchange activities on the development of the teamwork skills was demonstrated by some previous researches. So, L. Koch (2017) emphasizes the reciprocity as one of the basic principles of language exchange, which necessarily involves cooperation among the participants. A. Brinckwirth (2012) concludes that participants in the English-Portuguese language exchange gradually developed their teamwork skills during the language exchange. Some among them even initially demonstrated the resistance to the activity, but engaged more actively later on. In the conclusions of their



research (2018), K. Nishizumi and S. Morikawa suggest that future studies of the language exchange, among other things, should focus on how the participants in the language exchange should feel more independent and aware of their own role in the process. The teamwork skills, therefore, are recognized as the relevant language exchange factor.

Our analysis of the answers we received from the respondents indicates that the language exchange positively affects the development of at least some of the aspects of teamwork. We will cite several examples that demonstrate that:

RE 12, F:

Cooperation among the people at the table is excellent, in time we began to function as a team.

RE 17, M:

People at the German table were very quick to agree and fit in. We function very well as a group.

RE 20, M:

We all have a common goal, which is to practice our English as much as possible. And when the goal is the same, people fit well.

We see that our respondents recognize that the language exchange meetings within the Polyglot Club helped them see its aspects that are directly connected to the teamwork skills and to use them to engage and improve these skills. Some respondents recognized and explicitly emphasized in their answers how important the language exchange is of cooperation between participants:

RE 6, F:

I am currently learning Russian language so, the optimistic members of the Club help me learn the new language and in each new encounter, I can apply new knowledge.

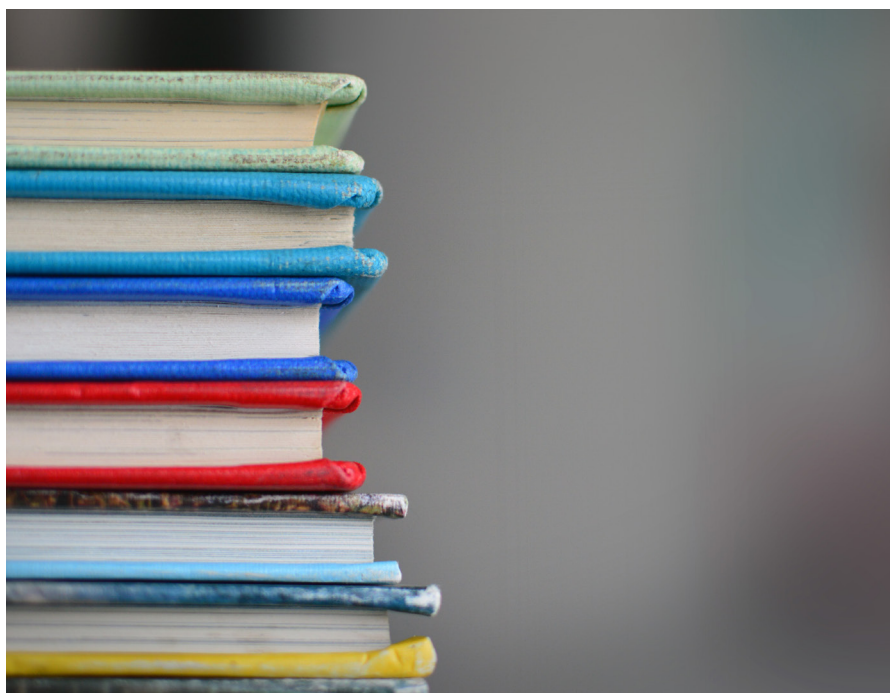
By participating in the language exchange activities, young people grow the habit to participate in the team and to structure their behavior according to team values, which will certainly be useful in situations when they are a part of their professional teams.

The language exchange is certainly primarily aimed at acquiring and improving communication competences in the target languages of the participants, which is the most direct possible way to connect with the third core skill from the list of skills required for employability - knowledge of foreign languages.

