

## The CEFR and the needs of the ESP students

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### Abstract

*This paper reports on the pre-implementation stage of an ELP study for the ESP learners and the ways to develop the self-assessment checklists for that implementation. Conducting a target situation analysis, identifying the actions that might take place in their works, finding out the related needs in these actions, and selecting the available descriptors from the 'Bank of Descriptors for Self-Assessment in ELP' in order to develop self-assessment checklists were the phases that occurred within the process of this development. This pre-implementation stage has helped us find answers to the following questions: (a) To what extent do the empirically scaled descriptors in the banks of descriptors available across Europe reflect the needs of the ESP students? (b) Do we need to develop more descriptors for ESP learners at finer levels and for different needs?*

### Introduction and Background to the Study

Established in 2001, the SEE University in Macedonia adopted some of its main aims as provision of a multilingual and multicultural approach to teaching and research and development of its teaching programs in a broad international and European perspective. To realize these aims, the university set a strategic plan for 2004-2008, which defines the framework for future development of the university and continuous quality improvement. Setting such a strategic plan is of crucial importance for the university and the region in order to be in line with the educational policies and their implementations within the Bologna Process.

In this process, the students at the SEEU have been encouraged to communicate effectively in both their native languages and in English or other modern international languages so that they can be successful in international operations such as business and management, communication science and technology, law and human rights. This policy of language use is a core asset of SEEU and a key issue for future development.

To attain the above-mentioned goals, the SEEU is planning to implement the European Language Portfolio (ELP), one of the most effective pedagogic instruments in language teaching. The ELP mainly aims growing plurilingual competence in a life-long perspective by meeting students' needs, helping them plan their further learning, and leading them to be life-long learners (Kohonen 2000;

Schneider & Lenz 2001; Little and Perclova 2001). It is a tool to establish standards in curricula and encourage quality and quality development in inter-cultural learning (Scharer 2005 : 2).

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), a descriptive scheme used to meet such aims of the ELP, helps learners to profile their main language skills and decide the level they need to look at a checklist containing detailed descriptors when they self-assess their level of proficiency (North 2002; Lenz & Schneider 2002). These self-assessment checklists comprise a number of descriptors that show communicative language proficiency and other aspects of language competences and strategies. In order to help the developers of the ELP select the related descriptors for their checklists, a number of descriptors have been empirically scaled and collected in various banks of descriptors (Lenz and Schneider 2004a, Lenz and Schneider 2004b, Little 2006). The scaled descriptors are presented in the Global Scale and the Self-Assessment Grid and they provide a common standard to be referred to. There are also other descriptors which are related to the scaled ones such as *Illustrative Scales of Descriptors in the CEF, bank of descriptors for self-assessment in ELP, Swiss ELP for young people and adults, DIALANG scales, and ALTE "can do" statements.*

In spite of these numerous descriptors, we might still need to adapt them for following reasons (Lenz and Schneider 2004a : 9-10):

- \* make it more compatible with the curricula,
- \* tailor them to specific domains of use (work, study)
- \* make them more easily comprehensible for certain groups (young learners)
- \* differentiate between finer levels
- \* rephrase them for different purposes (definition of objectives)

As Lenz and Schneider (2004a) mention, we might even need to develop new ones for different categories such as learning strategies and cultural/intercultural experiences. Although some of these descriptors are not scalable, they should be added in the ELP because of their pedagogic importance.

It is the aim of this study to see whether available descriptors in various ELP versions reflect the needs of the ESP students in the LC of the SEEU and for what competences we need to adapt or develop more descriptors in order to have effective self-assessment checklists.

### **Development of the Self-assessment Checklist**

In the Language Center of the university, where this study takes place, the total number of the students is over 2000. After completing Level 4 (B1) from Basic Skills in English Program, students from all faculties, except for PMT, are required to complete two semesters of ESP, starting from the 3<sup>rd</sup> semester. Accordingly, the Center provides ESP courses for Computer Science, Communication Science, Public Administration, Business Administration and Legal Studies. The general proficiency level of the students when they start their education in the ESP courses is B1.

The students we are working with are 3<sup>rd</sup> year Public Administration students at SEE University. This study is accepted as a preliminary study before implementing the ELP to all the other ESP students.

Table 1. Target Situation Analysis of PA Students

As one of the major aims of an ESP course is to prepare learners to use the language properly in their future jobs, we started our study by identifying the target situations and the required competences in these situations. For this, we developed a questionnaire making use of the situational categories for the occupational domain presented by the *Common European Framework in its political and educational context*, p. 48-49. The results of this questionnaire helped us identify at what locations the PA learners think they might be working, what kind of people they might interact with, what actions might take place, and what texts they might encounter within the situation (Table 1).

