

For the latest
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in Europe

TESTING TIMES

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Special Christmas 2011 Edition

EUROZONE CRISIS HITS COUNCIL OF EUROPE!

U.S. RATING AGENCIES DOWNGRADE CEF!

B1 in future only worth B0.9 ??????

The U.S. Rating Agencies “Poor Standards”, “Futch” and “Bad Moodys” were last night reported to have downgraded the Council of Europe Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. According to as yet unconfirmed sources, a number of Independent Users will no longer be internationally classified as B1. This level will probably be downgraded to about B 0.9. And C2 Proficient Users are at risk of suffering an even greater “haircut” ending up at around C1.53!

The direct cause of this development is the effect of so-called **bad banks** (data banks and item banks) and a number of **toxic**, inadequately validated and unreliable test items. In view of the gravity of the situation we sent “**Testing Times**” reporters to the main language certification centres in Europe to get more information and to find out what the local reactions are.

Athens: The Greeks seem to have had particular problems since the introduction of the CEF, in many cases due to perfectly valid and workable official test versions being sent into early retirement on full compensation. The result is that the Greek B1 has been squeezed down to almost B 0.45. The situation could however deteriorate even further during the next few weeks with the Greek CEF B levels all being reduced to **Beta version** status, a Microsoft quality standard well-known to all computer users.

Paris: The French B1 tests are equally exposed, as historically the French test system has a great affinity with Greek tradition. Even to the extent that many of their French language tests are organised under the name of **DELPH**. They are also in danger of losing the heavy subsidies provided by the French government to help sustain French as a global language. In addition, rumour has it that many of the French CEF level tests are **(B) un-deux**-developed in terms of candidates.

Rome: Despite the downgrading problems, the Italian B1 seems to be gaining the unequivocal support of ex-Prime Minister Berlusconi, who apparently has declared his full backing for all Italian CEF levels. For this reason Silvio is said to have publicly stated his intention to take three B1 tests every night for the next six months. However there are two pre-conditions on his part: Firstly the test must be a **paired-format** test, and secondly his fellow-candidate must be a **Young Learner**. Informed sources claim that these Berlusconi Italian tests will in future be known as **RU-BY 1**, **RU-BY 2**, etc. But this still has to be settled by the courts and there is stiff opposition. His support apparently also includes the offer of one of his luxury villas as a central examination centre to be known as the **CEF Bunga-Bungalow**.

Madrid: Even after the general election in Spain at the end of November the situation has not changed significantly with the result that all Spanish B2 level examinations are in great danger of being downgraded to **B Juan**. This will result in a huge increase in (candi)**debts** and an equally large hike in the **rate of interest** in non- and extra-European CEF-based qualifications. Spain may even become the laughing stock market of Europe.

London: Government circles are privately quite satisfied with recent developments regarding the downgrading of the CEF. Ever since Shakespeare first expressed his sceptical approach to the CEF levels (“B2 or not B2, that is the question!”), many UK language experts have always believed the good old British system of Elementary – Intermediate – Advanced to be far superior, even though the various names e.g. intermediate levels: **lower** intermediate, **pre**-intermediate, **post**-intermediate, **upper** intermediate, **higher** intermediate, etc. still cause problems for the uninitiated non-Brits. And so it appears that although the CEF a few years ago had finally overcome all the obstacles put in its way to prevent the CEF levels crossing the Channel, the rating agencies have indirectly provided useful support for the UK anti-CEF approach.

Berlin: The German CEF levels are still enjoying a high level of support throughout the whole of the language assessment world. Due to the high level of expertise and the German reputation for **reliability** the German B1 has revealed a high level of **stability** during the past difficult months. This particularly applies to the German tests for immigrants (DAZ), or as many German civil servants say: “DAZ vot ve vant!”.

As a result of the strong position of the **hard** German B1, increasing pressure is being brought to bear on official agencies in Germany to **upgrade the B1 level** to B 1.1 or even B 1.2 in order to **bail out** the weaker European B1s. The German authorities are however unwilling to comply with these demands as they realise the sensitivity of a large proportion of German voters towards any form of inflation, especially as they know that the German B1 will be revalued upwards should the weaker languages have to leave the framework and the CEF disintegrate. Many people still think back nostalgically to their previous hard currency – the Deutschmark – and the strength of that currency during post-war years. For this reason the German Chancellor is rumoured to be thinking of changing her name to Ms Märkel or even Ms Deutsch-Märkel in order to retain her Chancellorship at the next general elections in 2013.

Strasbourg: According to well-informed sources, the Council of Europe has finally recognised the need for swift action and is now proposing the following measures as a means of attempting to prevent a wild-fire crisis in the international acceptance of the CEF.

1. All **language certificates** based on the CEF will in future be known as **EUROBONDS**.
2. The following changes will be implemented in CEF-based curricula in order to optimize the **stability** and **reliability** of language testing in Europe:

- # **A sharp increase in SYN-TAX in the interest of fiscal stability in language tests**
- # **Absolute priority for STRONG VERBS and ADJECTIVES with STRONG ENDINGS**
- # **The exclusive use of PROGRESSIVE and PERFECT TENSES**
- # **MAIN CLAUSES to take precedence over SUBORDINATE CLAUSES**
- # **A ban on CONDITIONALS and “IF” especially “IF ONLY...” SENTENCES**
- # **Maximum use of the ACTIVE VOICE**
- # **Elimination of COMPENSATION and AVOIDANCE STRATEGIES**
- # **The introduction of WRITING OFF as a new writing sub-skill**

With these radical measures it is hoped that all CEF levels in every language will achieve a far higher degree of stability and regain the confidence of the language markets. Above all it is hoped that these measures will protect the Council of Europe against speculators pushing for a split-up in order to promote the interests of non-European language assessment systems.

Wishing you all the best for Xmas 2011 and the New Year 2012 and looking forward to meeting you again!

Geoff