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Italy us Europe

With Europe expanding from 15 nations to 25, the congress map will change. The European Parliament is now speaking in 20 tongues: the problem of understanding each other has to find an immediate solution

Keeping pace with E.u. expansion

Just 15 years ago, the 'iron curtain' came down, altering once again the concept of east and west. May 1st 2004 suddenly united in a single parliament several countries formerly distanced by the 'cold war'. That morning, the population of my country instantly swelled from 74 million inhabitants to a total of 455 million, with 10 new states bringing the total number of E.U. members to 25. There are now twenty official languages. However, a close look shows that the gap between the first 15 and the latest 10 members is not as wide as might be thought. There are noticeable differences in employment rates and in GNP, but in other sectors we are not that far apart. Take the number of mobile phones, for example: in the former 15 member states, 79% of the population owns a mobile, while in the 10 new ones the figure already stands at 51%.

And what is likely to happen in the congress industry? One area will feel an immediate impact, namely interpreting: the ranks of the 3000 Brussels-basedinterpretersand translators - already the world's biggest language service - are destined to swell. All parliamentary proceedings will now have to be translated into the 20 - as opposed to the former 11 - official languages of the 25

member states. This phenomenon will also affect the world of events. Allow me to make a small digression: if a group of people speaks twenty different languages, reciprocal understanding can only be ensured by an interpreting service. As this stands now, the European Parliament will have no fewer than 380 linguistic combinations. In actual fact, as happens at the United Nations there are the so-called privileged languages, used by the interpreters who do not speak the original language: if there is no interpreter availabletotranslate from Finnish into Maltese, for example, the Maltese interpreter can tune into the English translation channel and interpret from there. This is the so-calledrelaylanguage system. The U.N. follows different rules: 191 countries manage with just six working languages. In Europe, therefore, the congress industry will have to employ more interpreters, but what about the migratory movement of

congresses and events? In the

short term, new destinations will

as Riga, Tallin, Vilnius, Warsaw,

gradually come closer. Cities such

Prague, Bratislava, Budapest, Lublijana, Nicosia, Valletta and many of the new member states' smallertowns will become trendy and economically viable locations; indeed, some of them, such as Prague and Valletta, already rank among the top twenty European destinations. Initially, the demand for events will migrate eastwards, but at the same time the demand that will feed the events industry, and that is still relegated to the new member states, will also

grow. And then Italy and the other 14 earlier member

states will also benefit
from the growth in
international
demand; at the
moment Italy
probably plays a
more important
role as a provider
of conference
know-how, much like
all the important

European destinations.
Prices will settle, economic and labor issues will gradually fall into line with each other and so, hopefully, will taxation, but the general outlook is anyway one of growth and acceleration.

In the photo: A pan-European keyboard, including Cyrillic characters, would have to double in size. (© *Annelie Bortolotti*)