Various programs that are organized in the Western Balkan countries in recent years with the aim of improving the employability of young people (v. Skiljevic 2017: 38-42) are not oriented on the knowledge of foreign languages, but on some other, more general skills, such as mentioned communication skills and teamwork, but also on the skills of good CV writing, good preparation for job interviews, familiarity with workers' rights, etc. Since the knowledge of foreign languages still comes before many of these skills, we can conclude that organizing language exchange in Western Balkan countries should represent a regular supplement to all programs of this type in the future.

One possible reason for the remaining absence of a program that would focus solely on improving foreign language knowledge in youth is the fact that foreign languages are taught through the entire formal education, starting with preschool age, through primary and secondary school, to the university level. However, the language exchange, as we pointed out in the introduction chapter and as shown by other researches (v. Pujol 2012), represents supplement to formal language learning and cannot be considered redundant because young people already learn languages at school. On the contrary, it is a multi-beneficial addition to the school's language curriculum, which was proven by the researches so far (see Acar & Kobayashi 2011,





**Educational language policy in all Western Balkan countries shows great similarities when it comes to teaching foreign languages.**

Brinckwirth 2012, Dooly & O’Dowd 2012, Beaven et al 2017, Funk et al 2017, Nishizimi & Morikawa 2018), and which we are pointing out with this study.

Educational language policies in all Western Balkan countries show great similarities when it comes to foreign language courses, which is expected, given the fact that most of these countries are arising from a former joint state and that all of them have passed and are undergoing similar transition and approximation to European standards. In Serbia, starting 2005, it is mandatory to learn two foreign languages in formal education, the

first starting from the 1st grade, and the second starting from the 5th grade of elementary school (Filipovic 2009: 67). In Montenegro, the first foreign language is also starting in the 1st grade, and the second in the 6th grade.<sup>10</sup> In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the first foreign language, usually English, is taught from the 1st grade of elementary school, and the second foreign language is taught from the 5th grade (Kešetović 2017). In Croatia, since 2003/2004, the first foreign language is introduced in the 1st grade of elementary school, while the second is optional in the 4th grade (Buljan Culej 2012, According to Kosuta et al 2018: 5). As for

Northern Macedonia, elementary school students are taught English since the 1st grade of elementary school, and since the 4th grade, they start learning one of the local languages (so that Albanians must begin to learn Macedonian); the second foreign language, usually French or German, is introduced from the 6th grade.<sup>11</sup> In Albania, learning the first foreign language is offered from the 3rd grade of elementary school, while the second foreign language is introduced in the 6th grade.<sup>12</sup>

Such educational language policies in the Western Balkan countries, when it comes to foreign languages,

10) [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/montenegro/teaching-and-learning-single-structure-education\\_me](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/montenegro/teaching-and-learning-single-structure-education_me) (last visited on 13.10.2019)

11) <https://bop.unibe.ch/linguistik-online/article/view/1374/2320> (last visited on 13.10.2019)

12) <https://rm.coe.int/language-education-policy-profile-albania-country-report/16807b3b2d> (last visited on 13.10.2019)



are fully in line with the European language policy, which stipulates that the citizens of the European Union, apart from their mother tongue (or more than one, if they are multilinguals), learn at least two foreign languages through formal education (v. Filipovic 2009: 70-72). Although the formal language policy of Western Balkan countries is designed to allow young people to gain competency in two foreign languages, we are witnessing the fact that in practice this concept is not fully realized and that young people come out of the schooling system with underdeveloped foreign languages skills. Surveys conducted by interviewing of young people show that they do not have sufficient competences necessary for employability, which certainly includes knowledge of foreign languages (v. Skiljevic 2017: 11). In addition, in the informal language market, more and more courses are offered every day, many of whom are specialized for business use of foreign languages ("Business English", "Business German", "German for health workers" etc.). And even a brief Internet search reveals dozens of private schools that offer these courses in the Western Balkan countries. One of the reasons why supplementing of formal language classes with the informal ones is necessary, is that the foreign language curriculum of the Western Balkans still follows somewhat obsolete methods,

not putting enough focus on the communication competency in the lessons (v. Durbaba 2011: 93). Young people feel they lack communication in the target language, especially with the native speakers, and that school classes cannot provide them with this.

