

EDITORIAL:

It is sometimes useful to go back in history as we are able to do in this issue thanks to the review by our colleague, Christer Laurén, of the book published in 2005 by Thorsten Fögen on Language for Special Purposes (LSP) in ancient times (page 118). Fögen's anthology tackles a number of subjects that are still topical today. It reminds us that LSP and professional communication have always existed, that in those days too there were texts that were well written and others that were deplorable, and finally (and especially) that there have never been any impenetrable barriers between LSP and everyday language. The book also gives us occasion to remember that after the end of the domination of the Roman Empire, Latin remained the language used in literature, science, law and religion for centuries in a Europe where the political and linguistic borders were on the move.

In France, for example, it was not until the famous Villers-Cotterêts Decree, which was signed by François I in 1539 and replaced Latin with French in judgments and legal documents, that French became the official language of the French administration.

The overriding priority for those exercising political power was to make themselves understood by populations who did not speak or understand Latin.

The 16th century saw the first French grammars, and at the beginning of the 17th century came the first serious scientific and philosophical texts written in French and not in Latin.

In the other European countries, Latin remained the inter-European language for a while in certain fields, notably scientific, but the national languages had prevailed by 1800.

So in a way, the supporters of one single language in Europe to the detriment of the national languages are seeking a return to the 15th century.

Fortunately, these views are not held by the EU, as can be clearly seen from the particularly interesting article that Mr Leonard Orban, member of the European Commission, has kindly written for this edition of our journal.

Still, the game is not over for all that, because, as Mr Orban points out, policy on multilingualism is first and foremost a national competence.

It is thus a question of convincing the political decision-makers (who do not always burden themselves with historical or linguistic knowledge) of the need to strengthen the teaching of the mother tongue in schools very quickly and make the study of two foreign languages obligatory, preferably while there are still teachers to teach them.

We hope that Mr Orban's statement will be a useful instrument in the hands of our European colleagues in their efforts to make themselves heard by their governments.

The Editorial Board