

SECTION 8

INVOLVEMENT IN POLICY

One of the most important roles identified by many language teacher associations is that of representing their members' views to policy makers with a view to influencing decisions about different aspects of language learning and teaching.

In this section, we will see examples from associations of the ways in which they view their role in policy development, including why it is important and where it might take place. The section also identifies barriers to influencing policy and strategies which associations employ in order to overcome these.

1. Influencing policy as a priority

Many associations have identified the representation of teachers' views on policy-making bodies as their most important function. These include: the Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations; LMS Sweden; Verband der Deutschlehrer und Germanisten, Slowakei.

The reasons for this vary according to the language and the context. Common to all, however, are that policy is changing, sometimes constantly, and that the associations have a sense of responsibility to impact on that and to uphold standards:

“Representing teachers' views on policy making bodies' is very important nowadays, as the school system is changing, and we feel the influence of e.g. other European countries. It is both a good and a bad influence, and we have to work democratically and try to use our influence in order to avoid a deterioration of the language teaching...Our main challenge currently is our association's joint effort regarding designing/updating the policy for the teaching of foreign languages in our country.”
(Sproglærerforeningen Danmark, Denmark's association of teachers of foreign languages, Denmark)

“La représentation de l'opinion de nos membres auprès des autorités éducatives [est la fonction la plus importante, parce que] notre ministère de l'éducation procède souvent à des réformes qui concernent l'enseignement des langues étrangères, et il est important que notre opinion soit entendue. **(Association des professeurs de et en français en Bulgarie, Bulgaria)**

“Being a federation of foreign language teachers in Finland it is our task to safeguard and to try to improve the rights and well-being of our members, the Finnish foreign language teachers and at the same time to keep a high standard of language teaching in our country.” **(SUKOL, Finland)**

In some cases, there is a sense that the language taught by members needs to be protected, particularly in face of the pressures from governments to promote English and English alone. On one level, this has a potential impact on teachers' jobs:

“Die LehrerInnen erwarten, dass Ihre Arbeitsstellen gesichert werden, indem nicht nur Englisch, sondern auch andere Sprachen unterrichtet werden.” **(Polnischer Deutschlehrerverband/ Polskie Stowarzyszenie Nauczycieli Jezyka Niemieckiego, Poland)**

“Pour que l’enseignement du français, et surtout en français dans le cadre des projets internationaux, ne succombe pas évincé par l’anglais, il faut que les autorités linguistiques et éducatives développent et/ou soutiennent des programmes liés à la mise en pratique du multi- et plurilinguisme dans l’esprit de la politique linguistique européenne. Ceci permettrait de remplacer l’attitude „au lieu de...“, qui prédomine toujours lors du choix des langues d’enseignement et de recherche, par l’attitude „à côté de...“ qui est la plus efficace et prometteuse dans le contexte existant.”
(Organisation régionale caritative « Association des professeurs de français », Saint-Pétersbourg Russia)

“Das Bildungsministerium behandelt republik- sowie landesweit das Unterrichtsfach Englisch als Fremdsprache vorrangig. Deutsch wird demgegenüber nur stiefmütterlich behandelt - das hat seine Folgen: Die Zahl der Bewerber hat in den letzten Jahren nachgegeben.” **(Deutschlehrer-Verband Republik Baschkortostan, Russia)**

2. Where do the associations engage with policymakers?

Associations identify a number of different bodies where they represent their members' interests:

- Government departments, such as Ministries of Education, Tourism etc, and Parliamentary bodies (e.g. Association Costaricienne des Professeurs de Français – ACOPROF; ADEAF; ANILS; Association lituanienne des professeurs de français; Association Venezuelienne des Professeurs de Français (AVENPROF); BC Association of Teachers of Modern Languages, Canada; LMS Sweden; STIL; Verband der Deutschlehrenden Litauens)
- Examination authorities (e.g. APPA – Associação Portuguesa de Professores de Alemão; Estnischer Deutschlehrerverband)
- Local authorities, e.g. participation à la Table ronde consacrée aux problèmes de l’enseignement des langues étrangères dans les écoles secondaires organisée par la Douma de la ville de Moscou (Association des Enseignants de Français/Russie (AEFR))
- Other official bodies, e.g. grant awarding bodies, inspectorates