Possible locations	working	Possible people to interact with	Possible actions to take place	Possible texts to be encountered
-Government Organizations		-Colleagues	-Writing	-Technical documentation
-Local governments		-Politicians	-Reading	-Regulations
-Offices		(national/international)	-Listening	-Letters/faxes/e-mails
-Ministry of Foreign Affairs		-Employers/ees	-Speaking	-Legal documents
-Ministry of Finance		-Managers	-Taking notes	-Contracts
-Private finance institutions		-Customers	-Translating	-Materials from internet
-Banks		-Bank tellers	-Interpreting	-Newspaper articles
			-Making presentations	-Journal articles
			-Arranging meetings	
			-Organizing	
			-Identifying problems	
			-Presenting problems	
			-Offering solutions to problems	
			-Socializing	
			-Taking part in discussions	
			-Program management	
			-Planning	
			-Decision-making	
			-Implementing	
			-Evaluating	
			-Budgeting	

The results have been written in the table in the order of frequency. Accordingly, most PA students believe that government organizations are the most common places they will be working in, and they will be interacting with colleagues and politicians most of the time, being involved in such activities as making presentation and arranging meetings very often aside from the activities like writing, reading, listening, and they will also encounter texts like technical documents most. The items in this table are helpful for us in two ways: developing the tasks and the syllabus and selecting appropriate descriptors to be used in self-assessment checklists. Since development of the tasks and the syllabus is beyond the scope of this paper, we will focus on our choice of the descriptors for the checklists.

Before selecting the descriptors, we have tried to group the actions considering the possible ways of creating the tasks. The most

common actions to take place according to the questionnaires were **writing, reading, listening, speaking, taking notes, translating, and interpreting**; yet we did not count them as actions since they would already be used in various ways for actions to take place. Thus, we selected the next most common actions that the students mentioned in their questionnaires as **making a presentation, arranging meetings, dealing with problems** (identifying, presenting and offering solutions), **socializing**, and **taking part in discussions**. There were some other actions, like **talking on the phone** and **traveling abroad for business purposes**, but since they were mentioned only by few people, we did not develop checklist for these actions. Within the process of the implementation, we might work on these actions as well if needed.

Considering these actions the main themes of the tasks, we have conducted semi-focused interviews with 20 students and 5 staff

in the faculty. Our aim with these interviews was to obtain more specific data about these actions and identify the competences needed for each of them. Then we have correlated these competences with the categories of the CEF presented in *the Bank of Descriptors for Self-Assessment in European Language Portfolios* (Lenz & Schneider 2004b). This correlation has helped us obtain data that shows the skills and sub-skills for each action (Table 2). As seen in this table, such competences as **Language**

**Competence (Linguistic, Sociolinguistic, & Pragmatic)** are common to all actions. Some like **Interaction/Spoken, Reception/Written** and **Strategies/Production and Interaction** are present in three or four of the actions. These common needs will guide us to prepare the tasks and to develop the common checklists of descriptors. In other words, once we have analyzed the relevant data of descriptors and adapt or develop new ones, we can use these descriptors in other actions as well.

