# An Alliance communiqué to all members

Decisions further to the meeting of language network coordinators with the members of the Board (Monday 12 October 2009, Paris, France)

**International Alliance of independent publishers**

On Monday 12 October 2009, the Alliance brought together the five language network coordinators and six members of the Board. This meeting, prepared in advance by the permanent staff, was an opportunity to address several core issues for our movement. A French version of the minutes in full – including the *verbatim* of this long and exciting day of work – was sent to the participants. They wished however to have a communiqué, summing up the main points discussed and decisions taken together, drawn up in three languages for circulation among all members of the Alliance.

The participants in this meeting addressed several topics in turn, set out here alongside the relevant decisions.

## How can we work alongside each other, in spite of and thanks to our cultural differences?

One of the questions asked of participants involved the problems encountered, as coordinators and members of the Alliance, working together in an international and markedly intercultural setting, whether with members of their network, the other language networks, or the permanent staff in Paris.

- **The main problems encountered chiefly involved the organisation of teamwork**, the difference in levels of professionalism among publishers, legal management of agreements on the transfer of copyright. Few issues of a quintessentially cultural nature were raised; although cultural differences in work pace and time management were mentioned by Serge D. Kouam (coordinator of the Southern French-language network). Furthermore, Nouri Abid (coordinator of the Arabic-language network) spoke at length of the weight of tradition in the Arabic-language publishing world.

- **As to joint publishing and translation projects**, Cristina Warth (coordinator of Portuguese-language network) mentioned that Brazilian publishers and publishers from Portuguese-speaking Africa had had trouble working together. A Portuguese-language joint publishing project had suffered further to misunderstandings with respect to the rights transfer agreement (anonymity of authors, exclusivity for texts etc.). The difference in levels of professionalism was by far the most troublesome issue. Publishers involved in international joint publishing projects need a minimum amount of knowledge of business practices and the workings of joint publishing as a base on which to found this collaborative work. Marc Favreau mentioned legal issues affecting the publication of "sensitive" works in the US and more generally in English-speaking countries in the Northern hemisphere. In these countries, it is common practice for a lawyer to check the work prior to publication, since publishers seek to avoid the possibility of suits being brought by firms or institutions which may consider that their action is called into question in critical works. European publishers, especially the French, have trouble understanding and accepting this, in that they systematically suspect that it may lead to censure. This example highlighted the various legal setups in the countries involved in international joint publishing projects. Such practices are to be taken into account by all involved; these differences have to be accepted and their impact on projects needs to factored in as early on as possible.

The participants also noted the differences in their understanding of what the principle of joint publishing implied exactly – there seem to have been misunderstandings on this point, which are only natural given the various levels of joint publishing, with greater and lesser degrees of involvement (from mere participation in a publication with a number of copies bought at cost price from the leading publisher to systems involving a high level of participation such as solidarity-led joint publications with the "Fair Publishing" label).

- **Internal governance**: Serge D. Kouam insisted on language network coordinators having a greater level of independence, especially with regard to the permanent staff in Paris. He wishes to have greater powers to initiate local projects (for publications, the organisation of events etc.), without necessarily having to wait for approval from the permanent staff prior to launching initiatives. Guido Indij (coordinator of the Spanish-language network) asked for more support from the permanent staff for the coordination of the Spanish-language network. Nouri Abid (coordinator of the Arabic-language network) partly agreed with this. Lastly, the coordinators all agreed that there were no problems among the language networks or coordinators, simply because there were no contacts or relations between them (with the notable exception of the Spanish- and Portuguese-language networks)! They admitted not really knowing what was going on in the other networks, nor the content of other publishers' catalogues, in spite of the information tools in place. They specifically asked the Board and the permanent staff to smooth the way to regular coordinator meetings, in order to forge links (please see below, *The coordinators' role*).

Further to the discussion on the difficulties encountered while working together, the conclusion was drawn that the culture they shared far outweighed any cultural or intercultural tensions between Alliance members. Nevertheless, the permanent staff and the Board were challenged as to their capacity to:

- give coordinators wishing to take initiatives locally more independence (Serge D. Kouam's proposal);

- provide more support to those coordinators who requested it (Guido Indij's and Nouri Abid's proposal);

- support basic training for publishers participating in international joint publishing projects to avoid professional misunderstandings which could harm the project (Cristina Warth's proposal);

- ensure greater ties between the coordinators and foster better knowledge of the other networks' projects, especially with the setup of a powerful information system and coordinator meetings (proposal put forward by all participants).

