

CONFERENCE REPORT: June 29, 2008

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Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs (FIT): The Ninth International Forum on Interpreting and Translating at Court and for Public Authorities: Court Interpreting and Legal Translation – Issues of Professionalization: 29 May – 1 June 2008 - Tampere, Finland

The University of Tampere provided a beautiful setting for the Ninth International FIT Forum on Interpreting and Translating at Court and for Public Authorities. The buildings exhibited eclectic architectural styles, and the conference rooms were well-equipped with all the necessary equipment. The weather also cooperated nicely, and it was so pleasant to walk on campus and through the town after the day's presentations came to an end.

More than 145 people registered, and they represented 21 countries. Especially welcome was the participation of so many Finnish colleagues, both as presenters and audience members.

A delegation from the Supreme Court of Afghanistan was also in attendance. These gentlemen came to learn about the role of court interpreting and translating in other countries, as they are working to introduce translation to the Afghani legal system. Their visit was sponsored by the Government of Canada.

A highlight of the conference was a talk by Leonard Orban, European Union (EU) Commissioner for Multilingualism from Romania. He presented much interesting information about the status of legal interpreting and translating in the EU. As an example, Mr. Orban stated that more than one-half of the EU Member States have no specialized training for interpreters and translators in the legal field. Although funding is always an issue, one of his goals is to establish an inventory of best practices and promulgate these throughout Europe. He also wishes to "create a network of universities" that will work together to further develop training opportunities and advise politicians about language services issues.

The formal conference papers were divided into five sections: (1) Issues of Professionalization; (2) Perspectives on Communication and Roles; (3) Country Reports; (4) Court Interpreters, Legal Translators – Different Perspectives; and (5) The International Perspective. Most generated lively discussion, and it was always fascinating to hear other international scholars' ideas on the topics.

In addition to a stimulating and varied program of presentations, the Conference Organizers arranged for two extremely fascinating side trips. One was to the Police College of Finland in Tampere, and the other was to the District Court. At the Police College, we learned about the course of study to become a police officer as well as the hierarchy of positions within the Finnish Police System. Our speaker, Jorma Laitinen, talked about criminal activity in Finland as well as the need for interpreters in police matters. Most of us were surprised by one of his statistics: more than 90% of Finns trust the police. This is not the case in many countries! During the visit to the District Court, we were honored to be addressed by Chief Judge Pekka Lankinen and several of his colleagues. We learned about the structure of the Finnish legal system. They also told us about the immigration situation both in Finland and in Tampere's district as well as the specific challenges presented to the courts by non-Finnish speakers. There were many audience questions, and the judges responded graciously and fully. Learning about comparative legal systems is always a positive and relevant experience for those of us who study language planning and policy development for interpreter and translator services. Participants were also treated to a tour of the courthouse (including the judges' chambers), and we were able to see some courtrooms as well.

As a relatively new member of the FIT Committee on Court Interpreting and Legal Translation, this was my first FIT Forum. The conference offered numerous opportunities for networking. I was able to meet several people in person with whom I had corresponded for quite a while. I am sure this was the case for many other colleagues as well.

Many, many thanks go to the Chair of the FIT Committee, Liese Katschinka, who works tirelessly to improve the status of legal interpreting and translating throughout the EU and the world. We also wish to express our deepest gratitude to the local organizers, Satu Leinonen and Kaarina Hietanen, who offered such a splendid venue and made sure that all was in order on a daily basis. The Welcome Reception, the lunches on Friday and Saturday as well as the Congress Dinners were all wonderful!

Moreover, the Finnish/English interpreter services added so much to the meeting. As someone who listened to the interpreters regularly when a Finn spoke, I was really impressed with the high quality of their work.

All of the Organizers' planning and attention to detail resulted in an excellent conference overall, a resounding success! We all look forward to the next FIT Forum in 2010.