In this sense, organizing language exchange is a significant supplement to the school teaching of foreign languages, because the exchange participants are enabled to engage in activities that address in the most direct possible way the strengthening of communicative competencies in the target language.

Analysis of the answers we received from our respondents indicates that their participation in the events organized by "Polyglot Club Serbia" has greatly helped precisely with this:

IS 1, F:

I had a chance to communicate with German people on Polyglot, so I finally started practicing my German through communication, not just through exercises from the book.

IS 2, M:

... Contrary to regular courses, which I had had enough of, these events have allowed me to reduce focus to only grammar or translation and to turn to active use of languages, in contact with (often, but not always) native speakers of a language... Just owing to Polyglot, after half a year of learning Polish, I was able to speak it on a basic, but solid communication level.

RE 4, M:

... It was also useful to me because I developed the ability to communicate fluent in foreign languages even if I don't have an extremely rich vocabulary.

RE 5, M:

I started speaking two languages that I had only passive knowledge of, Portuguese and French, and strengthened my Spanish.

RE 7, M:

**Left photo:** <https://www.facebook.com/PolyglotClubSerbia>

**Right photo:** [www.mundolingo.org](http://www.mundolingo.org)

**Formal education in the Western Balkan countries does not provide young people with the opportunity to develop the skills needed for employability.**

... this is the place where I could practically apply the knowledge acquired during learning foreign languages.

RE 8, M:

Participation in the PCS primarily helped me to become fluent in communication in English, and then to turn my passive knowledge of other languages into active knowledge.

RE 11, F:

Participation in PCS has been quite useful to me... for practicing and maintaining of language knowledge.

RE 15, F:

I had only passive knowledge of Spanish, and thanks to coming to PCS, it has been transformed into an active knowledge long time ago.

RE 18, M:

... It's not like the class, you have a chance to say something, and you get a feedback from someone who knows better, which is a significant advantage. So I practiced my English and sometimes German and Italian, for which I have no chance at school and in courses.

As we see from these examples (of which there are plenty in our collected material), participants in the language exchange activities organized in the framework of "Polyglot Club Serbia" emphasize their advantages in comparison to the formal lectures, stating that they have acquired a certain communication competency in their target languages, and that they managed to turn their previous passive knowledge of

certain languages into an active one. Some respondents even explicitly emphasized that without participation in these activities, they could not advance in their knowledge of foreign languages:

RE 7, M:

Without Polyglot, I couldn't improve my foreign language level.

RE 14, F:

I would never have made so much progress in German if it wasn't for Polyglot.

RE 16, M:

To me, the Polyglot is indispensable for improving the level of spoken English.

Knowledge of foreign languages is essentially inseparable from familiarity with the cultures of the people who speak those languages, since the language and culture are inextricably connected (v. Filipovic 2009: 110-115). In this sense, the language exchange has long been recognized as an activity where intercultural dialogue occurs, i.e. in which participants, in addition to learning the language of the other and the characteristics of his culture, transfer the elements of their own culture (Brinckwirth 2012, Pujol 2012). Some authors (see especially Brinckwirth 2012) even claim that during the language exchange, the process of transculturalization is conducted, in which participants overcome the boundaries imposed by their own cultures, spread their horizons and become multicultural individuals.

Although intercultural competence is not listed as one of the key skills for the employability of young people

Photo: <https://www.facebook.com/PolyglotClubSerbia>



in the Western Balkans, we believe that it must also be taken as a relevant factor and in this context, as more and more working environments in this area are taking features of multi-cultural environments (such as branches of multinational companies, technical support centers, IT companies and other working environments in which jobs are performed by people of different nationalities, languages and cultures). Analysis of our respondents' answer indicates that they recognized the language exchange as a place where they have a unique opportunity to directly familiarize themselves with foreign cultures:

RE 6, F:

At the beginning, Polyglot helped me not to forget the culture of Brazil, as well as to get to know the culture of Portugal better.