## The coordinators' role

The participants then discussed the exact role played by each of the various types of players in the Alliance (Members' Meeting, General Meeting, Board, coordinators, permanent staff). The coordinators' role was naturally examined in detail.

- **The coordinators' role** has been honed gradually, at the Members' Meeting and at the Coordinators' Meeting in 2005. Coordinators:

- o ensure that information circulates among network members and between members and the staff in Paris;
- o remain in contact with the staff in Paris;
- o monitor the state of progress of projects (joint publishing, sharing of experience) that the network wishes to accomplish;
- o study requests for membership of the network they coordinate and give their opinion on these requests;
- o organise the network meetings, liaising with the staff in Paris.

- The coordinators' meeting in Paris confirmed the role that the coordinators may play – liaising with the permanent staff – **in seeking funding for their networks or the Alliance.**

- Lastly, given that the Charles Léopold Mayer Foundation is currently in an assessment and prospective phase, with 2010-2011 budgets due to be cut by 20%, the **coordinators drafted a short letter to be sent to Matthieu Calame** (Alliance referent at the Foundation) to repeat our gratitude and reassert our conviction that the Alliance fulfils the Foundation's main aims.

## General directions to be honed further to the coordinators' meeting

At the end of the day, an existing set of general directions was **consolidated and new ones were decided on**. Further to the coordinators' recommendations, the Alliance's Board decided to give them the form of decisions taken by the Association and called on the permanent staff to consider them as being an integral part of Alliance's legal framework.

- The **Alliance needs to become more representative,** for example by sparking the creation of national publishers' organisations which could themselves become members. It is also necessary to step up the geographic diversity of countries represented within the Alliance (for example Japanese publishers).

- **Communication** needs to **be reformed with respect to the representative nature of the Alliance,** especially emphasising the number of publishers represented indirectly (via the organisations for example).

- Alongside the national and language-based organisations, **a "regional" organisation should be developed**. This would mean the processing of certain continental issues at the appropriate level. This is already somewhat the case with Afrilivres (regional association of French-speaking African publishers) as well as with the summit of Latino-American publisher organisations and the ties forged between the Spanish- and Portuguese-language networks.

- **The coordinators' group needs to be formally set up** and regular teleconference meetings need to be organised.

- **The principle of an intermediary meeting to that of the International Conference** was approved. It would be attended by the coordinators, representatives of the Board and the staff in Paris as well as the representatives of national and regional organisations.

- No doubt it will be necessary to further **decentralise the running of the networks,** especially with respect to the programming of future initiatives.

- The more federal the organisation becomes, the more programming will be decentralised, the more the permanent staff will have to **step up its role in circulating information** among publishers, language networks and national and regional organisations. It could for example draft an e-newsletter inciting members to visit the Website. Furthermore, the permanent staff could monitor members' catalogues, alone or with coordinator backing, to spot the most propitious titles for international publications and foster joint publishing or the transfer of rights.

Lastly, **other possibilities** were discussed after the meeting by the members of the Board. These will be examined in more depth at the next associative meeting and will no doubt lead to formal decisions being taken.

- **Decentralisation**: the programming of Alliance activities could comprise the international actions put forward by the Alliance team as well as regional ones organised by the language networks (or perhaps one day, by the regional coordinations). This growth in initiatives – brought about by the diversification of sources making it possible to elaborate initiative programmes – supposes an enlargement and regionalisation of the seeking of funding and partnerships. However, we must be careful not to weaken Alliance unity, and ensure the overall consolidation of programming and budget.

- **Coordinators' group**: this group or the "International Alliance Committee" (which would comprise the coordinators, plus one or several representatives of continents not represented by the language networks – i.e. Asia or Europe) could become a body within the Alliance. This highly representative and international group could play an important role in supporting the seeking of funding and institutional partnerships. The requests for funding drafted by the staff and the Board could thus be approved and signed (thus internationalised) by this Committee.

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