
EUD Update

What's up for Deaf People in the European Union??

Special Edition: Update on The Status of Sign Languages in the European Union

Volume 4 Number 10 March 2001

Contents:

The Status of Sign Languages in the European Union in 2001.	1
Overview of Country-by-Country Analysis.....	1
BELGIUM	3
BELGIUM – FLANDERS: Flemish Sign Language	3
WALLONIA: Belgian-French Sign Language	5
DENMARK: Danish Sign Language	8
FINLAND: Finnish Sign Language	8
FRANCE: French Sign Language (LSF)	10
GERMANY: German Sign Language	11
GREECE: Hellenic Sign Language	13
IRELAND: Irish Sign Language	14
ITALY: Italian Sign Language (LIS)	16
LUXEMBOURG: A complex situation.....	17
NETHERLANDS: Sign Language of the Netherlands.....	18
PORTUGAL: Portuguese Sign Language (LGP)	19
SPAIN: Spanish Sign Language.....	19
SWEDEN: Swedish Sign Language.....	21
UNITED KINGDOM: British Sign Language.....	25
Non-EU Country Reports.....	26
ESTONIA: Estonian Sign Language	26
ICELAND: Icelandic Sign Language	27
NORWAY: Norwegian Sign Language.....	29

The Status of Sign Languages in the European Union in 2001.

In the February edition of EUD Update we reported on the EUD Seminar on Sign Languages that took place in Lund, Sweden on 17-18 February 2001. In February, we reported that delegates from all European Union Member States were present, along with representatives from outside the European Union - Estonia, Iceland, Norway and Russia. At this seminar, each country's official delegate provided an overview of the status of sign languages in their country. These reports followed up on the research carried out during the EUD Sign Languages Project 1997.

In this special edition of EUD Update, we provide you with the facts as presented at the EUD Seminar in Lund by Deaf organisation representatives in the European Union Member States. We also offer information about the status of sign languages in Estonia, Russia, Norway and Iceland, as reported by delegates from these non-EU countries.

Overview of Country-by-Country Analysis

As we know, the European Parliament first adopted a Resolution on Sign Languages in 1988, acknowledging them as the preferred languages of Deaf people. For almost a decade since that resolution was passed, we witnessed remarkably little action to increase the profile of sign languages in European countries.

However, since the end of the EUD Sign Languages Project in 1997, and especially since the European Parliament reiterated their support for the right of deaf people to use a sign language as their preferred language by adopting a second Resolution on Sign Languages in 1998, things have improved. While a number of developments have taken place to enhance the status of sign languages, many issues remain un-tackled. And tackle them we must in order to increase and consolidate the status of sign languages.

Update on Recognition of Sign Languages

It comes as no surprise that every country that presented a report in Lund state that they feel that sign languages are the first languages of the Deaf community. This is because they enable easy and natural communication. Delegate after delegate called for sign languages to be used as a first language, with the written language of the country considered as a second language for

writing and reading.

In many countries the official sign language/s is/are recognised to some extent. But sign languages are rarely officially recognised *an sich* in national constitutions or in legislation, as the preferred language of the Deaf community living in the country. Exceptions within the Council of Europe territories include the following, all of whom have constitutional reference to their sign languages:

Czech Republic (1988) – Czech Sign Language Finland (1995) – sign language users Greece (2000) – Greek Sign Language Portugal (1997) – Portuguese Sign Language (PSL) Slovak Republic (1995) – deaf sign language users

Consequently in all European countries Deaf associations and their members and allies have continued to campaign vigorously for the recognition of sign languages as fully-fledged languages, on equal footing with the spoken languages of their country/ region. They have put the recognition of sign language firmly on the agenda over the past four years.

It is clear that this movement has been in part facilitated by the momentum generated by the EUD Sign Languages Project of 1996-97, which analysed the problems and obstacles that confronted sign language users. For the first time, national Deaf associations were able to work together with other potential partners in their respective countries to analyse and define the problems, and to propose solutions to overcome these problems.

At the same time, the University of Bristol, Centre for Deaf Studies carried out an EU-wide survey. The results showed a difference in the way deaf people and their languages, sign languages, were perceived by hearing and deaf people, and by hearing people working within or outside the Deaf field. Findings also indicated that Deaf people tended to know less about their languages and their culture than hearing people did, and that there were relatively few deaf researchers active in Deaf studies, in comparison to the number of hearing researchers in this field.

The level to which the various national deaf associations have managed to take their campaign for sign language recognition varies understandably from one country to another, as the actual situation and legal framework differs from country to country.

It is, however, important to note that the campaign for increased recognition of sign languages has been backed up by research that demonstrates that sign languages are languages in their own right, with independent lexicons and grammar systems. This shows the importance of sign language research, since it is through such research that we can refute the assumptions of many people – politicians and high-level government officials among others – that sign languages are “not real languages”.

Deaf Education

Small but profound changes are also taking place in Deaf education: more and more deaf children are being taught bilingually, even though in many countries this still remains experimental and is the exception rather than the rule.

Only deaf children in the Scandinavian countries are entitled to receive a bilingual education, while in other countries, it is up to the child's parents to decide. Take into account the fact that parents are not always fully and objectively informed about the educational possibilities for their children (sometimes there is no educational choice at all!) and that this information is generally still biased towards mainstreaming and oral education.

Nevertheless, the oral method of education is slowly but surely losing ground to the bilingual approach. More demands are being placed on teachers of the Deaf – including those who have been working with deaf children for years – to acquire their national sign language in order to be able to communicate effectively with their pupils. In some countries it is a prerequisite for teachers who want to work with deaf children to know sign language, before they can start teaching deaf children.

Sign Language Training, Teaching and Interpretation

Another trend that is seen in the country reports is that more and more hearing people are interested in learning a sign language. Sometimes the demand is so great that there is not an adequate supply of appropriate courses on offer. The consequence is that in many cases the quality of sign language courses cannot be guaranteed or controlled, as in many cases, unqualified sign language instructors are used to teach sign language courses.

A related problem is the lack of adequate training and resources for sign language instructors in many countries, especially if they are Deaf, since Deaf people have generally had less educational opportunities than their non-deaf counterparts. There is also a wide diversity in the standards and level of sign language instruction/training. But in many countries serious efforts are being undertaken to streamline courses and standards, and to improve co-operation and co-ordination among the different “actors” in this field.

Furthermore, in some countries universities or institutes of higher education have begun to offer courses for those who want to learn sign language as a foreign language and/or those who want to become a qualified sign language interpreter. Thus standards are being raised and sign language training for would-be sign language interpreters are no longer confined to evening classes.

A problem is the level of remuneration of sign language interpreters and the fact that there are not enough sign language interpreters to satisfy demand. The latter will probably always be a problem, no matter what we do to recruit more interpreters, given the rather high turnover rate in the interpreting profession. We suggest that this should be an issue for further consideration by sign language interpreter associations.

In the next few pages, we introduce a country-by-country report in alphabetical order. We trust that you will find these reports of interest, and perhaps some of the findings will support you as you work towards greater recognition of your sign language/s in your country.

BELGIUM

BELGIUM – FLANDERS: Flemish Sign Language

VGTC (Flemish Sign Language Centre)

While participating in the EUD Sign Languages Project, the Flemish National Commission brought together experts in several areas such as linguistics, Flemish Sign Language users, Deaf Schools, and Parents associations.

After the Sign Languages Project came to an end, Fevlado decided to try to maintain the “intellectual values and know how” that had developed. As a result, we set up the Flemish Sign Language Centre that continues the research work on Flemish Sign Language. The Centre also supports our contact with Deaf Schools, in developing Sign Language teaching, and in promoting sign language research at academic level.

This Centre is lead by Dr. Myriam (Mim) VERMEERBERGEN and Dr. Mieke VANHERREWEGHE, both well-known and respected experts on sign language in Flanders.

Kasterlinden (School for Deaf and Hard of hearing Children in Brussels – Berchem)

Following the initiative of some teachers of the Deaf at the Kasterlinden School for the Deaf in Brussels (Kasterlinden), Fevlado has set up a new organisation “t Signaal”. This new organisation will monitor and coordinate an experimental pilot project in bi-lingual teaching. The project aims to teach deaf children using a “twin-teachers” approach. This means that the hearing “official” teacher is supported by a “Deaf” assistant, who teaches lessons through Flemish Sign Language. This pilot project has been running for over 2 years and the results are very positive. Our objective is to keep this experiment running and to secure funding to expand this approach to several schools / classes.

The main problem is that we don’t yet have qualified Deaf Teachers (though now we have a few students undertaking university level training to become officially sanctioned

teachers). Thus things are moving in the right direction.

Attitude Deaf Schools towards Flemish Sign Language

Before 1997, we could say that the Deaf Schools considered Flemish Sign Language to be the last resort in the teaching of Deaf Children. It was only used where an oral approach to education didn't provide adequate results. Since the Sign Languages Project, we can conclude that (in our eyes, a revolutionary) change has occurred in how the Deaf Schools view Flemish Sign Language: it is now seen as a valuable means for teaching Deaf Children. Parents can choose an oral education or an education delivered through Flemish Sign Language.

Deaf Schools are now working with us to improve their teaching programmes, to use the appropriate Flemish Sign Language vocabulary and grammar, to find appropriate Deaf people to work in the Deaf Schools as assistants, and so on. We are currently running a project, sponsored by the King Baudouin Foundation, in partnership with the Deaf Schools in Flanders and the Sign Language Centre to develop sign vocabulary for concepts for which we don't currently have an available Flemish Sign Language vocabulary.

Some Legal Change: Resolution dd. 05.05.1999 of the Flemish Government

After the Sign Languages Project (1997), our Federation continued our work at political level: we found that we could use the results of the Sign Languages Project in a positive way - we now had arguments, reports, etc. with which we could argue a strong case. Our lobbying brought us into contact with a very diverse group of politicians from several political parties.

The Flemish Parliament voted to support the resolution on 05.05.1999. This resolution asked the Government to take the necessary measures to improve the life situation of Deaf People in Flanders. The Minister of Welfare in Flanders has now adopted this resolution into her work programme and asked her administration to work out several steps for the practical application of this resolution.

The Ministry is now working very closely with our Federation, along with Deaf Schools, Services for Deaf People, and so forth, and we hope that in 2001 we can present some concrete results as an outcome of the resolution. One of the points explicitly mentioned in the resolution is the establishment of a commission to prepare for the official recognition of Flemish Sign Language in Flanders. Ideally, this will be linked to the European Year of the Languages.

Sign Language Research in Flanders

There are currently two major projects underway: The first is a research project called "The Status of Flemish Sign Language". This is being carried out by the universities of Ghent, Leuven and Brussels. This project was established at the request of the Flemish Government. Funding comes from the Flemish government. Researchers include Deaf researchers and members of Fevlado. A second project is also underway, focusing on dialects in Flemish Sign Language in Flanders.

In 1998 and 1999 our Federation lobbied the President of the Flemish Government to provide funding for a survey of the situation of Flemish Sign Language users and research regarding Flemish Sign Language itself. Finally, in 2000, the Flemish Government empowered 3 Universities to work together on this research programme. We hope that the results will be available in 2002.