Sometimes these are formal partnerships, which have been agreed and signed:

“L’ARPF a un partenariat avec le Ministère de l’Education Nationale signé au mois de février 2011 et participe à la mise en oeuvre de la nouvelle loi de l’éducation qui nous est favorable.” (**Association Roumaine des Professeurs de Français – Romania**)

“The fact that we have representatives at a national level, that there are periodic meetings between these representatives and government representatives. I am not sure how effective this is, but at least we make our concerns heard. Also, there are times when we write and sign letters addressed to our local governors. I wish, however, that more people took a stand when it comes to their own interests.” (**RATE - Romanian Association of Teachers of English, Romania**)

“Kommunikation mit den politischen Entscheidungsträgern mit dem Ziel, die Position der deutschen Sprache in den curricularen Diskussionen und in der Unterrichtspraxis zu stärken:

- Fachkommission zur Entwicklung des nationalen Curriculums (seit 2008)
- Fachkommission zur Entwicklung des "Pädagogischen Standards" (Mindestvoraussetzungen, die schulische Einrichtungen erfüllen müssen) (2007)
- Arbeitsgruppen zur Entwicklung von Prüfungen zur externen Evaluation auf der nationalen Ebene, einschließlich des Zentralabiturs (seit 2007)”

(**KDV - Kroatischer Deutschlehrerverband, Croatia**)

“L’engagement de LEND dans l’élaboration de propositions innovantes pour l’enseignement des langues a été reconnu par le ministère italien qui lui a octroyé, depuis 2002 le titre de « Institution de formation officiellement reconnue », ce qui permet de signer des conventions avec les établissements scolaires pour collaborer à la formation des enseignants de langues. Grâce à ce statut, LEND a pu collaborer et collabore encore à des projets ministériels de formation sur le territoire national comme le projet « Lingua 2000 » dans les années 90 et le projet « Poseidon » pour la formation à distance actuellement en cours.” (**LEND - Lingua e Nuova Didattica, Italy**)

They may also be represented on national steering groups, established by the Government with specific tasks to address. For example, in 2001-2002 the Association for Language Learning (ALL) was represented on the National Languages Steering Group by its President; chaired by a Government Minister, the task was to develop a National Languages Strategy. Similarly, ALL was represented on the Development of a new Government-sponsored languages qualification for 14-19 year olds from 2008-2010. A similar situation is described as follows:

“Groupe de Réflexion pour le Français: depuis 2003, le SCAC a mis en place un Projet National de Formation Continue qui est géré par des Groupes de Réflexion dans 8 régions. Ces groupes sont constitués par des représentants des institutions de formation

de formateurs, des écoles de langues vivantes, des alliances françaises locales et des associations locales membres de la FAPF. Chaque année, le SCAC demande aux groupes la présentation des projets de formation continue, qui peuvent être assurés par des spécialistes nationaux ou français.” (**FAPF - Fédération argentine de professeurs de français, Argentina**)

Associations can also play a strong role in the development of more specific aspects of the curriculum, such as assessment. SUKOL, in Finland, for example, sits on the Matriculation Examination board's committee on developing the national language exams, as well as the Ministry of Education's committee on introducing oral courses to upper secondary education.

3. Barriers to influencing policy

Associations identify internal and external barriers to influencing policy. **Examples of internal barriers** include the following:

- The problem of attracting members identified by many associations is explicitly identified also as a problem when trying to find people to represent the association, or when trying to convince policymakers that they represent language teachers' views.
- The fact that active members are volunteers employed by other organisations limits their availability and time; it is, for example, more difficult to find representatives who are school teachers than those working in universities.
- Economic barriers, i.e. lack of funding, reduce the number of paid officers, or prevents the association having an office.
- A sense that participation in consultative meetings takes a great deal of effort but does not have a significant impact sometimes leads to associations prioritising other forms of teacher support.
- Professional development and promotion is in some contexts gained more easily when teachers devote themselves to their own development, rather than taking a collegial approach.
- Fragmentation of the languages lobby is increased by the existence of separate language associations which may compete rather than collaborate.

External barriers include the following:

- Associations are not invited to join such decision-making bodies at all. This may be because there is no historical tradition of consultation in the country, or lack of recognition of the associations.
- Decisions are made in advance, and there is a sense that meetings are organised as a token gesture to consultation.
- Associations are not consulted on the major issues, such as finances; they can only influence more peripheral aspects of policy.
- There are frequent changes of people and policies, and it is impossible to keep up with them all.