RE 9, F:

I learned a lot about people in general, and about far away countries (Mexico, Peru).

RE 10, F:

This concept is not just a linguistical, it is also social and cultural.

RE 16, M:



**Knowledge of foreign languages and other cultures is one of the cornerstones for successful mobility of young people in Europe today, including the Western Balkans.**

I like that Polyglot is a unique cultural event, where I have the opportunity to meet other people and cultures.

Knowledge of foreign languages and other cultures is one of the key preconditions for the successful mobility of young people in Europe today, and in the Western Balkan countries (v. Popovic and Gligorovic 2016). Since the previous researches of the language exchange, as well as our analysis, show that it positively influences these two competences, we can conclude that organized implementation of the language exchange activities in Western Balkan countries will increase the potential for youth mobility, and that of students, as well as the one relating to professional activities. Some testimonies of the respondents that we analyzed expressly confirm that their participation in the language exchange had direct benefits for their mobility. We will cite several examples for illustrations:

RE 4, M:

It was very useful to me in New York recently. I spoke with the French and the Mexicans without any problems.

RE 12, F:

My trip to Austria for a semester owes a lot to the knowledge that I received at the Polyglot.

RE 20, M:

Since I recently went to the China to teach English, I can say that the occasional conversations with the native speakers of the Chinese on Polyglot prepared me very well for that.

In the course of this discussion of the research results, we have dealt with the individual skills and competences important for the employability and mobility of young people in the Western Balkans which, as we have seen, were very favorably influenced by the language exchange. We would emphasize, however, that our analysis shows that some respondents argued that their participation in the activities of "Polyglot Club Serbia" allowed them not only to strengthen their employability, but also to find the employment itself:

RE 1, F:

In the end, a girl who regularly came to the German desk recommended me for a job at the school where she teaches German, so now I'm employed there too.

**The dynamics of the language exchange can even enable work engagement, as a concrete realization of that potential.**

RE 5, M:

... And the current job I have... One part of the credit goes to those language events, because I have just freed myself there for French, and I got the courage to apply for a position where French is the working language.

RE 14, F:

... So I managed to get into the German call-center, only because of those contacts from the Club.

Therefore, we see that to young people, the dynamics of the language exchange, in addition to boosting employability and mobility, as a potential, can even enable work engagement, as a concrete realization of that potential.

At the end of this discussion, we would also highlight that the analysis of the answers we received from our respondents showed that the language exchange is not only a phenomenon that has a favorable impact on employability and mobility, which is primarily done by this study, but also a possibility for young people meet and connect with each other, demonstrating its significant social and psychological positive potential. This can be seen clearly from some of our respondents' answers:

RE 3, F:



... I had the opportunity to meet people with different profiles, including people who have the same enthusiasm as I do for languages.

RE 5, M:

I've met wonderful people, where I've gained friendships for life.

RE 15, F:

In addition to practicing languages, socializing with people is the nicest thing that Polyglot has given me.

This social dimension of language exchange (as well as

some other features, for example, economic, which our respondents also addressed in their responses, claiming that it means a lot to them that events are free) should be the subject of special future researches, whose results could also substantiate recommendations for the strategic organized introduction of the language exchange program in the Western Balkan countries. And the recommendations arising from the results of this survey will be presented in the next chapter.