In this project, some young Deaf people are working alongside hearing researchers. This allows these Deaf people to gain experience for later research projects.

We are also happy that this project has been requested by the Flemish Government itself and we hope they will follow the recommendations that arise from the project's research results.

TV Broadcasting

In 1998 Fevlado had its own TV-series, "World of Signs", and this series (26 broadcastings of 20 minutes) was repeated in 1999. This initiative aimed at providing the hearing community in Flanders a better understanding of Flemish Deaf People and their Sign Language. We have also produced a video, based on this TV-series.

We are now lobbying for our own weekly TV-programme. Contact has been made with the Minister of Media, and this has been very positive to date. We hope to make a breakthrough in 2001 in this area.

Sign Language Interpreters

In 1998 we organised a demonstration in Brussels to demand the right for Deaf Students attending mainstream schools to be provided with Flemish Sign Language Interpreters.

This demonstration has led to the establishment of a pilot project to provide Flemish Sign Language, funded by the Ministry of Education. However, due to strict limitations (number of students, available hours, lessons, etc.) – this experimental project is still running. And while we are moving forward in great leaps and bounds, we must keep working to ensure that the right of deaf students to be supported through the provision of Flemish Sign Language interpreters (without limitations) becomes a legal right.

Flemish Sign Language Interpreters are now better paid by the Government (due to the joint lobbying of Fevlado and CAB, the Flemish Sign Language Interpreting Bureau). As a result, Deaf People in Flanders now have more hours allocated to them for use of Flemish Sign Language Interpreters.¹

Training for Flemish Sign Language Interpreters is improving, but the problem remains that interpreter training is still only available in “evening-class” format. With the aim of providing a high-level education for the Flemish Sign Language Interpreters, Fevlado has been in contact with the Antwerp High School for Social Studies to set up a specific training programme for Flemish Sign Language Interpreters. This will be a full-time, daytime programme. Many practical details need to be handled and we are also gathering information about several existing sign language interpreter-training programmes across Europe.

¹ In Flanders, Deaf people are entitled to a minimum of 18 hours of interpretation for personal/ social purposes per year. In addition, each deaf person has the right to sign language interpretation at work for 10 % of their working hours. On request, this can be extended to 20 % of working hours. Interpreting fees are paid by the Flemish government.

Official Name of Flemish Sign Language **(VGT – Vlaamse Gebaren Taal)**

The Sign Language in Flanders was officially named at the recent Annual Meeting of Fevlado vzw. We had to choose between calling our sign language Belgium-Flemish Sign Language or Flemish Sign Language. Considering the situation in Belgium (cultural, social, linguistic, etc.), we chose the name: “Vlaamse Gebarentaal – in short: VGT” (translates into English as: Flemish Sign Language).

WALLONIA: Belgian-French Sign Language

From 1996 to 1997, the FFSB (*Federation Francophone des Sourds de Belgique*, or Belgian-French Community Federation of the Deaf) had the opportunity of establishing a national committee and of drawing up a report on the situation of Sign Language in French-speaking Belgium. The opportunity was made possible by financial support from the EUD (European Union of the Deaf).

First, it is important to remember that Belgium has been a federal state since 1993. Belgium thus has three communities: the Flemish, French and German-speaking communities - and three regions: the regions of Flanders, Brussels Capital and Wallonia. The German-speaking community is included in Wallonia. Belgium also has three official languages: Flemish (also called Dutch), French and German.

In brief, laws passed in the French community or the region of Wallonia are not necessarily valid in the other communities and regions, and vice versa. However, the regions of Wallonia and Brussels Capital have been trying for some time to come together through certain common actions.

Here we will take up the themes discussed in the 1996-97 report, namely: education and teaching by deaf teachers, financing and training of interpreters, legislation and the status of sign language, use of multimedia, interpretation and programming in television, relay service, training for parents and awareness-raising.

Education and Teaching by Deaf Teachers

In the field of special education, little has changed since the 1996-97 report. Mainstream education, however, has seen real progress at the legal level since former education minister, Laurette ONKELINX, launched her decree on immersion.

Amendments to the project proposed by the FFSB, working together with the APEDAF (*Association de Parents d'Enfants Déficitaires Auditifs*, or Association of Parents of Hearing-Deficient Children), enabled Belgian-French Sign Language to be recognised as a medium for teaching in schools, on a par with spoken languages such as Flemish, English or Spanish.

Since September 2000, an infants' class in Namur offers courses taught in Belgian-French Sign Language to both deaf and hearing children, but it is the parents of the deaf children who contribute financially.

Financing and Training of Interpreters

In the Brussels Capital region, the SISB (*Service d'Interprétation pour Sourds de Bruxelles*, or Brussels Interpretation Service for the Deaf) has been recognised since 1 July 2000 as a service. Deaf persons in Brussels also benefit from 30 hours' interpretation a year, as compared with the 15 hours originally allocated.

In the region of Wallonia, the SISW (*Service d'Interprétation pour Sourds de Wallonie*, or Wallonia Interpretation Service for the Deaf) is still not officially recognised, but is financed entirely by the Ministry of Social Affairs. The delay in recognition is due to the fact that the parties concerned are still looking for a better system that will give more flexibility in the number of hours granted. As needs differ so much from one deaf person to another, the FFSB insists on preserving a demand-based system.

In the schools sector, interpretation is still managed by the Ministry of Health – who specify speech therapy as a pre-requisite condition – and NOT by the Ministry of Education. At the present time, LPC (*Langue Parlée Complétée*, or Complete Spoken Language) and AKA are the most widely used systems, to the detriment of Sign Language. In certain public institutions the personnel learn

Sign Language, but the numbers are still very small.

There is still no professional interpreter's course or diploma, but this situation should change by the end of 2001. At present, interpreters come mainly from the *Promotion Sociale* courses organised by the administrators of Belgium's French Community.

Legislation and Status of Sign Language

Belgian-French Sign Language is not really recognised as such, but is referred to in certain legal texts – such as the decree on immersion in ordinary education.

On the 27th of April 1999 the French Community adopted a resolution aimed at recognising Belgian-French Sign Language by way of a decree to be implemented before the 31st of July 2000.

Unfortunately, various obstacles slowed down the process. At present, the case has been taken on by Nicole Maréchal, the French Community's Minister of Youth and Health. Lately there have been inter-ministry meetings to evaluate the ramifications in various domains.

The report on the special education sector, entitled, "*On a proposal made by Minister N. Maréchal the Government of the French Community established on inter-cabinet working group to define the fields and modalities of application of a draft decree proposal to recognize Sign Language* (Press Release of 19.11.2000) has just been submitted by the relevant commission.

Use of Multimedia

New technologies such as the Internet and the mobile phone/SMS are often very successful in the Deaf community. However, the price of a mobile phone/fax is prohibitive for some. A request has been put before the Brussels Service for Integration of the Handicapped for at least partial reimbursement, with no outcome as yet.

The Minitel, or ALTO, is unfortunately no longer manufactured in Belgium, due to its limited commercial viability. Other new technologies are being tried, but there is a regrettable inequality of means.

Concerning tariffs, Belgacom (the national telephone company) offers a 50% reduction for deaf persons on condition that their calls exceed 1,500 BEF per month. Proximus offers subscribers an SMS tariff of 3 BEF per transmission, as compared with their normal tariff of 6 BEF. However, subscription costs are such that the user would have to send over 300 SMS messages per month to make the system worthwhile.

A subsidy from the Wallonia region has enabled the FFSB to create an Internet site offering a maximum of information. It can be found at www.ffsb.be.

Television

Since 1981, RTBF (*Radio Télévision Belge Francophone*, Belgium's French-speaking state channel) continues to provide Sign Language interpretation of the 7.30 evening news, but it is frequently cancelled in favour of live sports coverage.

Since 1999, French Community funding has enabled RTBF to create 2½ full-time posts for closed-subtitle coding of some programmes. The FFSB conducted a survey to determine which programmes should be subtitled. However, the most-requested programme is only subtitled 50 per cent of the time (one programme in two).

RTBF's new children's news programme *Niuzz* is translated into Belgian-French Sign Language, but only on its fourth and last broadcast at 11am the next day.

The RTBF broadcasts *Tu vois ce que je veux dire* ('You see what I mean') 6 to 8 times a year. Created by and for the deaf, the programme has been running since 1995. It is created by a volunteer camera crew – 3 deaf and 3 hearing. RTBF takes responsibility for editing, subtitling, and, of course, broadcasting.

In December 1999, when the camera graciously lent by a professional studio broke down, FFSB took the necessary steps to obtain a subsidy for a semi-professional camera, which was kept in the *Centre Média Sourds* (Deaf Media Centre), who supply most of the volunteer cameramen.

In addition to RTBF, some local chains subtitle their broadcasts. News and information are also

available on Teletext. Overall access to television for deaf persons in French-speaking Belgium stands at around 5% of broadcasts.

Relay Service

Unlike the Flemish Community, the French Community still has no relay service. The emergency number, "100" is accessible by fax.

Training for Parents

The French Community's *Promotion Sociale* system offers Belgian-French Sign Language courses, but these are often unsuited to parents' needs, particularly as not many parents have access to the reduction of working hours that is normally part of the *Promotion Sociale* package.

However, the courses are very popular and a lot of institutions include Belgian-French Sign Language as one of their courses. One consequence of this, in view of the lack of qualified deaf teachers, is that the system engages deaf persons with no basic training in language teaching. FFSB is unable to intervene with the organising bodies of these institutions.

More and more parents meet the Deaf community in order to familiarise themselves with Deaf culture and Belgian-French Sign Language but many others opt for PLC, which is much easier to learn.

Awareness Raising

For the past 7 years, FFSB has organised the *Journée Mondiale des Sourds* (World Day of the Deaf), which takes place the fourth Saturday of September, in a different city each year. The event has proven a formidable tool for raising awareness among the public authorities and population of the host town. Stands presenting various associations of and for the deaf plus a mass procession in white gloves allow the two worlds to approach each other.

The *Surdimobil* (Deafmobile), an interactive walk-around presentation, is currently seeking funding to enable it to continue its activities.

The television programme *Tu vois ce que je veux dire*, mentioned above, is another excellent means of information dissemination for both deaf and hearing people.

Conclusion and Perspectives

Globally speaking, Belgian-French Sign Language is increasingly admitted and accepted by public authorities. However, once financial considerations come into the picture they tend to act as a brake on progress. We very much hope that the inter-ministerial meetings on the recognition of Belgian-French Sign Language organised by the French Community will bear tangible results in important areas such as education, training and the media.

Ms. Martine FRAITURE, FSSB

DENMARK: Danish Sign Language

European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

In 2000, the Danish Deaf Association tried to have Danish Sign Language included when the Danish government ratified the Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (Council of Europe 1992). Unfortunately, this campaign was not successful.

Social Interpretation Project

In a three and a half year project from 2000-2003, deaf people will have the right to sign language interpretation free of charge in situations where they previously had to pay themselves. Danish Sign Language interpretation is now free when:

- Visiting the doctor, dentist, chiropractor, physiotherapist, etc.
- Having conversations with a “home-help”, lawyer, insurance company, etc.
- Education (evening classes, open university, etc.)
- Receiving treatments in private hospitals
- Cultural events
- Meetings with unions and others within the labour market
- Private events, leisure activities, lectures, etc.