- Lack of transparency about where policy is really made makes it difficult for associations with limited resources to participate in a focused way.
- Languages are not considered important enough to devote time and resources to by policymakers. This is particularly the case in some English-speaking countries.
- There are conflicts of interest between decision-makers and associations, and associations may not have experience in effective lobbying. This can lead to a confrontational approach to influencing policy which can in turn lead to lack of impact on or exclusion from decisions.
- Devolution of language policy to a local, regional or provincial level, or even to individual schools, makes it harder for a national association to have an influence.
- If only one or a small number of languages are being promoted by the government, it is difficult for other language associations to gain access; this will also have an impact on the languages which language inspectors favour.

4. Strategies for influencing policy

Despite such barriers, many associations find ways of influencing policy. In some cases, where there is no tradition of consulting associations, this involves finding a range of ways of making themselves known to policymakers. Examples include the following:

- **Organising high profile events:**
 - “Versuchen, persönlich in Kontakt zu kommen. Für uns hat es sich auch bewährt, grössere Tagungen zu organisieren und so auf uns aufmerksam zu machen.”
(Arbeitskreis Deutsch als Fremdsprache in der Schweiz)
 - “We need to show the government that we offer a service to our teachers that can’t be found elsewhere. When we do that we can convince them to contribute funds to various activities. Our latest had to do with having a conference for teaching assistants coming from America, Britain and Australia who are here for one or two years to assist English language teachers. As they are sometimes little equipped to actually “teach” their own language this was a good project that was appreciated by the TAs themselves, the government and the other sponsoring organizations.”
(TEA Teachers of English in Austria, Austria)
- **Organising other forms of professional development courses and projects:**
 - “Nous bénéficions actuellement d'une bonne image auprès des autorités éducatives en raison de l'engagement de membres actuels de la direction et de la qualité du travail mené dans des projets éducatifs (notamment les programmes d'enseignement du français et le partenariat dans le développement des Sections Européennes)”. **(Associação Portuguesa dos Professores de Francês – APPF, Portugal)**

- “Nous participons aux différents projets, proposés par le ministère.” (**Association lituanienne des professeurs de français, Lithuania**)
- **Cultivating personal contacts in national and local Government and other official bodies, e.g.**
 - “Bei Veranstaltungen laden wir Policymakers mit Vorträgen oder bei Podiumsdiskussionen ein.” (**Deutschlehrerverband Rumäniens Romania**)
 - “Avoir des liens avec le Ministère de l’Education à Malte et l’Ambassade de France à Malte montre que nous voulons travailler dans la même direction. Le site web permet de montrer la réussite de l’association.” (**Association des Professeurs de Français de Malte (APFM), Malta**)
- **Lobbying/campaigning, especially when based on research expertise, careful analysis of the relevant documents, and consultation with the association’s members:**
 - “We have lobbied with success for languages having an increased value when going to universities.” (**LMS-Sweden**)
 - “Contribution au développement du multi- et plurilinguisme à l’échelle de nos établissement en utilisant comme argument des rapports analytiques basés aussi bien sur les résultats des pratiques locales que sur les documents européens en matière des politiques linguistiques. Les mécanismes de la participation des associations comme la nôtre en tant qu’acteurs institutionnels pouvant influencer la prise des décisions à un haut niveau est en train de se développer en Russie dans l’esprit de la nouvelle loi sur les organisations et groupements non commerciaux datant du 2006.” (**Organisation régionale caritative ‘Association des professeurs de français’, Saint-Pétersburg, Russia**)
 - “Aller faire des propositions concrètes de démarches méthodologiques adaptées à la réalité locale sans passer avant par les autorités éducatives. Se mettre au travail et résoudre le problème sur place en concordance avec ses partenaires.” (**APF Chile**)
 - “We have gathered statistics to show the policymakers that the number of children and youth studying other languages than English has been declining drastically during the past ten years. We also organized a three-year-long national campaign called KISU - Multilingual Finland 2005-2007 in order to promote the teaching and learning of languages. The target groups of the campaign were as much policymakers as citizens.” (**SUKOL, Finland**)

In other cases, associations are consulted but have to find alternative ways of influencing policy as they do not have sufficient people to cope with the amount of consultation. Written representation, e.g. letters to government ministers, contacting local politicians, letters to the

press, official press releases, is one way in which associations can still make their voices heard under such circumstances, though these are recognised as important lobbying strategies at all times.