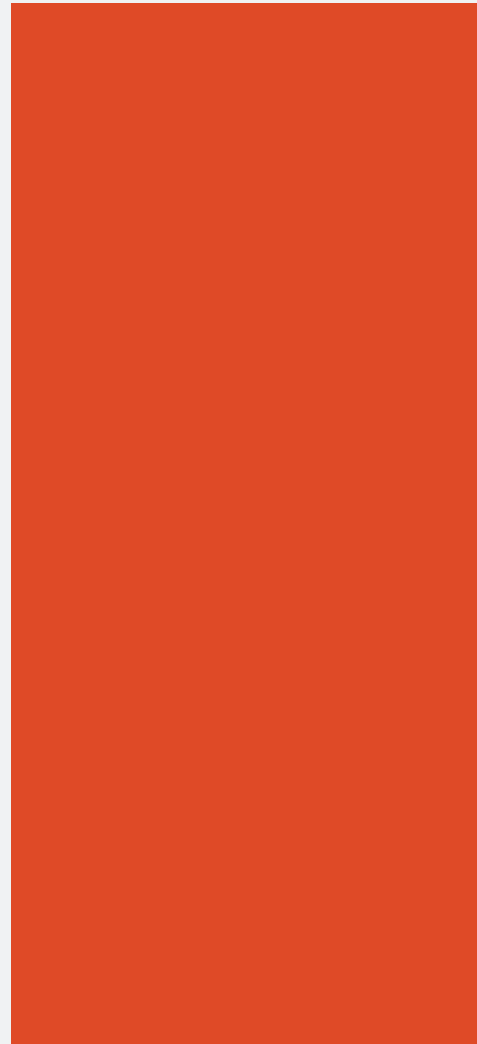


**Photo above:** <https://www.facebook.com/PolyglotClubSerbia>

**Photo below:** <https://www.facebook.com/PolyglotClubSerbia>

# Recommendations

07





**Young people in the Western Balkan countries do not possess sufficient language competencies, which they need for proper positioning in the labor market.**

There are clear indicators that informal education is positively influencing these competences, this problem has not been addressed at the regional level so far, i.e. taking into account the Western Balkan countries. The Western Balkan countries must embrace the linguistic diversity in their own territories and in the territory of all of Europe, on one hand, and the huge potential of youth, on the other hand, to make the two factors a serious competitive advantage, primarily in terms of strengthening the employability and mobility of young people.

The recommendations by which we are concluding by this study are composed based on the following items:

1. Analysis of the language situation in Europe and language policy and planning at the level of the European Union, with a special emphasis on educational language policy and planning;
2. Analysis of the language situation in the Western Balkans and language policy and planning in the Western Balkan states, with a special emphasis on educational language policy and planning;
3. The results of research on relationships between languages and employment and mobility, especially in the European context, and reports of European authorities on these researches, with special emphasis on the recommendations already mentioned in them (Araújo et al. 2015, Beadle et al. 2015, Canning 2009, Costa Lopes et al. 2018, Eurodesk 2015, European Commission 2008, 2010, Grasmann & Grasmann 2011, Kelly 2013, Popović &



- Gligorijević 2016, Skiljevic 2017);
4. Our theoretical and empirical study on the impact of language exchange on mobility and employability of youth in the Western Balkan countries.

The Western Balkan countries must embrace the linguistic diversity in their own territories and in the territory of all of Europe, on one hand, and the huge potential of youth, on the other hand, to make the two factors a serious competitive advantage, primarily in terms of strengthening the employability and mobility of young people.



Photo above: <https://balkaninsight.com/tag/western-balkans/>

In order to achieve this, it is necessary that the decision makers to jointly act at the level of official state authorities, at the local level, in the business sector, in education and in science. In that sense:

- Governments of the Western Balkan States should enable and encourage the teaching of a large number of foreign languages, including those of regional significance for the Western Balkans;
- Companies need a strategic way to use the potential of language skills of employees;
- Proper entities on national, regional and local level should cooperate with the business sector in the field of strategic use of the language skills of youth;
- All together should include in the existing European platforms that allow the exchange of good practices in the field of strengthening language skills for the purpose of employability, but also to create appropriate regional platforms with the same goal.