Danish Sign Language Interpreter Training

In 1998 this was extended to three and a half years. The first year focuses on providing basic Danish Sign Language input. In principle, this is open to everybody.

Deaf Teacher Education

There is a working group focusing on this issue. They proposed that more and better education be made available to Deaf teachers. This proposal is currently being considered by the Association of County Councils in Denmark.

Danish Sign Language Training for Parents

The parents association, Bonaventure, has planned a training programme for parents in conjunction with the Ministry of Education.

Danish Sign Language Dictionary

In 1999, preliminary work began on a new, extended Dictionary of Danish Sign Language. A steering committee has been formed. The committee works with a linguist.

Ms. Lene HEMPEL, Denmark.

FINLAND: Finnish Sign Language

Sign Language Research

The work of the Finnish Sign Language Board on language preservation has continued over a period of four years. It is submitted to the Research Center on National Languages and the work conducted has a basis in legislation.

Research project on Finnish Swedish Sign Language (1988-2002):

This project studied the situation of Deaf Finns who use Swedish Sign Language in Finland. The sign language used by them has been recorded on video and analyzed. Deaf Finns using Swedish Sign Language form a small minority that is in danger of extinction. Most Deaf children, young people and adults of working age who use the Swedish Sign Language have emigrated to Sweden. The school for Deaf Finns using Swedish Sign Language was closed down in 1993.

In the church the needs of those who use sign language have been taken into account so that in 1999, the Church Council (Lutheran) began translating the church manual into sign language. They plan to make the translation of church texts a permanent activity.

Legislation and Action Undertaken by the Finnish Authorities

Finnish Broadcasting Corporation (FBC)

(1998): A new law was passed in 1998 stating that the FBC must take account of the needs of sign language users in its production program. The news in sign language is still the only regular service for Finnish Sign Language Users. The Broadcasting Corporation/TV 1 has also hired a Deaf editor who is a Finnish Sign Language user. He works on a regular contract for the news broadcast in Finnish Sign Language.

The Research and Development Center for Welfare and Health carried out a study on the present status and functionality of Finnish Sign Language interpretation. The report was published, and it stated that there is lots of room for improvement and that the services offered varied greatly from municipality to municipality. The Finnish Association of the Deaf proposed to the Ministry of Education that an advisory committee be established to consider following-up on the question of how the needs of the sign language users are met in practice. The advisory committee has not yet been established, but the Ministry will call a follow-up meeting. Representatives of the pertinent ministries, various experts and representatives of cooperating organizations of those using sign language will be called together for this meeting.

The National Board of Education has ratified the bases for a new curriculum that will be implemented at pre-school level for a pilot project from 2000-2001. They take account of sign language users as an individual group. The Finnish Association of the Deaf participated in the preparatory process, and they were also asked to make a statement regarding the educational curriculum.

The law on basic and upper secondary education came into effect in 1998 and the legislation on general cultural and professional education was completely renewed in 1999.

In § 10, paragraph 1 of the law on basic education (Aug. 21, 1998/628) it states that the language used for teaching in a school can be a sign language. The guardian can choose a second language, which is taught as a mother tongue.

In the law on upper secondary school (21 August 1998/629) it is ruled that the language used in teaching can be a sign language. The student can choose the language in which he or she is taught. If the student so chooses, a sign language can also be taught as a mother tongue.

In the law on municipalities and in various decrees there are also regulations on teachers' linguistic competence: for instance, the director of the school and the class teacher must master perfectly the teaching language of the school, as stated in regulations § 10 of the BA (Basic Education Act). See Basic Education Act.

Training

A training programme for class teachers of Finnish Sign Language users started in the autumn of 1998, and 10 students began their studies. In autumn 2001 another group will commence studies.

University level studies in sign language are still popular subjects both at Turku and Jyväskylä Universities, and in the autumn of 1998 a study program regarding sign languages was started at the University of Jyväskylä.

Training of Finnish Sign Language interpreters moved from a second level college to a polytechnic institute of higher learning. The training consists of 140 credit weeks.

The basic diploma in Finnish Sign Language instruction will start in the autumn of 2001. The professional title is "Sign Language Instructor" and it consists in 120 credit weeks. It is a completely new profession in Finland.

The three-year Virtuopo (Virtual Study Tutor) Project, financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Ministry of Education, began in 2000, and its objective is to create in the data networks virtual study and vocational tutoring for all Finnish Sign Language user groups (including unemployed adults).

Six comprehensive schools of Deaf people and two adult schools participate in the Virtual School Project, which is coordinated by the Finnish Association of the Deaf. Its objective is to create for sign language users of all ages a suitable Open Learning Environment, network pedagogy and a visual user interface for sign language users. The project began last year.

Materials and Products

The basic dictionary of Finnish sign language was nominated for the "Finnish Knowledge" contest, and received a lot of attention.

The company ProSign Oy that produces multimedia in Finnish Sign Language was founded in 1998. They have produced, among other things, children's programs for TV in Finnish Sign Language and the educational program "I came, I saw, I signed".

In the autumn of 2000, with support from the Service Foundation for the Deaf and the Finnish Federation for Social Welfare and Health, a study called "If All Hearing People Could Use Sign Language" was published. It deals with the well being of Finnish Deaf people.

A survey of sign language "The Users of Sign Language in Finland" was published in the autumn of 2000.

A teaching package in Finnish Sign Language aimed at schools that teach social and health sciences will be completed in the winter of 2001.

The Finnish Association of the Deaf, obtained financing from the Finnish Slot Machine Association for the HELY Project aimed at the relatives and workers of the Deaf. This project will run from 2001-2006. The project studies how languages in general are taught and what can be applied to teaching sign languages to hearing people. A teaching unit is created based on level of skills, the exam system is renewed and new teaching material is produced.

FRANCE: French Sign Language (LSF)

Call for Recognition of LSF

At the end of the national "silent" march for the recognition of French Sign Language (LSF) on 17 March 1999, the National Federation of the Deaf in France, supported by 3,000 Deaf people, handed a private members bill concerning Deaf rights, the right to use LSF and a call for recognition of LSF to Mr. Laurent FABIUS, former President of the French National Assembly.

In France, the image people have of Deaf people is still quite negative. We need to promote the use of LSF as a first language, with written French as a second language for the purposes of written communication. LSF should be available and used in everyday communication with Deaf people, beginning at nursery school – right through to the professional life of Deaf people. We should not forget that LSF was first sign language that received a great deal of attention and recognition because of the work of Charles Michel de l'Épée who established the first public school for the deaf in the world in the 1800s. Today, academic research clearly shows that LSF is a complete language with its own grammar, vocabulary, etc.

Many non-deaf persons wish to learn LSF as a second or foreign language. We request that LSF be offered as a subject for examination in secondary schools, and as an optional subject for the Baccalauréat examination². It is very encouraging to see the increased demand for LSF courses, but unfortunately there are not enough qualified teachers available on the ground. The French Education Department are responsible for the allocation of resources, and we call on them to provide further resources to make it possible to offer appropriate training leading to a recognized diploma for the teaching of LSF.

We believe that teachers, researchers, leaders of associations, schools and the relevant authorities should work in synergy at national level to create a network for the teaching of LSF.

In April 1999, an action committee was established by 3 major organizations:

- IRIS (Toulouse)
- ALSF (Paris)
- IVT (Vincennes)

This action committee will work together to develop a basic training package for teaching LSF. The committee also intends to develop educational methods for teaching LSF. These approaches will then be disseminated across France.

² The Baccalauréat Examination results give students access to university courses. This is like the A-Level system in the UK or the Leaving Certificate in Ireland.

Bilingual Education

On 12 October 2000, a representative of The Minister of Education, Mr. BRISSON, observed the appalling state of education made available to Deaf teenagers. We challenged the Minister's representative to compare what he saw with the bilingual approach to education that is in place at IRIS, Toulouse. Mr. BRISSON reported on his visits to the Education Office for the Toulouse Region. He called for the region to take whatever measures are necessary to authorize bilingual education. We are currently waiting for similar measures to be taken at national level.

Mr. Jean-Pierre SUEUR, Lord Mayor of Orleans, and principal member in charge of the Private Members Bill concerning the recognition of LSF accepted that the complexity of the education system needed to be examined in more detail.

This year Mr. Alain SEKSIG, the advisor to the Ministers responsible for National Education, sent a letter to all principal teachers in schools for the deaf encouraging them to promote the use of LSF in their teaching in their schools.

Call for Action

The National Federation of the Deaf of France officially requests that:

- Each deaf person has the right to communicate using LSF
- That LSF is officially acknowledged as a language, and as an expression of the cultural richness of the deaf
- Nobody should be deprived of their sign language
- All deaf people should have access to an appropriate "normal" education
- LSF should be taught at all levels of education
- All parents should be entitled to fulfill their parental rights with respect to their deaf children
- The law should recognize the right of parents of deaf children to multidisciplinary training, including the learning of various types of communication with the deaf. They should have the right to have this training funded by the French Government.

Ms. Isabelle SEAU and Mr. Patrick FOURASTIE (FSNF).

GERMANY: German Sign Language

Introduction

Germany is divided into 16 federal states, each one having an elected government in its own right. If not stated otherwise by constitution, these governments are independent in their decision-making process. This includes all legal actions concerning educational matters as well as, for example, the recognition of Sign Language. For Deaf people this means that they have to get involved in decision-making in their home states in the first instance in order to change the national situation.

There is a wide range of political activities engaged in by Deaf people. During a festival of Deaf culture in Hamburg in 1993, a demonstration was organized, followed by another one in Munich in 1995. Round table meetings and discussions with a large number of politicians have been arranged in order to inform them about Deafness in general and the importance of Sign Language for the Deaf community. Many of these politicians felt they had to promote Deaf people's concerns more than they did before and got engaged in various political activities in this field.

One big success in 2001 will be the final admission of a new social law, bearing a number of advantages also for Deaf people, such as assistance in workplaces for example.

Concerning subtitling and sign language on TV there still is a lot left to be desired.

We also saw a change in the education of Deaf children. Whereas during the early 1990's, education was exclusively oral with some use of signed German, the end of the decade saw more and more use of German Sign Language and bilingual projects and students of special education for the deaf are now obliged to take classes in German Sign Language. More and more German Sign Language is used in the classroom.

The Recognition of German Sign Language

Most teachers of the Deaf did not learn German

Sign Language. Schools for the hearing impaired are not obliged to use German Sign Language and Deaf people are not legally entitled to have German Sign Language/ German interpreters. There are no regulations for the payment of interpreters.

Since 1989 the German Deaf Association has been fighting for the recognition of German Sign Language.

Above all there is a demand for:

- The training of Sign Language interpreters and the possibility to study German Sign Language at university
- Clear regulations regarding the payment of German Sign Language interpreters
- The inclusion of German Sign Language in schools: German Sign Language classes for teachers and the use of German Sign Language in the education of severely hearing impaired children and young adults.
- German Sign Language interpreters on TV
- From the beginning the German Deaf Association has been strongly supported by German universities, which have begun to carry out research into German Sign Language. We would like to especially mention the Institute for German Sign Language and Communication of the Deaf, University of Hamburg. Like many other linguists abroad, linguists working there recognized that German Sign Language is a true language in its own right. The European Parliament's Resolution on Sign Languages in 1988 was another important step forward.

