Now that I'm president: Looking forward to the next three years

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In a pre-Assembly issue of the Bulletin, I set out some ideas on the direction I would like to see AIIC go in if I were chosen president. Now, having been elected and with the results of the Assembly in place, I would like to follow up on those musings in a few major areas of activity. Our Assembly was a fitting culmination of three years of hard work, but it was also the beginning of the next three years and of meeting challenges to come.

Professional Life

It is essential that AIIC maintain and consolidate its position as the voice of authority in matters to do with conference interpretation. To do this we must be proactive, lead and anticipate events. And it is essential that we reach out to a larger public. Several of our projects will be doing exactly that.

The Teranga project will be picking up where the New Multilingualism Project left off, with Michel Lesseigne still at its head. This network will tackle all issues arising from the use of a growing number of languages in Europe and beyond, in particular the new language requirements arising out of the expansion of the EU. Moreover, it will promote even closer contacts with colleagues in countries where those languages are spoken, so that their voices can be heard.

The Vega project which provides information and guidance to all interested in our profession will now be an ongoing activity of our association. The network under it continues to grow and its members provide a direct contact for those with curiosity and questions about the profession. The Vega website will be translated into even more languages.

The Staff Interpreters Committee, in coordination with the Training Committee, will be carrying out a new project (La Relève), that will start with a survey of organisations where members are employed, concentrating on three areas: relationships between the organisation and interpreter training programs, procedures in place for recruitment of entry-level interpreters and any assistance given to integrating new interpreters into the professional world. The results, in addition to being informative, could well lead to some constructive recommendations.

The Business Organisation of Interpreters Project, having gathered invaluable information on how interpreters working in the private sector organise themselves, will now set to work on codifying the duties and responsibilities of consultant interpreters.
Admissions

From the foregoing it is clear that AIIC is providing information and reaching out to would-be, new and established interpreters around the world. At the Assembly, we had lively debate on proposed changes to admissions procedures. Many felt that, having changed our rules just three years ago and having seen a notable increase in new admissions since then (some 450 new members in the last 3 years), no further changes should be made for the time being. They preferred to see how these changes work over a longer period of time. I suspect, however, that by the time the next Assembly comes round, members will want to move a step further and perhaps support at least some of the proposals first put forward in Porto. For example, we might want to think again about a mechanism for admitting staff interpreters working for major institutional employers. I nonetheless remain convinced that despite the undeniable validity of the tests conducted by our most important employers, the ultimate responsibility for our standards remains with us. We must search for equitable ways to maintain the highest standards while broadening our base.

Training

No one can question the importance of training in a knowledge-based profession. And that means training on all levels and throughout an interpreter’s lifetime. The Training Committee will continue to refine the AIIC training paradigm, evaluate courses, and ensure that we are represented as required on exam juries and at conferences.

The Training of Trainers courses are an essential component in AIIC’s ongoing resolve to maintain and consolidate standards. The initial sessions in Porto were attended by more than 40 people, members and non-members, and further sessions are being planned.

The Portuguese refresher course held just before and after the Assembly, while not an official AIIC activity in itself, showed just how eager interpreters are to learn and improve. Courses organised in other regions, for example Italy and the UK, bear this out.

Communications

AIIC’s website has been redesigned to make it easier to navigate and to incorporate a greater user interface with all the possibilities and advantages that offers. Our webzine Communicate! will continue to be an essential part of it, to provide news and views about all aspects of our profession. And our improved “members only” area has shown its worth as a forum of discussion and debate in the months leading up to the Assembly. We hope that our readers will not only return often, but will participate by adding comments or rating articles.

The Assembly approved in principle an ambitious proposal to improve and expand the online services offered to AIIC members. Steps will be taken to offer members customizable email services through aiic.net. Also, a study will be made of offering members a roaming Internet access service through our server, as well as other enhanced services.

Public relations

Now that we are 50 years old I think that we may justifiably blow our own trumpet a bit louder; to make employers large and small aware of the benefits of working with a profession that is well-regulated, establishes what the expectations of the users of its services are, has a clear code of ethics, professional standards of competence and transparent business practices, is involved in
training and the induction of newcomers, and pays close attention to health and technical issues.

We have some very able people in the profession, as evidenced by the excellent job done by our colleagues in Porto. Now the Assembly has approved proposals to reach further through collaboration with specialist publications in the meeting industry. And the 50th Anniversary celebrations in Paris in July, which our French colleagues are organising with great dedication, will offer us a splendid platform from which to proclaim who we are and what we do.

The idea is to make AIIC visible to all who need interpreters or expert advice on matters related to interpreting. In addition to any specific PR activities, all AIIC projects should keep that ultimate goal in mind.

**Definition and Recognition of the Profession**

With maturity comes recognition. At the Porto Assembly marking the start of its 50th year, AIIC made a clear decision to work on a long-term project for the *definition and recognition of the conference interpreting profession* through UNESCO, very possibly in the form of a convention. This will take time as it requires extensive preparation and ratification by member governments, and money since it involves a considerable number of meetings and lengthy discussion. But if we are to uphold our professional standards and ensure a solid basis for the profession in its next fifty years, it is important that we make this major investment in time and resources.

**Governance**

The Assembly did not adopt a proposal to reduce the size of the Council, but I think it important to think afresh about Council representation and size. AIIC currently has an Assembly every three years with the Council meeting every six months. Currently the Council is composed of the President and Treasurer and one representative per region, with any region having at least 10% of total membership having two. While geographical representation is important and gives members an opportunity to discuss matters on a local level, there is also a commonality of interests within sectors, but there is no formal sectoral representation on the Council. Additionally, with the accession of 10 new members to the EU and the growth of our profession in other parts of the world, we might very well see a demand for the creation of new regions, making the Council even larger than the current 25 (and thus rather unwieldy?). Should regions be made larger, by spreading over a greater geographical area or by increasing the number of members that may constitute a region? Should no region have more than one Council member? Should we have supra-regional representation? Specific sectoral representation? No proposals at this stage but a few ideas to think about.

**The Future**

There are plenty of challenges ahead – how could it be otherwise in a rapidly changing world? I believe that we have foreseen some of them, but more are sure to come. AIIC must keep its collective eyes open and be ready to meet new demands in technology, in training, in the legal field, and elsewhere. And we must also keep our minds open to the needs of interpreters everywhere. We are proud to have completed 50 years as a worldwide body of conference interpreters and we hope to honour past accomplishments by making our association an even stronger, even more representative international body in the future.
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