The Porto assembly

What AIIC for the future? The 32nd Assembly of AIIC is just around the corner, set for 13 -16 January 2003 in Porto, Portugal.

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It will not be the first time an Assembly is held at the invitation of the Portuguese Region as the 1985 Assembly was held in Lisbon. The week we spend in Porto will be full of events that go well beyond our in-house business.

Over the pre-Assembly weekend (11-12 January) there will be a variety of activities, including a “Training for Trainers” course organised by the Training Committee, a workshop for regional webmasters and meetings of the various agreement sectors, the Private Market Sector, the Vega network and the Research Committee. And throughout the week cultural events will take place.

In the opening session of the Assembly itself, Mr. Cunha Rodrigues, former Attorney General of Portugal and a judge at the European Court of Justice, will talk about professional secrecy and conference interpreters. The mayor of Porto and other authorities will also deliver speeches.

A lot has happened in world politics, on the economic and social scene, in the world of conferences and in AIIC over the last three years. The 2000 Assembly in Dakar took stock of the situation of our profession and of our Association at the turn of the century, and adopted bold policy guidelines for the future.

How has the Association followed up on those guidelines and how well prepared are we to face the future now? The three main policy thrusts of the Dakar Assembly called on AIIC to:

- a. prepare for the entry of a number of Eastern and Central European countries into the European Union and the effect of enlargement on the interpretation market, the exercise of our profession and future membership of AIIC;
- b. assure that the Association be open to top-quality professional conference interpreters wherever they are located so as to be truly representative and to enhance our negotiating power;
- c. further examine procedures and criteria for admission of new members.

The Council elected in Dakar adopted a project-oriented approach to tackle these and other issues. Council thus assumed full responsibility for AIIC activities, from planning to implementation and assessment. This was a departure from the operational model which had prevailed until then, namely that Council committees and working groups set their own agendas, but were not actually called upon to produce results within specific timeframes.

It is never easy for a group of individuals who have been nominated by their regions and elected by the Assembly on no common platform (or any platform at all, for that matter) to come together and
assume responsibility for planning and carrying out a comprehensive three-year plan of action. It can be argued that Council at least is more representative of the whole membership of AIIC than were the few mostly self-appointed members of the former committees and working groups. There is no guarantee, however, that members of Council, individually or collectively, have the competence or the time to carry out the work involved. In that regard the former system of committees and working groups, whose membership changed little over time, at least had the relative advantage that members could be expected to have become competent in their areas. Be that as it may, Council decided to try out this new system.

A number of projects were set up, each with a team and a leader, well-defined activities, a budget, a timetable and specific goals. Council discussed, approved and regularly reviewed these projects in its bi-annual meetings. The following projects were among the most active and important for attaining the goals set by the Dakar Assembly:

- New Multilingualism (NML)
- Vega (New Interpreters Project)
- Definition and Recognition of the Profession (DRP)
- Webzine and Communication
- Business Organisation of Interpreters (BOI)
- New Information Technologies Project (NIT)

In addition, some of the standing committees continued to exist and carry out valuable work, such as the Training Committee, the Research Committee, the Private Market Sector standing committee and the Staff Interpreters Committee.

The NML Project has completed its mandate with a number of recommendations on the admission of professional interpreters from Eastern and Central Europe, on relationships between AIIC and interpreters in those countries, on the classification of B languages, and on manning strength for conferences with many languages.

The New Interpreters Project, re-baptized Vega, has found innovative ways of introducing the world of conference interpreting to new and would-be interpreters. In addition to a number of seminars, it planned, developed and set up a series of web pages about our profession, how it works and the role of AIIC. It has prepared informative articles – the “First Contract” series - on what one needs to know when working at specific international organisations for the first time. It has also created a network of members who will respond personally to questions coming from website visitors.

The DRP Project has progressed slowly but surely, gathering more information about how AIIC can work towards an international instrument that would gain recognition for the profession of conference interpretation. It will bring to the 2003 Assembly a proposal on how to pursue this goal and will ask for a major commitment from AIIC over the next 5 to 10 years.

The BOI Project carried out a survey of AIIC interpreter groups and individual consultant interpreters. The response rate was very high and the study concluded with a number of recommendations, including Ethical Guidelines for Consultant Interpreters.

The NIT Project has revealed the difficulties that we as interpreters have in grappling with new technologies that affect the way we exercise our profession, as well as revealing differences between the institutional and private markets. Although the Project did not achieve its goals, it has laid valuable groundwork for the future.

The Training Committee concluded a major review of interpreter training programs. The results were published on our website where they can be updated regularly. It is encouraging to note that many more schools responded to the questionnaire than in previous years. Many schools have
expressed a wish to benefit from continued contact with AIIC. A proposal to that end will be forwarded to the Assembly.

The Research Committee, with the help of an independent team of researchers, carried out a major study on workload and stress which provides an invaluable scientific basis to the underpinnings of our working conditions. The committee is recommending to the Assembly a number of ways to best make use of the conclusions.

All of this and more will be discussed at the Assembly. Your presence in Porto will make a difference. Come and contribute to the future work of AIIC, your Association – the only truly representative body of the profession.

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