To date we have achieved:

- Promotion of the recognition of German Sign Language from 1993 to 1996 by the federal parliaments of Sachsen, Sachsen-Anhalt, Thüringen and Hessen in order to achieve nationwide recognition.
- The decision of all of the 16 Ministers of Labour and all of the Ministers of Social Affairs to recognize German Sign Language in 1994
- The decision of the Council of Ministers regarding the recognition of sign Language in 1997, 1998 and 1999.
- 1998 saw the first debate on the recognition of German Sign Language at the national German Parliament

- When Bündnis90/Die Grünen (Green Party) and the SPD (Social-Democrats) agreed on common guidelines after having won the election, German Sign Language was also put on the agenda.
- In 1999 Berlin was the first federal state to agree on an act of equal opportunities for people with disabilities, which also includes numerous paragraphs on German Sign Language.

The German Deaf Association is now hoping that German Sign Language will be officially recognized with the help of a nationwide act on equal opportunities for people with disabilities. The act is supposed to be agreed upon by the end of 2001/beginning of 2002.

Sign Language Interpreting

As mentioned before, German Deaf people are not legally entitled to have Sign Language interpreters and there are no regulations for the payment of interpreters.

It is therefore not surprising that in Germany the number of Sign Language interpreters is very small. According to a recent survey, most interpreters are working part-time and there are only about 50 full-time interpreters available. This means that each Deaf person could book an interpreter for an average of two hours a year (!!). Those of you, who know that sign language on TV is a common sight in many countries, will realize that in Germany hardly any programme is interpreted into German Sign Language.

We still have the problem that personal assistance in the workplace is by no means comparable to the work of a Sign Language interpreter. Being a real profession, German Sign Language/English interpreting does need remuneration regulations that take into consideration the length of training and the high level qualification interpreters must have, which are unnecessary for an assistant. The amount of time people with disabilities are entitled to have a personal assistant at work does not reflect the actual amount of time deaf employees would need an interpreter.

It is, however, a great success to have several universities in Germany (Hamburg, Frankfurt and Magdeburg) offering interpreter training at a

high level.

In 1999 the "Bavarian Institute for the Promotion of Communication of the Deaf and the hearing impaired" was founded to do more research into the education and certification of German Sign Language/ English interpreters and German Sign Language teachers.

Sign Language Interpreting on TV

There is still very little German Sign Language visible on TV. Subtitling is offered exclusively by state run broadcasting stations and is available on only a very narrow range of programmes. The only exception is the private broadcasting station "Pro7", which offers a Saturday night movie with subtitles.

The state run broadcasting station, "Phoenix", does have interpreters on the 8 o'clock news every evening as well as on a news round-up programme, broadcast later at night. These same programmes are broadcast on ZDF at the same time without interpreters, so that hearing people cannot complain about the "interference" of sign language/subtitles. Apart from this there are no regulatory interpreted programmes available so far.

Ms. Anke HANNIG / Mr. Rudi SAILER
Ms. Simone SCHOLL (translation)

GREECE: Hellenic Sign Language

During the three years from 1998 to 2000, the Hellenic Federation of the Deaf worked hard lobbying for the recognition of the Hellenic Sign Language in view of the processing from the Ministry of Education of a Law draft concerning the Disabled people with special educational needs. Particularly, we followed the guidelines for action and findings laid down in the EUD Sign Languages project of 1996-97.

In fact, the new Law 2817/14-3-2000 defines that *"The Language of Deaf and Hard of Hearing students is the Hellenic Sign Language"*.

In the same Law, knowledge of Hellenic Sign Language is also determined as an indispensable qualification for the appointment of the

educational Personnel in Deaf Schools or school units of the Deaf children the knowledge of the Hellenic Sign Language.

Also, the appointment of Deaf Educational Personnel has to be at a range of 20% of the total entire Personnel.

Since 1998, the Hellenic Federation of the Deaf has run courses in Hellenic Sign Language that are attended by approximately 150 hearing students every year.

Based on a new Hellenic Broadcasting Law in 1995 (Law 2328/95), a 5-minute news Bulletin in Hellenic Sign Language is broadcast on all TV channels everyday. Already there's a daily Bulletin from 7 national TV channels officially and some other local TV channels. 3-4 Deaf broadcasters are also working in local TV channels daily.

The Hellenic Federation of the Deaf is also subsidized by the Ministry of Welfare for the coverage of the interpreting needs in Hellenic Sign Language, where the Deaf individuals have the right to use interpreting in their everyday life (an exception applies to interpreting in University).

Further actions of the Hellenic Federation of the Deaf aim at the establishment of a Hellenic Sign Language University courses/Center, which will include research of Hellenic Sign Language, Training Courses for Deaf teachers of Hellenic Sign Language, and courses for Hellenic Sign Language/ Greek Interpreters.

Furthermore, the Hellenic Federation of the Deaf is now planning to set up a half-hour TV program twice a month in Hellenic Sign Language, focusing on, for example, educational, scientific, medical, and cultural issues.

The Hellenic Federation of the Deaf is also closely co-operating with the Department of Education at the *University of Patras*, where a Deaf Education Unit was set up. This is the only Deaf Education and Sign Language Research Unit in Greece. It involves Deaf and hearing experts teaching undergraduate and post-graduate courses.

IRELAND: Irish Sign Language

Status of Irish Sign Language

Irish Sign Language (ISL) is still not officially recognised in the national constitution. Only two languages- Irish and English- are the official languages. At the moment, there is a governmental committee is reviewing the constitution and it is expected that a report will be produced. It is the intention of the Irish Deaf Society to present a submission arguing for constitutional status for ISL.

However, there is some indication within government circles that ISL is accepted as a language of the Irish Deaf community. This is reflected in a number of recent measures, which were agreed upon and financed by the Irish government. The measures are as follows:

- **Education Act 1998.** The Act includes a clause recognising that Deaf children should be taught through ISL. It has to be noted that the clause is not clearly outlined as the wording. "*and other sign languages..*" has caused ambiguity. Nevertheless, the Act is in full force since the end of 2000. Coupled with recently enacted equality laws, Deaf people and parents of Deaf children are in a strong position to demand that education services to be provided through ISL. So far, there no case has been brought before the courts.
- **Centre for Deaf Studies:** The government announced the establishment of a centre in Trinity College, Dublin in June 2000 and has agreed to finance the centre for the next five years. The centre will focus on training ISL tutors and ISL/English interpreters. It is envisaged that the centre is to be a place of research on ISL. It is expected to have the centre fully operational by October 2002 although staff will be recruited in the near future and first courses could be set up in October 2001.
- **Link Up Literacy Project:** Following the well-documented record of appalling literacy rates among Deaf people due to the oral method of education, the Irish Deaf Society was given a large financial subvention to set up a literacy project for Deaf people to improve and sustain English as a second

language. The project aims to develop a curriculum and train 25 Deaf tutors who, in turn, will teach Deaf people through ISL.

- **Home ISL tuition scheme:** The government has agreed to finance the scheme aiming to give grants to parents of Deaf pre-school children to hire ISL tutors to maximise the language acquisition for the child. This was a result of a campaign by parents themselves and the Irish Deaf Society fully supported this campaign. It is understood in recent weeks that the scheme has will be extended to primary level education. Each child is entitled to have 7 and a half hours each week of ISL tuition.
- **The Model School for the Deaf Project:** The government through the Department of Education has agreed to fund the setting up of pre-school provision for Deaf children. The project emphasises the philosophy of bilingualism where children are expected to be taught through both languages - ISL and written English. The project enjoys a growing volume of support and more parents have enrolled. It is expected to have the school up and running by Autumn 2001. Although the project is independent of the Irish Deaf Society, the Irish Deaf Society fully supports the project.

Clearly the state has regarded ISL as a language. However, the goal of constitutional recognition of ISL remains a priority.

Current Situation

There is a growing awareness among grassroots Deaf people of the importance of ISL as a language. Media-wise, there have been a number of newspaper articles on the status of Deaf people in Ireland to highlight the need to have ISL recognised.

On TV, we still have two minutes daily news bulletin signing by a pool of three Deaf newscasters. Due to time restraints and lack of introductory training courses, the transmissions are still dominated by signed English, rather than ISL. The news bulletin is still administered by editors who do not have any basic understanding of ISL. We also have a half-hour programme dedicated to the Deaf community and it is transmitted on TV twelve times a year. It is understood that two Deaf presenters have been

reassigned as associate producers of this programme.

The programme is franchised to an independent production company by the public broadcaster RTE and there is a very strong emphasis on budgetary prudence.

The only interpreting agency in Ireland - **Irish Sign Link** - continues trading despite some recent financial difficulty. The agency depends on a once-off grant from the government and commission levied from interpreting fees. However, recent experience shows it is not possible to have the agency operating on a commercial basis. Regarding difficulties, recently some government departments have indicated that the agency will be partly financed by the state while retaining a commission levied on interpreting fees. It is generally envisaged that the agency will be put on a firmer footing once it has a regular government subsidy.

Issues Regarding the Status of ISL.

Although there has been an impressive number of measures undertaken recently to support ISL, agreed and financed by the government, there are several serious outstanding issues. These are:

The quality of ISL tutors: there are only four appropriately qualified ISL tutors catering for all the demands for ISL tuition. There are an enormous number of tutors employed on a part-time basis but they do not have access to quality or adequate training. As a consequence, there is a greater confusion among the public regarding the linguistic nature of ISL.

The lack of on-going research into ISL: this has been a source of concern to those who supports the status of ISL. It is envisaged that the Centre for Deaf Studies will be a place where on-going research will be conducted.

The low levels of awareness among Deaf people regarding the status of ISL: there is a good deal of ignorance and confusion surrounding the nature of ISL. It has proved to be a frustration to those who are trying to get the message across the community.

European Year of Language:

The Irish Deaf Society has set up a sub-committee to organise a one-year long action plan to elevate the status of ISL as a part of the

European Year of Languages. The following activities are planned, subject to the approval of the Board:

- A series of **open lectures** on issues relating to ISL and the Deaf community are to be held in Trinity College Dublin (February to May 2001). The series is open to all and free of charge.
- A series of **intensive workshops** on ISL and issues related to the Deaf community is to be organised on monthly basis.
- A series of **discussions / debates** in several Deaf clubs aiming to increase the level of awareness among Deaf people at grassroots level.
- A **two-day seminar** is to be held in October in conjunction with the official opening of the Centre for Deaf Studies. It is intended to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Irish Deaf Society's establishment.
- A **commemorative copy** of the Irish Deaf Journal to celebrate the 20th anniversary and the European Year of Languages.
- A **calendar leaflet** is to be published and various events organised by several Deaf groups is to be included. Each Deaf club and group are asked to organise an event to celebrate EYL. The Irish Deaf Society has promised to support them.
- A **public awareness campaign** will be organised and measures including letters / articles on ISL and Deaf community issues will be sent to newspapers. Interviews with radio and TV stations are planned. Discussion with one TV channel with a view to screening several TV programmes to celebrate ISL is still ongoing.

