

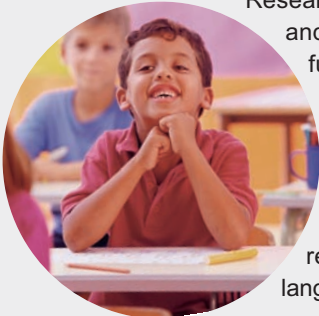
## CONFERENCES

The Mercator Research Centre organises conferences and seminars on a regular basis. Important themes for the conferences are: measurement & good practice, educational models, development of minimum standards, teacher training, and the application of the Common European Framework of Reference. The main target groups for the Mercator Research Centre are professionals, researchers, and policymakers from all member states of the Council of Europe and beyond.

## PARTNERS

During the twenty years of its existence, Mercator Education has cooperated with two partners in a network structure: Mercator Media hosted at the University of Wales in Aberystwyth and Mercator Legislation hosted at the Ciemen Foundation in Barcelona. The Mercator Research Centre expands its network in close cooperation with a number of partner organisations working in the same field. This cooperation includes partners in Fryslân, as well as partners in the Netherlands and in Europe. The provincial government of Fryslân is the main funding body of the Mercator

Research Centre. Projects and activities are funded by the EU as well as by the authorities of other regions in Europe with an active policy to support their regional or minority language and its culture.



## HOW TO CONTACT US



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European Research Centre on  
Multilingualism and Language Learning

**Half of the citizens of the European Union speak at least one other language than their mother tongue. Children's bilingual skills develop best when they are practised every day – at school and outside.**

## EUROPEAN CONTEXT

In the 21st Century, all European citizens live in a multilingual environment. In their daily lives they come across many different languages. As a communication tool, languages are useful in communicating with others for trade, tourism, and international contacts. In

its symbolic function, language carries the deepest emotions and the historical awareness of its speakers. The mother tongue is the language people acquire first in life. It is also the language that

most people know best, use most, and strongly identify with. All people have the right to learn and use their mother tongue and to learn a second or third language. In many cases, these rights are still absent, or there are no adequate provisions. Regional or minority languages are spoken by more than ten percent of the European population. Particularly for some languages, their situation and future prospects are critical.



In Europe, however, there is a growing awareness of the value of linguistic diversity and the need to learn languages. The objective of the Council of Europe and the European Union is that all Europeans learn to speak at least two other languages in addition to their mother tongue. This not only refers to some of the major languages of Europe, such as English, French, German, or Spanish, but also to smaller state languages, immigrant languages, and regional and minority languages. All these languages together create the linguistic diversity of Europe. This characteristic diversity, however, needs to be protected and promoted at all levels. For example, the



Province of Fryslân, the Dutch government, and the European commissioner for multilingualism all emphasise the relevance and importance of multilingualism. The Council of Europe stimulates language teaching and learning by means of conferences, projects and comparative studies, whereas the European Union has its own 'Integrated Lifelong Learning Programme' (2007-2013) that explicitly wants to promote language learning and supports linguistic diversity.

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### MISSION & GOALS

The Mercator European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning addresses the growing interest in multilingualism and the increasing need of language communities to exchange experiences and to cooperate in a European context. The Mercator Research Centre is the successor of Mercator Education, which was founded in 1987 by an initiative of the Euro-

pean Commission. The research centre is based in Ljouwert/Leeuwarden, the capital of Fryslân – a bilingual province of the Netherlands – and hosted at the Fryske Akademy (Frisian Academy). Research of the Fryske Akademy is geared to the society, language and history of Fryslân. The Mercator Research Centre focuses on research, policy, and practice in the field of multilingualism and language learning. The centre aims to be an independent and recognised organisation for researchers, policymakers, and professionals in education. The centre endeavours to favour linguistic diversity within Europe. The starting point lies in the field of regional and minority languages. Yet, immi-



grant languages and smaller state languages are also a topic of study. The centre's main focus is the creation, circulation, and application of knowledge in the field of language learning at school, at home, and through cultural participation. Successful activities of the Mercator Research Centre are the series of Regional Dossiers and the Network of Schools. Publications are available for download from the website.

### REGIONAL DOSSIERS

The series of Regional Dossiers meets the growing need for basic information on education in minority language settings. The dossiers present an up-to-date description of the position of a minority language at all levels in the educational system of a state. The Regional Dossiers are written by experts according to a fixed structure. In this way the dossiers can also be used for

comparative research. Some 40 languages of EU member states have been covered.

### NETWORK OF SCHOOLS

The Network of Schools consists of more than 60 schools in 20 European regions where a minority language is taught. The goal of the Network of Schools is to create a platform for bilingual and multilingual schools in minority regions in Europe in order to facilitate the exchange of information and experiences. The Network of Schools is intended for schools at the pre-primary, primary, and secondary levels as well as for teacher training institutes. These schools actively teach and use the minority language, or regional language, aside from the state language in the curriculum and they often teach English as a third language.



### RESEARCH

The Mercator Research Centre develops a research programme on the basis of the data collections available. Research activities focus on various aspects of bilingual and trilingual education, such as interaction in multilingual classrooms, language proficiency in different languages, and teachers' qualifications for the multilingual classroom. Whenever possible, research will be carried out in a comparative European perspective. A good example of this approach is the study 'The Development of Minimum Standards on Language Education in Regional and Minority Languages' (2007). Research results are disseminated through publications and conferences in collaboration with European partners.