Letter from the President – AIIC around the world

Presidents of international associations must often go traveling to represent their associations properly. The year 2006 provided me with an opportunity to do so, and as a result I was able to get an idea of the wide-ranging diversity that such contacts offer.

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I took advantage of work-related assignments abroad to have informal contacts with colleagues - AIIC members in regions which I do not often have the opportunity to visit and where AIIC itself is not always well represented. Also, I was able to take part in meetings attended by non-member interpreting colleagues, with whom I was able to discuss our common problems. Invitations to attend university lectures afforded me valuable insights into the world of research and training in the field of conference interpretation. Meetings with other communication professionals, in particular translators and the organisations representing them, were also on my agenda. Lastly, I had discussions with members of related professions (e.g. conference organisers).

In addition to their being a source of personal enrichment, there emerged from all these meetings a common perception of our problems, regardless of the country (Hungary, China, France, South Africa or Switzerland): the outside world does not know us that well; it does not always see the added value we provide, obsessed as it is by budgetary cuts; it believes that it can do without us and our professionalism; technological advances pose a threat to our ways and even to our working conditions; poor communication through sub-standard English is often viewed (wrongly so!) as the only possible form of communication. In short, the picture may seem a rather gloomy one.

Yet the impression I got from my many contacts on these various occasions was very different indeed: what predominate are energy, enthusiasm and the desire to fight to defend and improve the services we can provide.

The real danger would be for us to become divided, as each professional category or interest group does not necessarily perceive or value the bonds that unite us.

Naturally, each group has its own needs, which may clash with those of other groups. Yet we have so much more in common. Translators, terminologists, précis-writers, language department heads, university teachers, sign language interpreters and of course conference interpreters would all benefit from stressing these common bonds in order to cope with the political, social and technological changes that lead to a disregard for our professions or minimize their usefulness. It would appear that this union sacrée is taking shape little by little. Let us do everything in our power to help it along.
This Issue

The 6th National Conference and International Forum on Interpreting in Beijing brought together teachers and administrators from major universities in China. Practitioners of our profession were also present, our President among them. We open this issue with the brief reflection on interpretation and professionalism that he shared with the conference participants.

AIIC had a meeting of its own recently, an inter-regional bringing together members from Europe, North America and Asia-Pacific to compare notes on markets and more. The venue was Bangkok, and one session brought together all the major players in Thailand's growing conference sector. AIIC discovers Thailand gives you the story and shows you some of the faces present.

Staff interpreters play an important role in AIIC and our profession. International organisations evolve and our staff interpreters committee keeps on eye on changes. Their yearly overview of organisations brings us up to date once again.

Our next article takes us out of the meeting room and back to the world we love, one filled with languages to learn and cultures to explore. A challenge awaits: pick up a new language as quickly as possible and be able to get around using it. Brooklyn-born adventure traveler Antonio Graceffo lays out some ideas on how to do so in Learning That Awful Foreign Language.

Bridging cultures is our job, and to do it well we must learn how different systems work and not just the words that describe their component parts. Legal systems present special challenges in this regard. To help members meet them, the Dutch region of AIIC recently organised a continuing education seminar on The Law of Criminal Procedure - A Comparative Approach. We thank Emma Charlotte Hartkamp for her summary.

With this issue Communicate! reaches a milestone that never even crossed out minds when we started out some 7 years ago: 40 issues online. We would like to thank our regular contributors and columnists, as well as all who have sent in articles. To help us spread the word about professional interpreting and all language matters, remember us, submit your contributions, and communicate!

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