Conclusion:

The decade 1988-1998, saw little change in increasing the profile of ISL but since 1998, things have moved on a dramatic scale. A number of developments have taken place to enhance the profile of ISL. Nevertheless, we recognise that there are a number of outstanding issues, which we will continue to work on in our

endeavour to promote and uphold the status of ISL.

Mr. John Bosco CONAMA: Honorary Secretary, IDS.

ITALY: Italian Sign Language (LIS)

In Italy, ENS was charged with establishing a National Committee for Sign Language as part of the EUD Sign Languages Project. This committee worked intensively from December 1996 to June 1997, presenting bills to Parliament for the recognition of Italian Sign Language in the educational environment, in university environments and in the mass media. Here we offer you an update on our work since 1997 in these domains.

Recognition of Italian Sign Language (LIS)

A total of four bills have been presented to the Italian parliament regarding the recognition of Italian Sign Language. These include Bill No.s 4000, 5556, 3083 and 6637. Though these bills have not been passed, if they were, they would guarantee deaf individuals the freedom to use LIS in all areas of their lives. It is not a matter of pitching oral language versus a signed language: many Deaf people already are bilingual to a greater or lesser degree insofar as they know written Italian and LIS. It is more a case of recognizing LIS and increasing opportunities for its use in educational, social and work settings, just as was previously recommended by the European Parliament in their 1988 and 1998 resolutions.

Education

Legislation for School Settings

Proposals to include the teaching of LIS to trainee support teachers have been accepted. For the first time in Italy, a number of hours in LIS training must be completed in order to qualify for the qualification awarded by the Ministry for Public Instruction for Support Teachers.

Throughout Italy, communication assistants, Deaf and hearing, are now working. Their role is to facilitate communication between Deaf student/s, his or her classmates and teachers through LIS. Among many European projects that have taken place, one focused on offering

training to deaf people to become communication assistants. Beside possessing certain teaching skills, these professionals must be skilled in communication strategies for use with deaf people and have a certain degree of knowledge of LIS (as set down in Law No. 104/92). Increasing numbers of families are choosing a bilingual education for their Deaf child (LIS and Italian), and they are calling on their governments and local agencies (municipal or provincial) to provide classroom assistants in their children's classrooms. At nursery school and elementary school, the assistant is often a Deaf person. In addition, the committee's suggestion to place more than one deaf child in each classroom has been implemented by many schools throughout Italy.

The Italian school system has recently been reformed. One reform gives each school more autonomy in deciding on the programme of studies it will provide. This has led to the establishment of new LIS as a second language courses for hearing students in places like Palermo, Guidonia (Rome), Cossato (Biella), etc. This change opens up many new opportunities for ENS and for LIS.

University

Law 104/92 provides for the presence of LIS interpreters. A new law, Law No. 17 of 28/01/1999 guaranteed funding for tutors, though each university may act autonomously. Four years ago, ENS established specialized internal departments where Deaf and hearing experts work side by side. These departments include FALiCs (Training and Updating in LIS and Deaf culture), SEU (School, Education, University). Both departments work in tandem and collaborate when in contact with external organizations and institutions such as the two national associations of interpreters – ANIOS and ANIMU. However, sometimes these organizations do not co-operate fully with ENS.

For ENS, recognition of LIS remains our central priority. We also seek to have the profession of Italian sign language/ Italian interpreting recognized.

Mass Media

Italian regulations require that government owned television stations must offer services to people with disabilities (by virtue of their service

contract that is renewable every three years). Such services are also considered to be a just return for taxes that are paid for television licenses. ENS has held sit-in demonstrations and protests, which have resulted in the provision of two national television live news programmes per day with closed captioning and three pre-recorded new bulletins provided with LIS interpretation. In addition, the number of closed-captioned programmes has increased by 20% due to the close collaboration of Televideo and ENS.

LUXEMBOURG: A complex situation

The Situation of Sign Languages in the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg

The Verein der Gehörlosen und Schwerhörigen Luxembourg a.s.b.l. (Luxembourgish Deaf Association) would like to report on the situation of sign languages in the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg. The situation is related to the education, culture and policy.

Education

In Luxembourg there is only one school for the Deaf, the *Centre de Logopédie*. Given the particular geographic situation of Luxembourg, hearing children receive intensive language teaching during their education. We will outline this in the next section and contrast the situation for Deaf Luxembourgers.

Learning Languages in State Schools

Luxembourgish children learn Luxembourgish as their native language. At primary school German is taught as the first foreign language from the first year onwards. From the second school year onwards, French and German are taught in parallel. At secondary school, additional languages like English, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Latin or Greek are taught. The official Languages of Luxembourg are Luxembourgish, German and French.

Language Learning at the School for the Deaf

Deaf pupils are taught German as their primary language from the first school year French is an option that can be taken from the second school year on, but the teaching French is limited. The consequence is that Deaf students apply only German as the principal language and are not

able to apply French for communication, despite the fact that French is more widely spoken in the environment. Because most teachers working at the Centre de Logopédie have studied Deaf Education at German universities, a strong oral approach is applied, as opposed to a sign language-based approach.

Introduction of Sign Language in Education

Until the 1980's, only the oral approach was applied. Sign language was introduced incrementally, especially for Deaf pupils with learning difficulties. Deaf students who do not have a learning difficulty are expected to participate in an oral education.

Conclusions about Sign Languages in Education In Luxembourg

Sign language is only permitted for use with Deaf persons who have learning difficulties. Deaf people who do not have an intellectual disability continue to learn the spoken language. Moreover there exists a certain number of deaf and hard of hearing pupils who are educated beyond the Centre de Logopédie, at mainstream schools. These pupils are usually not familiar with sign languages.

Sign Language Courses

There exists an increasing number of persons who are not deaf, but who are interested in learning sign languages hoping to communicate with Deaf people in leisure activities, in education and at work places. Unfortunately there are no sign language courses running at present in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. However, sign languages courses are offered in neighbouring regions of the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg.

For the moment Luxembourgers attend sign languages courses in the German city, Trier. This is because the distance Luxembourg and Trier is not great.

German Sign Language and "Sign- supported German" are offered in an evening course programme. Moreover certain Luxembourgers are interested in taking courses in French and Wallonian Sign Languages, but they have difficulty in finding appropriate sign language courses in French regions like Lorraine and in Belgian regions like the province of Luxembourg.

Sign Language and Culture

The Verein der Gehörlosen und Schwerhörigen Luxembourg has participated twice in the Language Festival where students of all schools of the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg participate. At this festival, we aim to demonstrate sign languages in use, use of finger spelling, exhibiting sign language based multi-media like CD-ROMs and videos, and sign language sketches for the rally. The response from the students participating in this festival is very positive.

Policy for Handicapped Persons

In 1995, in the course of reorganising the Luxembourgish Government, the Minister for Families, Marie-Josée JACOBS was nominated as Minister for Affairs of Handicapped Persons. An independent Ministry for the Affairs of Handicapped Persons does not exist, but the Ministry of the Family is charged with this responsibility. A policy for Handicapped Persons was introduced and led to the first national colloquium about policy for Handicapped Persons (1997) where the Verein der Gehörlosen und Schwerhörigen was invited to take part in influencing the policy process. As a result, an action programme was developed. However, sign languages are not mentioned in the action programme.

Legislation and the Constitution

In Luxembourg there is no legislation that refers to the use of sign language and no fundamental right regarding use of a sign language in the Luxembourgish constitution. However, reform of the Luxembourgish constitution is not yet complete.

Mention of Sign Languages at Ministerial and Parliamentary Level

At the political level, the issue of sign languages has been raised. Recently the Minister of Affairs of Handicapped Persons mentioned that the use of sign languages is necessary. Moreover we recently heard a parliamentary question that was concerned with the provision of sign language interpreters in museums to guide Deaf people.

Conclusion

The situation in education, culture and policy shows that there is still a long way to go before sign languages are used and recognised widely in Luxembourg. As the smallest country of the

European Union, Luxembourg is dependent on approaches that have their origin in larger EU countries. It is rather more practical for Luxembourg to participate in sign language projects that have a regional focus: For Luxembourg it means the possibility of participating in projects in the region composed of Luxembourg, Lorraine (France), Rheinland-Pfalz and Saarland (both Germany) and the province of Luxembourg (Belgium).

NETHERLANDS: Sign Language of the Netherlands

Towards Legal Status for Sign Language of the Netherlands

In 1995, the Dutch government installed a so-called 'inter departmental committee' for the legal status of Sign Language of the Netherlands. This committee published a report, which indicated that before June 2001, the government should make suggestions about;

- One standard Sign Language of the Netherlands
- Legal status for Sign Language of the Netherlands

This report and the lack of results and the committee's slow progress has led to great concern amongst organisations of the Deaf.

In September 2000, the platform for Sign Language of the Netherlands was founded. Members of this platform include representatives of Dovenschap, institutes for the Deaf, FODOK (federation of parents of deaf children) and the College for Sign Language of the Netherlands teachers and interpreters. The platform can form one united front and put pressure on the government.

On 30 November 2000, the house of parliament submitted a resolution requiring that the government must show results before June 2001. To support this resolution Dovenschap, together with the Gebaren Front (pressure group of deaf students) prepared a demonstration in December 2000. The demonstration took place on 18 January 2001. Approximately 450 deaf people

and organisations of/ for the Deaf demonstrated in front of the House of Parliament in The Hague. The Deaf community is tired of waiting for the government to take action on the subject of Sign Language of the Netherlands.

The demonstration was reported in many newspapers and TV programmes showed an interest in the story.

In autumn 2000 Dovenschap had a meeting with a member of the national committee for the European Year of the Languages 2001. Dovenschap will advise on the subject of Sign Language of the Netherlands, and will make an effort to enhance familiarity with sign languages.

Handtheater (a Dutch theatre group of deaf actors) will participate by performing their cultural productions in Sign Language of the Netherlands during this Year of Languages.

The use of Sign Language of the Netherlands in education for Deaf people is still monitored by the steering committee, of the project 'Covenant'. This project will be completed this year and should lead to standardization of Sign Language of the Netherlands.

Ms. Marjan STUIFZAND, Dovenschap

PORTUGAL: Portuguese Sign Language (LGP)

The Portuguese Deaf community have won some battles in our long diplomatic fight for recognition of LGP. Among our achievements since our involvement in the EUD Year of Languages Project, we include:

- Constitutional recognition of Portuguese Sign Language (1997: Art. 74b)
- The State Bureau of Education and Innovation defined the conditions for the creation, operation and support of units for the education of deaf children and young people attending state primary and secondary schools (II Series, No. 104, 06/05/1998), p.6094 – Dispatch No. 7520/98 (2nd series).
- Official recognition of the status of the profession of "Interpreter of Sign Language". The profession had existed

for many years, but hitherto had not been statutorily recognized. The professional profile has now been defined, and subsequently, a profile of the LGP interpreter has been developed (Law 380/VII, May 1999).