More specifically, the following measures should be taken into consideration:

#### **NATIONAL LEVEL**

Decision makers and competent State authorities at the national level in the Western Balkans countries should enable the teaching of foreign languages in formal education to be more efficient, especially in the following sense:

*Quantity:* more hours (i.e. school classes) dedicated to foreign languages; foreign language learning from earlier age; teaching foreign languages to as many pupils in as many schools possible (target: everyone and everywhere) within formal education;

*Quality:* Application of new methods in the teaching of foreign languages, especially CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning); continuous education and development of foreign language teachers; implementation of new information technologies and digitisation of foreign languages;

*Focus:* The results of foreign language teaching must be strongly, determinedly aimed at employability, mobility and personal development of young people; education system must co-operate better with the business sector, in order to respond to market demands;



*Guidance:* Students and their families must get appropriate guidance, by professionals, in all issues related to languages and their influence on mobility and employability;

*Monitoring:* Continuous systematical monitoring of the results of teaching foreign languages in formal education and supporting research in this field, in order to improve the results in the future and improve.

#### **LOCAL LEVEL**

Local authorities in the Western Balkan countries need to contribute to learning foreign languages in the context of strengthening the employability through the following measures:

*Connecting:* Public-private partnerships between schools and companies of local importance, with which students would be allowed, as part of the curriculum, to use the knowledge of languages in the companies; connecting different local self-governments to exchange experiences in the field of promoting foreign languages, but also exchanging students between different local communities;

*Encouraging:* Strengthening local awareness of the

importance of multilingualism and learning foreign languages through local campaigns; support to local companies in business with partners from other language speaking areas; strengthening the awareness of companies about the importance of hiring individuals who have high competences in foreign languages.

#### **COMPANY LEVEL**

Companies in the Western Balkan countries should contribute to learning foreign languages in the context of strengthening employability through the following measures:

*Management of language knowledge:* exploiting the existing human resources in the company in a better and more efficient way – examine which employees have which language skills and then efficiently organize the work; enabling employees to improve their knowledge of foreign languages by enrolling to courses and including them in other activities that contribute to the improvement of language skills;

*Employment policy:* employment of people with appropriate language skills;

*Cooperation with educational institutions, local authorities and non-governmental sector* in order to promote the importance of learning foreign languages, organizing practices for students and other activities useful for improving language skills.

When it comes to the activity of *LANGUAGE EXCHANGE*, as it has been analysed in this study, the following recommendations should be considered in order to use the potential of language exchange to strengthen the mobility and employment of young people in Western Balkans in the most efficient manner:

#### **NATIONAL LEVEL**

- Discuss the introduction of students' participation

in the language exchange as an integral part of the mandatory foreign languages lessons – the students would receive the appropriate scoring based on the number of language exchange meetings in which they participated, which would enter into the forming of their closing score from foreign languages;

- Engage foreign language teachers to participate in language exchange activities and educate them about all relevant issues related to language exchange;



- Encourage the research of language exchange and taking into account the results of those surveys to increase the effectiveness of language exchange.

#### **LOCAL LEVEL**

- Organise language exchange meetings in cooperation with educational institutions, non-governmental sector and companies; provide appropriate space for the language exchange meetings, especially in local cultural centers, youth offices, etc.;
- Promote language exchange meetings in local media, especially in electronic media and on social networks.

#### **COMPANY LEVEL**

- Participate in organizing language exchange meetings along with educational institutions, local authorities and non-governmental sector;
- Encourage employees to participate in language exchange meetings;
- Promote the importance of language skills for employability, giving positive examples from their own practice, through lectures and short promotions before the language exchange meetings;
- Support financially and logistically the language exchange meetings.

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**Photo above:** <https://www.facebook.com/PolyglotClubSerbia>

## 7.1 Sarajevo

**There is currently no history of organized language exchange in Sarajevo. There have been several attempts to probe the market by foreign language exchange organizations, but without specific events and results.**

Intensive desk research and visit to the location in October 2019 led us to the conclusion that there is currently no history of organized language exchange in Sarajevo. There have been several attempts to probe the market by foreign organizations for language exchange, but without specific events and results. Still, there is certain potential in Sarajevo for the establishment of the language exchange structures, especially given the popularity of Turkish and Arabic culture in the area. The existence of Turkish (Yunus Emre Institute, Anadolu University) and Arab ("King Fahd", representing the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Bosnia and Herzegovina) cultural centers, which offer even free language courses, the investments of these countries in BiH, and many tourists, i.e. native speakers from the Turkish and Arabic speaking area who visit Sarajevo, can greatly contribute to the organization of language exchange for these languages.