Table 2. Competences for actions of PA students

<b>Making a presentation</b>	<b>Arranging meetings</b>	<b>Identifying/presenting a problem and offering a solution</b>	<b>Socializing</b>	<b>Taking part in discussions</b>
<b>Production / Spoken</b> *Overall oral production *Sustained Monologue: <i>(Describing experience)</i> *Sustained Monologue: <i>(Putting a case)</i> *Addressing audience  <b>Strategies / Production</b> *Planning *Compensating *Monitoring and repair  <b>Reception / Written</b> *Overall Reading Compreh. *Reading for orientation *Reading for information and argument  <b>Lang. Compt. (Linguistic)</b> *General linguistic range *Vocabulary control *Grammatical accuracy *Phonological control  <b>Lang.Compt.(Sociolinguistic)</b> *Sociolinguistic appropriateness  <b>Lang. Comp. (Pragmatic)</b> *Flexibility *Thematic development *Coherence and cohesion *Spoken fluency *Propositional precision	<b>Strategies / Production</b> *Planning  <b>Reception / Spoken</b> *Overall Listening Compreh.  <b>Interaction / Spoken</b> *Overall Spoken Interaction *Understanding a native speaker interlocutor *Conversation *Goal-oriented co-operation *Information exchange  <b>Strategies / Interaction</b> *Co-operating  <b>Lang. Compt. (Linguistic)</b> *General linguistic range *Vocabulary range *Vocabulary control *Grammatical accuracy *Phonological control  <b>Lang.Compt.(Sociolinguistic)</b> *Sociolinguistic appropriateness  <b>Lang. Comp. (Pragmatic)</b> *Flexibility *Thematic development *Coherence and cohesion *Spoken fluency *Propositional precision	<b>Production / Spoken</b> *Overall oral production *Sustained Monologue: <i>(Describing experience)</i> *Sustained Monologue: <i>(Putting a case)</i> *Addressing audience  <b>Production / Written</b> *Overall Written Production *Reports and essays  <b>Reception / Written</b> *Overall Reading Compreh. *Reading for orientation *Reading for information and argument  <b>Interaction / Spoken</b> *Overall Spoken Interaction *Informal discussion *Formal discussion and meetings *Goal-oriented co-operation *Transactions to obtain goods and services  <b>Interaction / Written</b> *Overall Written Interaction *Notes, messages, forms  <b>Lang. Compt. (Linguistic)</b> *General linguistic range *Vocabulary range *Vocabulary control *Grammatical accuracy *Phonological control *Orthographic control  <b>Lang.Compt.(Sociolinguistic)</b> *Sociolinguistic appropriateness  <b>Lang. Comp. (Pragmatic)</b> *Flexibility *Thematic development *Coherence and cohesion *Spoken fluency *Propositional precision	<b>Reception / Spoken</b> *Overall Listening Compreh *Understanding conversation between native speakers *Listening to audio media and recordings  <b>Reception / Written</b> *Reading for information and argument  <b>Interaction / Spoken</b> *Overall Spoken Interaction *Understanding a native speaker interlocutor *Conversation *Informal discussion *Formal discussion and meetings *Information exchange  <b>Strategies / Interaction</b> *Taking the floor/turmtaking *Co-operating *Asking for clarification  <b>Lang. Compt. (Linguistic)</b> *General linguistic range *Vocabulary range *Vocabulary control *Grammatical accuracy *Phonological control  <b>Lang.Compt.(Sociolinguistic)</b> *Sociolinguistic appropriateness  <b>Lang. Comp. (Pragmatic)</b> *Flexibility *Spoken fluency	<b>Strategies / Production</b> *Compensating *Monitoring and repair  <b>Reception / Spoken</b> *Overall Listening Compreh *Understanding conversation between native speakers *Listening as a member of live audience  <b>Strategies / Reception</b> *Identifying cues and inferring  <b>Interaction / Spoken</b> *Overall Spoken Interaction *Understanding a native speaker interlocutor *Conversation *Informal discussion *Formal discussion and meetings *Goal-oriented co-operation *Transactions to obtain goods and services *Information exchange  <b>Strategies / Interaction</b> *Taking the floor/turmtaking *Co-operating *Asking for clarification  <b>Lang. Compt. (Linguistic)</b> *General linguistic range *Vocabulary range *Vocabulary control *Grammatical accuracy *Phonological control  <b>Lang.Compt.(Sociolinguistic)</b> *Sociolinguistic appropriateness  <b>Lang. Comp. (Pragmatic)</b> *Flexibility *Turmtaking *Spoken fluency

In this paper, we would like to present the way we reached the necessary descriptors for one of these actions, *making a presentation*. The results of the interviews combined with the data from the questionnaires revealed that the

competences that PA students need to make effective presentations are as shown in Table 3. This table helped us select the appropriate descriptors from the bank.

Table 3. Needs of Public Administration Students

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<p>Before presentation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reading various sources related to their field</li> <li>• translating some sources (from L1 to L2 &amp; from L2 to L1)</li> <li>• retrieving and analyzing these sources</li> <li>• planning the stages of the presentation</li> </ul> <p>During presentation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• giving detailed presentation on the topic by expanding and supporting the ideas and giving examples</li> <li>• developing an argument clearly if needed</li> <li>• explaining their own viewpoints giving the advantages and disadvantages</li> <li>• talking clearly and precisely enough to be followed by the audience</li> <li>• following points raised by the audience</li> <li>• taking follow-up questions by the audience and replying them clearly</li> <li>• finding ways to compensate in case of forgetting a word, phrase, etc.</li> <li>• correcting mistakes while speaking</li> <li>• having a sufficient range of language to run the presentation</li> <li>• having sufficient range of vocabulary to run the presentation</li> <li>• having sufficient knowledge of grammar</li> <li>• having clear natural pronunciation and intonation</li> <li>• being aware of the register</li> <li>• using enough number of cohesive devices to make the speech fluent</li> <li>• convincing the audience on the important points in the talk</li> </ul> <p>After presentation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reviewing</li> <li>• evaluating</li> <li>• cooperating with others</li> </ul>	<hr/> <p>As shown in Table 2 for <i>making a presentation</i>, the competences matching with the categories presented in the bank of descriptors are <i>Production/Spoken, Strategies/Production, Reception/Written and Language Competence (Linguistic, Sociolinguistic and Pragmatic)</i>. Among these descriptors, we have picked up all the relevant ones at B1 and B2 levels for these categories. Since it would be too long to write all the</p>
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descriptors here, we have used only the codes for those descriptors as they are used in *the Bank of Descriptors for Self-Assessment in European Language Portfolios* (Table 4). This table shows us that the main skills the learners need to make a presentation are Spoken (Production), Reading, Language Quality (Linguistic, Sociolinguistic, and Pragmatic Competence), and some Strategies. Thus, we have prepared the self-assessment checklists at