- LGP Interpreter working at the State Television Company. A protocol has been developed with RTP (National Broadcaster) for the implementation of teletext for Portuguese programmes (1999).
- The Aladim Programme has offered support to Portugal Telecom Comunicações AS. The practical outcome of this support is a discount of up to 50% or payment facilities for videoconference facilities for the Deaf population.
- A protocol has been established between the Associação de Intérpretes de LGP and the National Bureau for the Rehabilitation and Integration of People with Disabilities. This protocol ensures that public or private events are interpreted/ translated and promote increased awareness of the existence of LGP among participants attending events where an LGP interpretation is provided.
- The Portuguese Federation of Deaf Associations (FPAS) have set up an agreement with the Ministry of Justice whereby any deaf person requiring access to judicial, notary or police matters will be provided with LGP interpretation at no cost to the Deaf person (2000).
- Currently discussing a possible agreement with Portugal Telecom Comunicações AS whereby text telephones will be made available to the Deaf population, along with public text-telephone provision.

SPAIN: Spanish Sign Language

Current situation of Spanish Sign Language.

Sign Language in Spain does not have any legal or official recognition. Only two measures can be considered as important advances in favour of recognition:

-Royal Decree 20/60/1995, of December 22nd, which gives the title of High Technician in Sign Language Interpretation and its corresponding minimum required qualifications (BOE 23-02-96).

-Royal Decree 696/1995 of April 28th, for the Ordination of the Education of students with special educational necessities. (BOE 2-06-95)

On 16 November 1997, the Commission of Social Politics and Employment of the Congress of Deputies approved a Pre- Law Proposal. This pre-proposal urged the government to present, in not more than a year, a detailed report of the measures to adopt progressive recognition of Spanish Sign Language.

A year later, two working teams were set up. This has led to the publication of two reports: one from the Department of Education and Culture and another from the Department of Employment and Social Matters. In December 1999 both reports, detailing the measures that should be adopted for the progressive legal recognition of Spanish Sign Language were published in the Official Bulletin of the General Court. These measures have not been applied in practice so far and this leaves the Deaf Community unprotected and also leads to a lack of development and support from the public authorities.

-The Report of the Department of Employment and Social Matters (20 December 1999) (BOCG núm. 806) states that: "The Public Administrations would strengthen, cement and facilitate knowledge of and access to a certain level in Sign Language, mainly in the services of general information and in all those that are related to the social, health, juridical, fundamental rights services, etc."

-The Report of the Department of Education and Culture (September 24th 1999) (BOCG numb. 741). Proposal of calendar for the application of measures provides the following:

From academic year 2000-2001 to 2001-2002 (2 academic years): elaboration of a framework-document that contemplates a bilingual focus as an educational option and to adopt primary legislative measures.

From academic year 2002-2003 to 2005-2006 (4 academic years): to develop plans and profiles of professional training, to elaborate the curriculum for Spanish Sign Language, to develop specific teaching materials, to strengthen the research approach, and to develop legislative measures.

For this purpose, the Council of the CNSE approved a Strategic Plan (adopted on 3 March 2001), called **"Action Plan for Legal Recognition of Spanish Sign Language"**. This plan of action will focus on the dissemination of information materials (videos, guides, pamphlets), as well as ensuring interviews with leading politicians and highlighting the issue in the Deaf Community itself. Further, we will arrange public events to inform and to raise the awareness of the relevant politicians and society at large. We will focus on raising awareness of the situation of Deaf people in Spain, their organization and the situation of Spanish Sign Language. The aim is to ensure that the necessary actions are put into practice, During the year 2000 three visits have been made:

1st visit: Tuesday, 19 September 2000. Meeting with the President of the Regional Community of Navarra, Mr. Miguel Ángel SANZ and the Consultant of Education and Culture of the Navarra Government, Mr. Jesus LAGUNA.

2nd visit: Monday, 20 November 2000: Meeting with the President of the Government from The Rioja region, Mr. Pedro Sanz ALONSO and the Consultant of Education and Culture, Mr. Luis ALEGRE.

3rd visit: Thursday, 23 November 2000: Meeting with the Consultant of Education of the Canary Islands Government, Mr. José Miguel RUANO.

The Action Plan for legal recognition of Spanish Sign Language will continue to develop, coinciding with the European Year of Languages (2001). Related to this, CNSE proposed a project: **"Get to Know our Language: Sign Language"**, aimed at increasing public awareness of Spanish Sign Language and disseminating information about Sign Language in Spain.

The aims of the project are:

- To raise awareness, to sensitise and to expand knowledge of Spanish Sign Language;
- To demonstrate teaching methods vis-à-vis Spanish Sign Language;
- To encourage the use of Spanish Sign Language in all social environments;
- To contribute to the legal recognition of Spanish Sign Language.

Recently, the Popular Party, (who are currently in government) through Ana MATO, coordinator of Social Action and Participation proposed that CNSE create a working team in early 2001 to move forward on topics like Sign Language and the teaching of Deaf Children.

Studies to become a High Technician in Sign Language Interpretation

In December 1995, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the Royal Decree 2060/1995 of 22 December 1999, which established the title of “High Technician in Sign Language Interpretation” and outlined the corresponding minimum qualifications.

This decree officially recognizes Spanish Sign Language/ Spanish interpretation as a full profession. These advanced studies began in 1998 as part of the Horizon-Pradez project. As a part of this project, 1998-1999 and 1999-2000 saw the first cohort of Spanish Sign Language/Spanish Interpreters receive an official degree in the various national territories.

These programmes of training continue, with demand for training outstripping the supply of places available for students. These studies are carried out in 2000 class hours, over two academic years and include a requirement to undertake some practical placement in work centres.

SWEDEN: Swedish Sign Language

National Plan of Action for a Disability-Policy

In Spring 2001, the Swedish government presented a national disability policy action plan that includes interesting goals with respect to

accessibility. Examples of the priorities laid down for the coming years include:

- Ensuring that a disability perspective permeates all sectors of society
- Creating an accessible society

Some of the practical applications of these goals include:

- Establishing a national programme to develop the competency of elected representatives, and all persons whose work brings them in contact with people with disabilities;
- Resources have been earmarked for increasing disabled people’s access to cultural events;
- Representatives of disability organisations to form a consultative committee

When this plan of action was announced in parliament in spring, many Deaf representatives were in attendance. Access was provided via sign language interpretation: for the first time, Swedish Sign Language interpreters occupied a central place in the parliament.

Experts Meeting on an Accessible Europe for People with Disabilities

SDR has participated in the planning process for this event with HSO, The National Umbrella Disability Organisation. The Ministry for Health and Social Affairs has contacted EUD with regard to providing appropriately skilled interpreters for the event, which will take place from 24-26 April 2001 in Linköping, Sweden.

Education

SPM – Special Schools Authority from 2000

On 1 June 2000, the SPM was established as the authority for directing and managing special schools. This Board was established as a result of investigations into the level of support offered to pupils with disabilities. One of the findings of the investigation was that Deaf schools should be opened up, allowing for the integration of mainstream students. However, SDR and others were critical of this finding, as we argue that Swedish Sign Language can best be fostered in schools for the Deaf. To this end, the state decided that they shall remain as principal directors of the schools for the Deaf, but they

also established a new Board to direct and manage the schools for the Deaf. There is one Deaf member sitting on this board.

There is also an advisory group who advises the Deaf Education Board of SPM. Representatives from SDR are involved in this advisory group. In 1999, the Swedish Parliament agreed that a Swedish Sign Language environment is necessary for pupils who, because of deafness or impaired hearing, cannot attend a comprehensive school. That is, they accepted the principal that education should be provided via Swedish Sign Language. Indeed, the Education Act (1995:1100, amendment November 1999) says that the goals to be attained by schools with respect to school-leavers who are deaf or hearing impaired include:

- Bilingualism: i.e. can use Swedish Sign Language and read Swedish as well as expressing thoughts in Swedish Sign Language and through written Swedish;
- Can communicate in writing in English

Teacher Training

Training for teachers of the Deaf is offered alongside the training programme for teachers who will teach in comprehensive schools. Candidates wishing to become teachers of the deaf must demonstrate knowledge of Swedish Sign Language. For several years, SDR have maintained that not all teachers for the deaf need be trained as special education teachers, although these are also needed in schools for the deaf. Special attention has been paid to the need for teachers of the deaf with the skills to teach the curriculum for schools for the disabled to deaf children who have slight learning disabilities.

Sign Language: Ratification of the Council of Europe's Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in Sweden

As part of the process to ratify the Council of Europe's Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, the Swedish government decided not to include Swedish Sign Language as a minority language for the purpose of ratification (Spring 1999). SDR has argued the issue in parliamentary debate and written to all Members of Parliament. All parties expressed their support for Swedish Sign Language though they felt that it could not be encompassed into the Swedish

response to the Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

The European Year of Languages

SDR are participating in an advisory group to the Swedish Committee for the European Year of Languages. The Opening Conference took place in Lund, Sweden from 18-20 February 2001. The proceedings will include a session focusing on sign languages. Other activities are planned for the duration of the year.

An Anniversary

2001 also marks the 20th anniversary of official recognition of Swedish Sign Language in Sweden. In May 1981, the Swedish parliament decided that: "deaf have to be bilingual to function amongst themselves and society. Bilingualism on their part ...means that they have to be fluent in their visual/gestural language and in the language that surrounds them, Swedish." This decision is recognised as acceptance that Swedish Sign Language is the first language of Swedish Deaf people. SDR and the Deaf Association at Örebro are planning a series of activities on 14 May 2001 to celebrate this anniversary.

Swedish Sign Language and Parents

In 1997, the Swedish parliament voted that parents of Deaf children and children with impaired hearing should have the right to learn Swedish Sign Language. The state provides for a total of 240 hours of Swedish Sign language tuition over a period of four years for parents. This training is offered free of charge to parents, and parents receive compensation for loss of income from employment. The National Agency for Education has developed a curriculum for this programme (SKOLFS 1998:7).

Swedish Sign Language and Siblings of Deaf Children/ Children of Deaf Adults

In Sweden it is possible to have a Swedish Sign Language as first language education provided where a minimum of five pupils are involved (Comprehensive Schools Act SFS 1997:599). This has happened, though not very frequently.

The state also provides for weekly courses, most of which are delivered at schools for the Deaf. This allows an opportunity for students who have Deaf siblings or Deaf parents to learn more

Swedish Sign Language and to interact and share experiences amongst themselves.

Swedish Sign Language at Comprehensive School and Upper Secondary School

Since 1995, non-deaf students have the opportunity to choose Swedish Sign Language as their third language at comprehensive school and at upper secondary school. The curriculum was last changed in 2000 with more hours being added to the programme of study, and more advanced level courses being made available.

In the south of Sweden, in Vänersborg, there is an upper secondary school for non-deaf students, which offers the Swedish Sign Language option. As a result, students are taking Swedish Sign Language classes that are as advanced as introductory courses offered to interpreting students. Indeed, several graduates of the school have been offered places to train as interpreters.

Swedish Sign Language Teachers

A one-year programme is available to deaf and hearing students to train as teachers of Swedish Sign Language. This is the only training programme in Sweden for Swedish Sign Language teachers.

There are many opportunities for graduates of this programme, as there is a growing demand for Swedish Sign Language teaching in interpreter training programmes, at schools for the Deaf (all levels), and in offering Swedish Sign Language classes to parents of deaf children, siblings of deaf children and to children of Deaf parents.