Potential partners from public and NGO sectors that could have key roles in the realization of the language exchange in Sarajevo include:

**Public institution of the Culture and Youth Center of Municipality Center Sarajevo**, since it has numerous events and gatherings (courses, schools, performances, projects, audio video production) that gather a large number of

Photo: <https://www.funtravelnis.rs/sarajevo/>





**There is some potential in Sarajevo for establishing language exchange structures, especially given the popularity of Turkish and Arab culture in the area.**

Photo: [https://www.flickr.com/photos/twiga\\_swala/6096985333](https://www.flickr.com/photos/twiga_swala/6096985333)

young people in one place, and the appropriate space for organization of language exchange.

#### **Institute for Youth Development**

**CULT**, that deals with improving the position of young people in society. Their vision, inter alia, states the following: "Citizens need to possess the knowledge and skills necessary to become responsible stakeholders in the social life. Providing them with this knowledge and skills means enabling them to be more than only observers of the changes that are occurring, but in accordance with their interests and possibilities, to contribute to the development of both personal and social progress.

That is, among other, the role of the NGO sector in the concept of civil society - to enable citizens for active inclusion, which is in accordance with the objectives of our project, as is of the program within which it is funded.

#### **The Youth Council of Federation**

**of BiH**, which represents the roof organization of youth from the Federation of BiH, which, in addition to the cantonal Youth Council, has 31 local youth Councils, 108 youth organizations and more than 1 000 active young people at different levels. Among other things, the Youth Council publicly advocates the interests and needs of the

youth, exchanging information, experiences and examples of good practice among the members, informally educate their members and other stakeholders involved in the issues of youth, etc. These activities, as well as the aim of improving the position of young people, are in accordance with the objectives of our project, as is the program within which it is funded.

## 7.2 Podgorica

**Something most similar to the language exchange that already exists in Podgorica would be Meetup Positive Conversations, where participants gather every other Thursday to talk about given topics.**

Intensive desk research and visit to the location in October 2019 indicate that there is currently no history of organized language exchanges in Podgorica. One Duolingo event was announced for January 2020, which would include English and German language. The most similar linguistic exchange that already exists in Podgorica would be the Meetup positive talks, where participants gather every other Thursday to talk to the predefined subject, but this is not a language exchange, although it may exist if there are foreigners.

Potential partners from public and NGO sectors that could have key roles in the realization of the language exchange in Podgorica include:

**Forum MNE**, whose vision is “a fair and peaceful society whose development is contributed to by the active young citizens”. The Forum develops and implements programs and projects that promote: informal education, youth work in the community, youth activism, EU values and democracy, children’s and human rights and youth policy. They implement all programs according to their 3 strategic directions:

- Advocating and lobbying for a better position of youth
- Recognition of informal education

Photo: <https://www.bhfieldschool.org/countries/montenegro/Montenegro-Capital-Cities>





**Potential partners from the public and NGO sectors who could play key roles in the implementation of language exchanges in Podgorica include: MNE Forum and Center for Civic Education (CCE).**

Photo: <https://balkaneu.com/montenegro-is-getting-closer-to-opening-chapter-27/>

- Strengthening of international cooperation

**Centre for Civic Education (CGO)** is a non-governmental and nonprofit organization, which is a vision of Montenegro as a democratic society of responsible citizens. They advocate continuous learning, teamwork, quality, tolerance and social change. The work of the CGO is organized through three main programs: Europeization and democratisation, human rights and active citizenship, and through these programs, hundreds of projects have been realized and different forms of expertise are provided to the numerous stakeholders.

## 7.3 Skopje

**A comprehensive desk research and a visit to Skopje in October 2019 led to the conclusion that organized language exchange already exist in Skopje.**

A comprehensive desk research and a visit to Skopje in October 2019 led to the conclusion that organized language exchange already exist in Skopje, which makes it somewhat easier to establish a language exchange structure in this city.