Collaboration with other associations and organizations is another way of making economies of scale with regard to attending consultation meetings. However, it is also recognized that such collaboration is a way of strengthening their influence. Partners might include universities, schools, embassies, cultural institutes, and the media. For associations which represent one particular language, it is crucial that they work alongside other associations in order to demonstrate a united front wherever this is possible. These can involve collaborations with other associations representing the same language, e.g. “Comité de Liaison en Argentine, composé par les 3 associations nationales pour le Français: SAPFESU – DICIFRAN – FAPF”. Partnerships can also involve teachers of different languages. For example, ZAFT (Zambian Association of French Teachers) stated that they influence policy through collaborating with teachers of English and local languages in LATAZ (Language Teachers’ Association of Zambia). Similarly, in Iceland, it is recognised that:

“Die einzelnen Verbände müssen zusammenarbeiten, denn als geschlossene Einheit sind wir stärker und können einander helfen. Momentan ist es wichtig, dass die sog. 3. Fremdsprache (Deutsch, Spanisch, Französisch) zusammen arbeiten, da im Kultusministerium an einem neuen Curriculum gearbeitet wird.”

(Félag Þýzkukennara/Icelandic Association of German Teachers, Iceland)

“Als effektiv hat sich die Kooperation von verschiedenen SprachlehrerInnenverbänden in der Slowakei erwiesen, zum Beispiel die gemeinsame Vorgehensweise in den Stellungnahmen zum Pflichtenglisch-Gesetz. Effektiv ist auch die Zusammenarbeit mit diversen Institutionen der deutschsprachigen Länder in der Slowakei, auch Botschaften, und mit dem Netzwerk der Sprachmittler. Wichtig ist auch die Zusammenarbeit mit methodischen Zentren.” **(Spoločnosť učiteľov nemeckého jazyka a germanistov Slovenska (SUNG)/ Verband der Deutschlehrer und Germanisten der Slowakei, Slovakia)**

In some cases these individual associations have even become one languages association, as happened in the 1980s in the UK when ALL was formed through the merger of a range of individual language associations. There is an increasing interest in forming multilingual associations such as ALL (UK), Australian Federation of Modern Language Teacher Associations (Australia), LALT (Latvia), LMS Sweden (Sweden), STIL (Iceland), SUKOL (Finland), and LATAZ (Zambia).

There is also evidence of associations collaborating internationally. ANILS (Italy) cites its membership of FIPLV as a support to policy influence, for example. (See also the case study from LKPA, the Association of Language Teachers of Lithuania, in Case study 8.1.)

Others work with a wider range of teacher organisations, such as subject associations and trade unions, or with other language-related organisations (see the case study from the American Association of Teachers of German, in Case study 8.2).

CASE STUDY 8.1

LKPA (LIETUVOS KALBŲ PEDAGOGŲ ASOCIACIJA)

ASSOCIATION OF LANGUAGE TEACHERS OF LITHUANIA

ACTING LOCALLY AND GLOBALLY

Eglė Šleinotienė

President of the Association of Language Teachers of Lithuania



The European Union, the Council of Europe, and the European Commission support multilingualism as an integral part of the present and future development of Europe. The Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania grants the Lithuanian language the status of the state language; good conditions are created for all citizens to foster and develop their national languages and learn other languages as well. Language teachers are the main participants and promoters of the above mentioned EU and national strategy. The role of professionals and teacher associations is increasing. Language promotion at the European level and in Lithuania is an important element of several policy agendas at the local or national levels. Languages are linked to important policy issues such as intercultural dialogue, socio-economic development, employment, and integration. National and regional officials in Lithuania consider language competence to be an important factor for employment and intercultural understanding.

As the President of LKPA, elected by languages professionals representing universities, colleges, language schools and associations, I understand that successful promotion of the association is not just dependent on raising awareness amongst direct targets such as teachers, teacher trainers, educational institutions or other experts in the language field. Targeting policy makers helps to increase the visibility of the organisation and maximise its impact, because they can provide new opportunities for funding, networking, ideas for expansion of the association's activities, and sustainability of the results.