B1 and B2 levels for *making a presentation* action using these skills as sub-titles. We have presented here only the checklist for B1 level (see Appendix). We have not put any

descriptors for Listening, Spoken (Interaction) or Writing for this action as they are not needed primarily.

Table 4. The relevant descriptors for *making a presentation*

<b>Production / Spoken</b>	
*Overall oral production	: PS1-B2, PS1-B2.2-1, PS1-B2.1-1, PS1-B1-1
*Sustained Monologue ( <i>Describing experience</i> )	: PS2-B2, PS2-B1, PS2-B2-1, PS2-B1-1, PS2-B1-2
*Sustained Monologue ( <i>Putting a case</i> )	: PS3-B2.2-1, PS3-B2.1-1, PS3-B2.1-2, PS3-B2.1-3, PS3-B1.2-1, PS3-B1.1-1
*Addressing audience	: PS5-B1.1, PS5-B2.2-1, PS5-B2.2-2, PS5-B2.1-1, PS5-B2.1-2, PS5-B1-1, PS5-B1-1
<b>Strategies / Production</b>	
*Planning	: SP1-B2.1-1, SP1-B1.2-1, SP1-B1.1-1
*Compensating	: SP2-B2-1, SP2-B1.2-1, SP2-B1.2-2, SP2-B1.1-1
*Monitoring and repair	: SP3-B2-1, SP3-B2-2, SP3-B1.2-1, SP3-B1.1-2
<b>Reception / Written</b>	
*Overall Reading Compreh.	: RW1-B2-1, RW1-B1-1
*Reading for orientation	: RW3-B2, RW3-B2, RW3-B2-1, RW3-B2-2, RW3-B1.2-1
*Reading for info and arg.	: RW4-B1, RW4-B2.2-1, RW4-B2.2-2, RW4-B2.1-1, RW4-B1.2-1, RW4-B1.2-2, RW4-B1.1-1
<b>Lang. Compt. (Linguistic)</b>	
*General linguistic range	: LL1-B2.2-1, LL1-B2.1-1, LL1-B1.2-1, LL1-B1.1-1
*Vocabulary range	: LL2-B2-1, LL2-B1-1
*Vocabulary control	: LL3-B2-1, LL3-B1-1
*Grammatical accuracy	: LL4-B1, LL4-B2.2-1, LL4-B2.1-1, LL4-B1.2-1
*Phonological control	: LL5-B2-1, LL5-B1-1
<b>Lang. Compt. (Sociolinguistic)</b>	
*Sociolinguistic approp.	: LS-B2.2-1, LS-B2.1-3, LS-B1-1, LS-B1-2, LS-B1-3
<b>Lang. Comp. (Pragmatic)</b>	
*Flexibility	: LP1-B2.2-1, LP1-B2.1-1, LP1-B2.1-2, LP1-B1.2-1, LP1-B1.1-1
*Thematic development	: LP3-B2-1, LP3-B1-1
*Coherence and cohesion	: LP4-B2.2-1, LP4-B2.1-1, LP4-B1-1
*Spoken fluency	: LP5-B2.2-1, LP5-B2.1-1, LP5-B1.2-1, LP5-B1.1-1
*Propositional precision	: LP6-B2-1, LP6-B1.2-1, LP6-B1.1-1, LP6-B1.1-2