The Swedish Parliament decided to upgrade the training available for Swedish Sign Language tutors to college-level qualification following pressure from SDR and those involved in delivering training at Västankvik (autumn 2000).

Information in Swedish Sign Language at the Parliament Website.

For many years, SDR has argued that Deaf people must participate in civil society: but to do so, we must have access to information that is provided in newspapers, TV and on the radio to members of the wider society. This information must be made available to those of us who have Swedish Sign Language as a first language.

“Samhällsguiden” (The Civic Guide) is a manual for all citizens who want to know more about their rights, obligations, the legal system and regulations. SDR felt that this would be a good place to begin translating materials into Swedish Sign Language. It is now used as part of the course literature for civics at the special schools for the Deaf.

At the beginning of 1998, SDR presented a petition to the Ministry for Health and Social Affairs requesting a subsidy for a project called “Civic Information in Sign Language”. The Information unit at the Swedish Parliament has been interested in adapting and distributing civic information to relevant groups for a long time. In spring 1999, they contacted SDR with a view to co-operation in putting civic information in Swedish Sign Language on the Internet. By this stage, SDR had received no official response to our request for subsidy for the civic information in sign language project. However, we decided to press ahead with the Parliament’s information unit, and a pilot project was undertaken.

Several sections from the Civic Guide were selected which we felt best met the needs of the Swedish Deaf community. These included information about the labour market; employees rights; wage subsidies for the employment of people with physical disabilities; special measures for the occupationally disabled; membership of a union; the employment office; grants for establishing an independent business for the physically disabled; and democracy.

In December 1999, the texts were recorded and posted on the Internet. In February 2000, the Swedish parliament notified the media that sample elements from the Civic Guide were available on the web in Swedish Sign Language. On the first day that information was available in Swedish Sign Language, more than 200 people accessed the website. The media highlighted the launch of the website, and after the first week, evaluations showed very positive feedback from Swedish Deaf people who had visited the site.

You can visit the site at:
www.samhallsguiden.riksdagen.se

Continued Development of Civic Information in Swedish Sign Language

In connection with the fact that Sweden holds the Presidency of the European Union for the first half of 2001, the information unit of the Swedish Parliament is working in conjunction with SDR to translate two important chapters of the Civic Guide into Swedish Sign Language. These chapters are "How Sweden is governed", and a chapter about democracy, "Participate and Influence". These chapters are now available at the Parliament's home page. The aim of these translations is to demonstrate the way in which the Swedish civic system functions to sign language users who know Swedish Sign Language.

"Straight Talking Group"

The Swedish Government has a committee whose task is to make information about the Swedish authorities accessible in plain language. They encourage the authorities to start projects that encourage clear use of language and every year, they award a prize, "The Straight Talking Crystal" to an authority who has been successful in making their information accessible. The theme for the year 2000 was "Straight Talking for People with Disabilities". The SDR and the Parliament's Information Unit were invited to participate in the award ceremony on 19 May 2000, and were invited to speak on the topic "This is how we created the Civic Guide in Sign Language".

The Swedish Presidency of the European Union – Information in Swedish Sign Language

In October 2000, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs contacted SDR with respect to making information about the Swedish Presidency of the European Union available in Swedish Sign Language on their website. The layout turned out to be different from that of the Swedish Parliament's Information Website. The final website includes a series of 12 questions and answers about the European Union and the Presidency of the European Union in "International Signing". The questions include:

- An Introduction
- What does it mean to be the President of the European Union?

- How will we succeed in holding the Presidency of the European Union?
- What about contacts with countries outside the European Union?
- Are there any questions that are particularly relevant to Sweden as President of the European Union?
- Will even more countries become members of the European Union?
- How can we reduce unemployment?
- How can we create a better environment?
- What does the logo for the Swedish Presidency represent?
- How is the European Union organised?
- Who are the Council of Ministers?

These questions were given priority by the Swedish government. The aim of translating these questions and answers is to provide accessible information for Deaf citizens of the European Union.

Swedish Sign Language Interpreters

In autumn 1999, SDR had a question introduced in the Swedish Parliament regarding the authorisation of Swedish Sign Language interpreters. During the autumn of 2000, the Parliament requested that the Swedish National Judicial Board for Public Lands and Funds focus on this issue.

Since 1994, the county councils have had responsibility for offering interpreter services. State subsidies allow for expansion of these services. The number of interpreters has subsequently increased, and there are now seven institutes offering Swedish Sign Language/ Swedish interpreter training in Sweden. The Swedish Board of Health and Welfare are responsible for monitoring the situation.

One might expect that because there are more Swedish Sign language interpreters available that access has increased: however, as more interpreters have become available, demand for interpreter services has increased. However, funding has not increased. This has led to concerns that the county councils will not be able to find the

funding to employ the current student interpreters when they graduate from training.

As a result, SDR has raised the question of whether a Deaf person has the legal right to an interpreter in the Swedish Parliament (autumn 2000). The problem seems to be that the state cannot impose further responsibility on the county councils without offering them further financial support/resources. A number of bills will thus be processed in spring 2001. SDR has written to the Minister of Health and Social Affairs asking him to respond on this issue.

UNITED KINGDOM: British Sign Language

British Sign Language (BSL) Recognition Campaign - Progress Report

Since the Sign Languages Project (1996-1997), the British Deaf Association (BDA) has been campaigning hard at all levels to achieve the goal of official government recognition of BSL. This has been made possible by the setting up of a new Campaigns Unit at the British Deaf Association to focus on political and campaigning work.

As a result of lobbying by the BDA, the new Scottish Parliament debated the issue of BSL recognition. The debate was well attended by Members of the Scottish Parliament representing all political parties, many of whom spoke in support of the motion urging official recognition of BSL. Unfortunately, the debate was a members' debate - these are not voted on, but merely an opportunity for members of the Parliament to express views on a particular subject. Many Deaf people watched the debate from the public galleries, and for the first time sign/spoken language interpreters were used in the Parliament. The BDA sent briefings to MSPs who had expressed an interest in the subject.

Following the debate, an official group on deafness was set up, comprising members of all parliamentary parties in Scotland, and it is hoped that this group will progress the issue further.

A similar debate took place in the National Assembly for Wales in 1999, which also attracted widespread cross-party support.

The BDA has also been actively lobbying the UK national parliament at Westminster. We supplied briefings to Mr. Tom LEVITT MP, who has basic signing skills and who introduced a short debate on BSL in the House of Commons in April 2000. In reply to this debate, the Minister for Disabled People, Ms. Margaret HODGE, agreed that the government would explore further the question of official recognition of BSL.

The UK has now signed the European Council Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which is due to be ratified shortly. However, the government has so far refused to specify BSL as one of the minority languages to which part three of the Charter shall be applied. The UK government takes the view that the Charter is not the best vehicle for taking forward the issue of BSL recognition.

In May 2000, the government asked the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) to provide advice on how the issue of official recognition might be taken forward. The DRC in turn sought advice from the UK Council on Deafness - an umbrella organisation of d/Deaf organisations and charities.

The BDA led this coalition of which made a joint submission to the DRC calling for:

- The establishment of a national BSL taskforce and
- Official recognition of BSL under the Council of Europe's Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992).

The DRC has now recommended that the government implement these two key objectives. It has also called for an expansion of interpreter services. We await the government's response and have requested a meeting with Mr. Keith VAZ MP, Minister for Europe, who has responsibility for the Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and a further meeting with Ms. Margaret HODGE, Minister for Disabled People.

The BDA has held meetings with officials of the Department of Education and Employment to discuss in more detail the need for BSL recognition. The government has already announced that it will be making available new funding to train more British Sign Language/English interpreters.

During Deaf Awareness Week 2000, the BDA obtained widespread media coverage for its campaign for BSL recognition, including a postcard campaign calling on Tony Blair to back recognition. 15,000 postcards were distributed. The BDA also launched a controversial billboard poster, which generated coverage on national television news.

Despite the lack of formal recognition of BSL, legislative progress has been made to improve the status of British Sign Language, including:

- **Part Three of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995** came into force in October 1999. This relates to access for disabled people to goods, services and facilities. Service providers are now required to make "reasonable adjustments" to their practices and procedures to prevent discrimination against disabled people. For Deaf people, this might mean the provision of an interpreter, or information being made available in BSL. The law is still to be comprehensively tested, but Deaf people have already benefited from the legislation and are likely to do so further.
- Provisions in the **Broadcasting Act 1996** also came into force in May 2000, which require broadcasters of digital terrestrial TV services to provide sign language on 1% of their programmes every week. This will increase gradually to 5% by 2008. The government published its Communications White Paper in December 2000 in which it affirmed its commitment to extending the requirements for sign language on TV.
- Lobbying by the BDA secured amendments to the **Representation of the People Act 2000** which makes provision for Deaf people to use a sign/spoken language interpreter while voting at polling stations.

- **Jury Service:** The BDA mounted a legal challenge when its Chief Executive, Mr. Jeff Mc WHINNEY, was barred from jury service. UK law prevents a sign/spoken language interpreter from entering the jury room - only the 12 jurors can retire to deliberate. As a result of our challenge and widespread national coverage of the case, the Prime Minister Mr. Tony BLAIR told the Westminster Parliament that he supported the right of everyone to do jury service. The BDA met with the Lord Chancellor and we are awaiting a government's report on the issue, which is due any time.

Non-EU Country Reports

In this section we bring you reports from the non-European Union countries who attended the EUD Seminar in Lund, Sweden.

ESTONIA: Estonian Sign Language

Situation and Status of Estonian Sign Language (ESL).

The number of inhabitants in Estonia is 1,5 million. There are approximately 2000 Deaf people.

Organizations and institutions working for improving the situation and status of ESL

- Estonian Association for Deaf
- Estonian Association for Parents of Hearing Impaired Children
- Tallinn Deaf School
- Sign Language Centre by Tallinn Deaf School
- Estonian Union of Sign Language Interpreters
- Estonian Institute of Humanities
- Tartu University

What Has been Achieved and What Remains to be Achieved?

Towards recognition of ESL. Preparative project for constitutional recognition of ESL by Estonian Government started in Sept. 2000 in cooperation with the above mentioned organizations and institutions. The final report

has to be delivered to the government for recognition of ESL at the end of 2001.

ESL and Deaf Education

There has been a Bilingual teaching approach (bilingual curriculum and Deaf teachers) at Tallinn Deaf School since 1994 starting from preschool, and continuing to high-school level. The cornerstone for bilingual teaching was put in place thanks to financial aid from Sweden (SDR, Manillaskolan, Birgittaskolan and other institutions) and thanks to initiative of our Parents Association. This includes:

- Basic teaching in ESL for the staff of Tallinn Deaf School and parents of Deaf children.
- Developing materials and methods for teaching ESL.
- Both courses and materials are developed and managed by the Centre of ESL starting from September 2000. Before this work was led by Tallinn Deaf School and the Parents Association.
- ESL short courses for students at Tartu University since 1995.
- Interpreter educational training is carried on by the Union of Sign Language Interpreters in the form of short-term projects and is dependent of different funding sources. During 1996-1998 financial aid was received from Finland.