We try to work on national and international levels. On the national level, LKPA aims to attract officials and government authorities (Members of the SEIMAS, or Parliament), ministries, other national, regional and local authorities and associations, international organizations, such as the Goethe Institute, the British Council, and the French Cultural

Centre etc. A good understanding of the functioning of local and national government structures helps a lot. We manage to attract their attention and sometimes support for our initiatives, especially before elections, when everybody is eager to promise. Politicians and civil servants participate in conferences, organized by the LKPA members. Last year the Forum of Teachers' Associations was initiated by the Ministry of Education and Science. It adopted school curriculum and syllabi during the meeting organized December 17, 2010. Representatives of 22 associations signed the resolution. On behalf of LKPA the document was signed by the President.

We think that language teachers' associations should think European as well. EU institutions and other European organisations, such as the European Commission, the Parliament or the Committee of the Regions, The Council of Europe, UNESCO, and ECML support teacher associations. They can offer networking within Europe and great opportunities for associations to participate in international projects. LKPA has been a member of FIPLV (www.fiplv.org) since 2008 and it is currently a founding member of the REAL consortium (www.real-association.eu). LKPA also participates actively in the ELTACS (www.eltacs.eu) project.

When contacting policy makers we are brief and focused, highlighting the LKPA's potential contribution to the objectives of the country. We represent the needs of language teachers, language teaching institutions and associations, and we emphasize it. We make proposals and/or recommendations regarding language teaching curriculum design and teaching resource preparation to the Government and organizations which offer language teaching services. It is a pity that the voice of language teachers is not always listened to properly when initiating and approving strategies and policies in the country.

Eglė Šleiniotienė

President of the Association of Language Teachers of Lithuania

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CASE STUDY 8.2

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OF GERMAN

ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES

The **Joint National Committee for Languages (JNCL)** is an umbrella organization currently comprised of over sixty associations concerned with languages and international studies. JNCL exists to provide a forum for associations to discuss, plan and address **language policies** that affect international education.

Its sister organization, **the National Council for Languages and International Studies (NCLIS)** with a similar but not identical membership, is **the advocacy or lobbying organization that attempts to create and influence these policies and their funding**. The division of focuses between the two is necessary because of U.S tax code that requires any lobbying group to register under a different tax law.

JNCL-NCLIS Mission Statement

The member organizations are united in their belief that all Americans must have the opportunity to learn and use English and at least one other language. Their mission is to promote policies that respect and develop the language abilities of Americans.

JNCL-NCLIS Goals include:

- To unify the language profession;
- To promote policies that respect and develop the language abilities of Americans;
- To increase language awareness by the American public; and
- To promote national policies that address the nation and its citizens' needs and capabilities

Members include (not all are listed):

National Language Specific Associations

- Alliance of Associations of Teachers of Japanese
- American Association of Applied Linguistics
- American Association of Teachers of Arabic
- American Association of Teachers of French
- American Association of Teachers of German
- American Association of Teachers of Italian
- American Association of Slavic and East European Languages
- American Association of Spanish and Portuguese
- American Sign Language Teachers Association
- Chinese Language Teachers Association
- National Committee for Latin and Greek

National Council of Organizations of Less Commonly Taught Languages
Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

National Generic Associations

American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages
American Translators Association
Modern Language Association
National Association of Bilingual Education
Council of Directors of Language Resource Centers
National Network for Early Language Learning
National Council of State Supervisors of Languages
National Association of District Supervisors of Foreign Languages
Computer Assisted Language Instruction Consortium

State Associations from California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Illinois, Kansas, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New York State, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Wisconsin

As the fact that these two lists are not the same suggests, each of the organisations has its specific focus, though JNCL-NCLIS each contributes to achievement of the individual associations in its own way. We believe that it is more effective to to work together rather than working alone when issues of language policy are at stake.

Fees depend on how much financial contribution each organisation can afford towards the running of an office in Washington DC, where a full-time lobbying group and a small team are employed. All members come together in Washington once a year for a three-day meeting of delegates, and spend the first day visiting representatives and senators in their offices. The Board meets once a year in order to plan further meetings and to discuss political issues. The JNCL website www.languagepolicy.org contains information on current themes and our members regularly receive emails which encourage them to become actively involved in particular issues.