**The InterNations** organization has a group titled “**Skopje French-Spanish-German and more Group**”, which meets once a month for “enjoyment of food, live music and Language Exchange” **InterNations** is an international organization that links people living outside of the home countries for the purpose of socializing and easier living in foreign countries. This organization may prove to be a suitable partner for the establishment of YES Club Skopje, especially because of good connection with the native speakers.

**The Volunteer Center Skopje (VCS)** has also tried to establish a regular event called “Language Cafe”, but after some time these events have become sparse. VCS currently organizes only activity called “Language Karaoke”, where participants sing in foreign languages. The Volunteer Center Skopje is a non-governmental organization established by the former **EVS Volunteers (European Volunteer service)**, whose main activities include promoting volunteering,

Photo: [www.booking.com](http://www.booking.com)





**The organization that could be a partner in establishing YES Club Skopje is InterNations - an international organization that connects people living outside their home countries for the purpose of socializing and facilitating foreign countries.**

Photo: <https://emerging-europe.com/news/western-balkan-growth-accelerates-but-more-new-jobs-are-needed/attachment/skopje-macedonia-july-2nd-2018-tourist-crossing-a-bridge-wi/>

informal education, active citizenship, career development and building of youth capacities. Their main goal is to connect young people on various grounds, regardless of their national, racial, religious, political and economic status. VCS is also accredited by EVS, which means that it receives volunteers from various European countries. It is also participating in **Erasmus +**, funded by the European Commission. VCS may be a valuable partner in forming a language exchange structure in Skopje, since its operations are fully in accordance with the values of the language exchange concept, as is the program within

which it is funded. It is also very convenient that the organization has volunteers from other foreign language speaking areas, as well as an apparent interest in language exchange activities.

**The Centre for Intercultural Dialogue** is another organization from Skopje that could be considered a potential partner. The CID's mission is to promote and support intercultural understanding and cooperation, peace and solidarity through the active participation of youth in society, especially through volunteer activities at the local and international level. This organization

is particularly interesting because of its participation in the drafting of the BOS Regional Portfolio of the Youth Employability Skills 2017, which deals with key skills for the employment of young people, and which was one of the bases for this Study and project. It is also important that it gathers a large number of young people from the country and abroad through volunteer practices.

## 7.4 Tirana

**In Tirana, there were also organized language exchanges, called “Multi-Languages Café”. This initiative was organized by language enthusiasts, and focused on informal learning and based on discussions, debates, role-playing and exchange between national and international institutions.**

In Tirana, there were also organized language exchanges, called “Multi-Languages Café”. This initiative was organized by language enthusiasts, and focused on informal learning and based on discussions, debates, role-playing and exchange between national and international institutions. It took place at the youth center in Tirana, but ceased in late 2018.

Potential partners who would have key roles in the realization of the language exchange in Tirana would be:

**Beyond Barriers** is a national association of young people. It is a volunteer, non-profit NGO that protects the rights and interests of the youth. Their activities include: training and capacity building, seminars and youth exchanges, volunteer work, advocacy of human rights, inclusion and social development. Beyond Barriers organizes recreational and cultural activities where young people can meet, discuss their problems and values, and thus acquire new social skills, become more communicative and flexible. This organization is particularly interesting because of its participation in the drafting of the BOS Regional Portfolio of the Youth Employability Skills 2017, which deals with key skills relevant to the employment of young people, which was one of the bases for this Study and project. It is also

Photo: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Tirana>





**Potential partners from the public and NGO sectors who could play key roles in implementing language exchange in Tirana include: Beyond Barriers and the National Youth Congress.**

Photo: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Tirana>

important that it gathers a large number of young people from the country and abroad through volunteer practices.

**National Youth Congress** is a non-governmental and nonprofit youth organization, whose mission is to strengthen the role of youth in society. One of its objectives is a better regulated system of formal and informal education for young people, as well as joint initiatives with young people which know no boundaries.

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Contact phone:  
066310506