ESL interpretation

“Interpretation” (transliteration) is still carried out into signed exact Estonian. There are approximately 30 interpreters in Estonia, most of them are free-lancer interpreters. There is a lack of educated (Bachelor, MA) SL interpreters available for Deaf students at universities.

Interpretation service amounts to 36 hours per Deaf person during a year. This is free of charge per Deaf person and is offered and guided by the Sign Language Interpreters Union. Finance comes from local governments. Interpretation service for studies at universities and vocational schools is covered by special funding sources.

ESL Research.

There is a publication that offers a short description of ESL. This research was carried out by a young researcher striving for an MA degree at the Estonian Institute of Humanities.

She compares grammatical categories of ESL and Estonian, the spoken majority language of Estonia.

Currently, a Commission of standardization is working to compile different Estonian signs. The team consists of interpreters and Deaf people and it works under the guidance of the Estonian Association for Deaf. In this project, ESL is recorded on videotape and analysed at ESL Centre by the Tallinn Deaf School.

ESL and television.

The Estonian broadcasting authorities offer daily news programme translation into signed Estonian. Teletext news is available and widely used. For example, The Parents Association spreads information mostly through teletext. There are no special programmes for Deaf.

ESL dictionaries.

As research of ESL is in its infancy, only two booklets have been published by Tartu University (“Speaking Hands” and “The Dictionary of Christian Signs”).

Funding

Social maintenance, pensions, and the cost of education up to high-school level, at vocational schools and at universities is covered by state and local communities.

Estonian Sign Language interpretation costs are covered by local communities. Estonian Sign Language courses for parents of Deaf children are financed by the Association of Parents of Hearing Impaired Children. ESL training courses for teachers of the Deaf are financed by the local community. ESL training courses for interpreters are financed through pilot projects. ESL research work is financed by the state and/ or by pilot projects.

Ms. Ave PAAT

ICELAND: Icelandic Sign Language

Media and Multimedia

Deaf people’s access to the media remains very much the same as it did in 1997, when we reported on the situation during the Sign Languages Project. Very little has changed

regarding interpreted or text provision of news services: it is still rare to have such access, and even when provided, the quality tends to be low.

Even where a news item is directly relevant to the Deaf community (e.g. the discussion of Cochlear Implantation, etc.), the programme will generally remain un-subtitled. Where programmes that are broadcast are in the English language, then Icelandic subtitles are provided. However, this is not the case for Icelandic programmes.

However, there have been some breakthroughs regarding multimedia access: better computers have been distributed amongst the Deaf community so that Deaf people now communicate more amongst themselves.

We have also seen video telephony on trial in three locations in Iceland (Vesturhliðarskóli, SHH and FH). The preliminary trial results are good. As a result, the Icelandic Phone Company has offered a discount to Deaf people who wish to buy a video phone. To date approximately 30 Deaf people have stated their interest in buying a video phone. While video phones offer excellent opportunities for enhanced communication, it is still necessary for both persons communicating by video phone to know a sign language for communication to be effective. Another problem is that of cost: as video phones are not yet included on the list of subsidized equipment at the Icelandic Hearing and Speech Centre (IHSC), Deaf people must cover all costs associated with buying and using the phone themselves.

Mobile telephony has become very popular among Deaf and hearing populations. Mobile phones have proven to be very useful. Technology is improving constantly, and as it improves, more and more possibilities become realities: internet connections, fax modems, SMS systems, etc. The mobile phone offers a good and cheap way of moving forward – and offers a way of keeping in touch with other Deaf people regardless of where they are in our world. Our goal in Iceland is to have mobile phones listed on the subsidized equipment list at the IHSC, so that the Deaf person would pay approximately 50 % of the cost price.

Education

In 1999, the Ministry of Education, in the Icelandic basic curriculum, stated that Icelandic Sign Language is the first language of Deaf people, and Icelandic, the national languages, is a second language for deaf Icelanders. As such, Deaf Icelanders should learn Icelandic Sign Language as their first language and Icelandic as their second language. This basic curriculum does not apply to children under six years, so there is still work to do, as we know that the critical period for language acquisition occurs prior to this early age.

The basic curriculum also states that sign language has basic meaning for linguistic, cognitive and personality development for the deaf child. This obviously has serious implications for every Deaf child's future.

Today, children aged 6-12 years can attend "after-school service" with hearing students of the same age. This service is provided in conjunction with Hliðarskóli "twin-school for Vesturhliðarskóli", and is going well to date.

There have been some changes regarding provision at Kindergarten (pre-school) level since the Reykjavik Community took over. Today, the Kindergarten school for deaf children is at Sólborg. This school also caters for hearing children.

Interpretation

Problems still occur regarding the provision of Icelandic Sign Language interpreters: institutions are quick to argue that it is not their responsibility to cover interpreters fees and that they do not have a budget to cover such costs. The IDO are currently campaigning for interpretation for elderly deaf people when they participate in social activities at day center for elderly people in Geröuberg. We hope to have a clear response to this situation soon.

Icelandic Sign Language Interpreter Training

The summers of 1997 and 1998 saw two groups of students graduate from the University of Iceland. This training was supported by the Communication Centre for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and the Ministry of Education. It is hoped that this training programme will run again in autumn 2001, but this has not yet been confirmed.

NORWAY: Norwegian Sign Language

Introduction

Norway is a country, which has become used to the idea of bilingualism. The population consists of 4.3 million people has two written standards to contend with, and a native population of Sami who have their own language, schools and curricula. Most Norwegians speak at least one foreign language. Recent reforms in the education system have led to the introduction of bilingual education for deaf children.

Norwegian Sign Language in the Constitution

The Norwegian Association of the Deaf made a proposal to the relevant Ministry to establish a Sign Language Act in 1990. The NAD wanted Norwegian Sign Language to be recognized as our first language and stressed among others the importance of a syllabus in Norwegian Sign language as first language. As a result, the Education Act makes reference to Norwegian Sign Language as Deaf peoples first language.

Norwegian Sign Language in the Education Act

In 1997 the right of deaf children's right to access education in Norwegian Sign Language was stated, in the form of the Ministry's provision to the Primary Education Act.

In 1998, a new Education Act, covering both primary education (10 years) and secondary education (3 years) and certain aspects of pre-school education (up to age 6 years), was passed in the Norwegian Parliament. The new Act states, among other things, the following:

Education Act, § 2-6: "Pupils having Norwegian Sign Language as their first language have the right to primary education in Norwegian Sign Language and in the subject Norwegian Sign Language as a first language. Instruction in Sign Language is to be given according to the National Curriculum passed by the Government. Pre-school children with special requirements for Norwegian Sign Language have the right to such education."

On 17 of September 1999, the parliament passed certain changes to the act. Of special interest to our topic is the addition of a statement concerning secondary education:

Education Act, § 3-9: "Youngsters entitled to secondary education and who have Norwegian Sign Language as their first language, or who are, according to an expert judgement, in need of such education, have the right to choose secondary education in Norwegian Sign Language and in the subject Norwegian Sign Language as first language in a signing environment, or the right to choose to use an interpreter in regular secondary schools. The same applies to adults who are admitted to secondary education. A signing environment represents the schools that offer suitable education done in Norwegian Sign Language and in the subject Norwegian Sign Language as first language for hearing impaired pupils. The right to education done in Norwegian Sign Language and in the subject Norwegian Sign Language as first language is limited to the courses offered by these schools. Parts of this education can be offered by using an interpreter."

It is also stated in the act that these rights are triggered by expert judgements of the type referred elsewhere in the Act to trigger special needs education. As we can see, the legislation secures the right for every deaf pre-school child, and every deaf child in primary or secondary school, to receive their education through Norwegian Sign language if that is their first language. No matter if they attend a Deaf school, partially hearing units or are mainstreamed.

It is worth pointing out, however, that we are talking about a right, not about an obligation. Nobody can force a family to choose education in Norwegian Sign language for their child.

The National Curricula, which are passed by the Government and compulsory for all children states the intended outcome for deaf children is functional bilingualism.

Norwegian Sign Language as a Subject at University

Norwegian Sign Language is a subject at University for both Deaf and hearing people who have NSL as first language and for people who does not have NSL as first language.

Teacher Qualifications in Norwegian Sign Language

All teachers of the deaf, no matter if they teach at a school for the deaf or at a local school with

only one deaf pupil need knowledge and skills in Norwegian Sign Language. The Ministry of Education ran a project in 1996-1997 where 250 teachers of the deaf were offered a full term course in Norwegian Sign Language at the University and at the Teachers Training College with all expenses paid by the Government. Now teachers among others can attend a one-year full-time course in Norwegian Sign Language (but it is not free of charge).

The Ministry of Education now states that the minimum qualification in Norwegian Sign Language for teachers is the one term course. This is the same standard as teachers' need to be allowed to teach in Norwegian in Norwegian schools. (But we all know this is not comparable). Those teachers have learned Norwegian from their childhood and are fully capable of all aspects within the language. A one-term course of study in Norwegian Sign Language only qualifies them to be able to communicate in NSL, not for teaching in the subject or in other subjects through NSL. Here we still have a long way to go.

Norwegian Sign Language Courses for Parents

Since 1996, parents are offered 40 weeks of Sign Language courses with all expenses paid. These classes are on offer from the moment their child's deafness is discovered until the child is 16 years old.

Sign Language Dictionary

In 1998 the Ministry of Education started a Norwegian Sign Language Dictionary Project.

that their languages are offered protections similar to those given to minority and regional spoken languages.

Ms. STEVENS also attended the European Parliament Disability Intergroup meeting, which focused specifically on the lead up to the European Year of Disabled People 2003. Mr. Brendan SINNOTT, Newly appointed head of the European Commission's Disability Unit was in attendance. He mentioned that the needs of sign language users will also be considered a priority in the plans currently under development for 2003. Mr. Thorsten AFFLERBACH represented the Council of Europe at this meeting, and Ms. Dana KARANJAC represented the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Given a timetable clash, Ms. STEVENS was unable to attend the European Parliament's Intergroup on Regional or Minority Languages as intended. However, she did have the opportunity to speak with MEP, Ms. Eluned MORGAN's assistant. Ms. STEVENS provided Ms. MORGAN with an information pack that outlines our work with respect to the inclusion of sign languages in the Council of Europe's Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. This followed from a UK resident's letter to his MEP with respect to the UK's ratification of the Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the possible inclusion of British Sign Language. A similar information pack was presented to Mr. Richard HOWWITT, MEP and Ms. Mel READ, MEP.

We look forward to keeping you informed regarding progress in the UK.

EUD Director Visits Strasbourg

In the aftermath of the Opening of the European Year of Languages, EUD Director, Helga STEVENS has met informally with Mr. Joseph SHIELS, of the Modern Languages Department at the Council of Europe. Mr. SHIELS had been in attendance at the opening of the Year of Languages in Lund in February 2001 and had agreed to meet with EUD when Helga STEVENS next visited Strasbourg. This informal meeting focused on the importance of sign languages for Deaf people in Europe, and why Deaf sign language users feel it is important

Published by EUD with support from the European Community - The European Union against discrimination. The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission.

European Union of the Deaf
Rue Franklinstraat 110
B-1000 Brussels
Tel: ++ 32 2 735 72 18
Fax: ++32 2 735 53 54
E-mail: eudeaf@pophost.eunet.be