AATG became actively involved in 1976, when JNCL was established. As a founder member, we are also a member of the Board. I personally am President and have been Treasurer twice.

CASE STUDY 8.3



SUNG Spoločnosť učiteľov nemeckého jazyka a germanistov Slovenska

Slovakian Association of German Teachers and Germanists

President: PhDr. Nadežda Zemaníková, PhD.

<http://www.sung.sk/>

On the Slovakian School Ministry's planned legislation to introduce English as a compulsory foreign language, and the Association's initiatives – which have not yet achieved a happy ending

On September 2 2010, during the 10th Conference of the Slovakian Association of German Teachers and Germanists in Prešov, the Association's new executive committee was elected. The new committee members hardly had any time to consider the challenges they would face before they were confronted with an extremely important problem: as a representative body for the profession, they were called upon by German teachers in Slovakia to intervene in the public debate taking place over the Slovakian School Ministry's planned legislation to introduce English as a compulsory foreign language.

The executive committee decided to write to the government concerning this issue. A detailed response to the proposed legislative changes was produced by the Association and sent to the education minister, the prime minister, the leader of the parliament and the parliamentary education committee. In this letter we attempted to express our concerns, to support our objections with relevant arguments and to draw attention to the foreseeable negative effects of the planned changes.

In our letter we argued very strongly in favour of plurilingualism, and as a result we were able to gain the support of other language teacher associations (Russian, French and Spanish), though we were sadly unable to secure the collaboration of the English teachers' association. The embassies of the three German speaking countries (Germany, Austria and Switzerland) also wrote to the Slovakian government in support of our statement. This came about in part as a result of the careful coordination of our actions with activities carried out by the network of German language promoters in Slovakia ("Netzwerk Deutsch"). However we had hoped for more assistance from academic Germanist circles given that the Association is no outsider to these, and that the issue at stake affects every level of the educational system.

From the beginning we were confident that we would make ourselves heard in the ministry, and in fact in November 2010 the president of the Association held talks with relevant figures: the general director of the department for regional schools in the education ministry, and the leader of the parliament. In these talks we pushed for at least a compromise solution, whereby the free choice of a first foreign language according to the requirements of parents, schools or regional administrations

etc would be retained; and whereby the position of the second foreign language on the curriculum would be strengthened. During these meetings the representatives of the language teacher associations were invited to contribute to the development of the new national curriculum and to participate in relevant working groups in the ministry, should the opportunity arise for them to influence the content of the curriculum.

It is worth mentioning here that the new wording of the school legislation merely contains the specification that “competence in English and at least one additional foreign language” is now one of the main goals of the educational system in Slovakia, as opposed to the original requirement for “competence in at least two foreign languages”. The legislation does not state at what stage language teaching should be introduced in schools, nor does it specify the order in which foreign languages are to be taught. These will be specified by the curriculum instead.

Although the Slovakian president has not approved the new legislation, it successfully passed through parliament on the second attempt and the changes will come into force on September 1 2011.

We were reluctant to admit defeat even though most politicians declined to take part in discussions on the topic of compulsory English. In the curriculum working group we found that representatives from many associations shared our concerns. Nonetheless in May 2011 it was decided that the curriculum would also reflect English’s status as Slovakia’s first foreign language on a national basis.

Unfortunately we also encountered strong opposition from the media. For months on end the Slovakian media presented the problem in an overly simplified and inaccurate way, without any discussion of the wide-ranging consequences of the legislation – for instance the enormous difference between the statuses of the first and second foreign languages in the lower secondary school curriculum, where the development of second language competence to B1 or B2 level has been effectively dropped.

What now? In times like these - when in order to avoid German being pushed to one side in Slovakian language education it is necessary to repeatedly point out what we think of as obvious facts such as Slovakia’s geographical proximity to German speaking countries, its long national tradition of learning and teaching German and its extensive cultural, academic and economic interaction with the German speaking world – in times like these we rely on mutual support more than ever. We need the solidarity and reinforcement provided by a strong professional association. If we are unable to join forces and to overcome our intellectual differences (in particular the supposed differences between relevant branches of science, research and classroom practice), then we can hardly presume to tackle our current problems. If that happens, our struggles will collapse into resignation.