This self-assessment checklist has shown us where we need to adapt or develop new descriptors. It is clearly seen that for each subtitle, we can find some related descriptors from the bank. As this is a self-assessment checklist, we need to use these descriptors in the

form of *I can do* statements. While matching the available *I can do* descriptors with the needs, we have investigated that some descriptors are available only in the CEF, so they are not in the form of *I can do* statements. For some of them, it has been easy to transform by putting only “I”

at the beginning of the descriptors (marked with \* in the checklist). For some, we have needed to paraphrase the statement without changing the meaning and the message (marked with \*\* in the checklist). However, we still need to work on some descriptors, present in the CEF, as they need to be divided into separate statements that convey only one message and that can be more clearly understood by the learners. The CEF descriptors we need to split and adapt in the Language Quality part of the checklist are presented below:

*Has a sufficient range of language to describe unpredictable situations, explain the main points in an idea or problem with reasonable precision and express thoughts on abstract or cultural topics such as music and films. [CEF 2001]*

*Has a sufficient vocabulary to express him/herself with some circumlocutions on most topics pertinent to his/her everyday life such as family, hobbies and interests, work, travel, and current events. [CEF 2001]*

*Communicates with reasonable accuracy in familiar contexts; generally good control though with noticeable mother tongue influence. Errors occur, but it is clear what he/she is trying to express. [CEF 2001]*

Aside from such adaptations, we feel that we need to develop new descriptors for translation to be used in the Language Quality part and for evaluating and cooperating with others for the Strategies part. Having analyzed the available descriptors, we have found out that we do not have descriptors to meet such needs identified and presented before.

## Conclusion

The main aim of this study is to try to use the ELP and the CEF with the ESP learners, meeting their needs. In this paper, we have demonstrated the pre-stage of the implementation of our ELP. As self-assessment checklists play a crucial role in the use of the ELP, we have wanted to prepare these checklists which properly reflect the needs of the learners in their professional target

situations. For that reason, having identified the actions to take place in these target situations, we have developed checklists for each action. In the development of these checklists, we have used *the Bank of Descriptors for Self-Assessment in European Language Portfolio* to select the descriptors needed for the actions.

As demonstrated above, there are a good number of descriptors to meet most but not all of the ESP learners' needs. Therefore, we still need to adapt and develop few more descriptors. For instance, our preliminary findings for the action, *making a presentation*, for Public Administration students indicate that we need to adapt some descriptors that reflect their grammatical accuracy and vocabulary knowledge more properly in the Language Quality section. There is also a need to develop descriptors that reflect learners' capacity to translate since this is one of the needs expressed by most of the students both in the questionnaires and in the interviews.

To sum up, this study does not offer any adapted or newly-developed descriptors; it only reveals what further descriptors we need. However, we believe that the checklist we have developed for the use of ESP learners for "Making a Presentation" will be of great benefit for those who are interested in using the ELP in their ESP classes, as it might be a starting point to similar checklists.

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## Appendix

### B1 Checklist for “*Making a Presentation*”

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#### Spoken Production

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I can develop an argument well enough to be followed without difficulty most of the time.

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I can explain and give reasons for my plans, intentions and actions.

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I can give a short prepared presentation, without practising word for word, and answer clear questions.

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I can give a short and straightforward prepared presentation on a chosen topic in my academic or professional field in a reasonably clear and precise manner.

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\*I can take follow up questions, but may have to ask for repetition if the speech was rapid.

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#### Reading

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I can read straightforward factual texts on subjects related to my field and interests at a satisfactory level of understanding.

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I can scan longer texts in my field in order to locate desired information and also to gather information from different texts or parts of a text in order to complete a specific task.

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I can skim short texts (for example news summaries) and find relevant facts and information (for example who has done what and where).

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#### Language Quality

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I can express myself reasonably accurately in familiar, predictable situations.

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\*I can exploit a wide range of simple language flexibly to express much of what I want.

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\*I can link a series of shorter, discrete simple elements into a connected, linear sequence of points.

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\*I can express myself with relative ease. Despite some problems with formulation resulting in pauses, I can keep going effectively without help.

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\*I can express the main point he/she wants to make comprehensibly.

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\*\*I am aware of the salient politeness conventions and I can act appropriately.

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\*\*I have clearly intelligible pronunciation but sometimes I have a foreign accent which might cause mispronunciations.

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#### Production/Strategies

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When I can't think of the word I want, I can use a simple word meaning something similar and invite “correction”.

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\*I can work out how to communicate the main point(s) I want to get across, exploiting any resources available and limiting the message to what I can recall or find the means to express.

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\*I can correct mix-ups with tenses or expressions that lead to misunderstandings provided the interlocutor indicates there is a problem.

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\*I can start again using a different tactic when communication breaks down.

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\* *changed from CEF as “I can do”*

\*\**paraphrased from CEF as “I can do”*