The Swedish Presidency of the EU

On 1 January 2001, Sweden will pick up the gavel of the EU presidency. The three areas it has declared as highest priorities for its six-month term are: EU enlargement, job promotion and increased environmental consideration in EU cooperation.

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Published: November 23, 2000 Last updated: December 2, 2015

During the presidency, Council of Minister meetings will be held in the hometowns of the various Swedish Ministers who will be acting as Council presidents. The Swedish presidency is actively engaging the entire country in arrangements. A large proportion of all meetings, not only Council meetings, will be held elsewhere than in Stockholm. This means that many small cities in Sweden will be venues for meetings. This is a major difference as compared to the Finnish presidency, when for logistical reasons most meetings were held in that country's two largest cities. The Swedish decision will, of course, pose problems of accessibility, accommodation and conference arrangements.

There will also be challenges for interpretation. Most of the interpreters domiciled in Sweden live in or near large urban areas, and the facilities most used for interpreting are also located there. Many of the smaller cities have little or no experience of hosting such large conferences, or of interpretation and the necessary equipment. Moreover, since there are only a small number of interpreters living in Sweden, many more will have to be brought in from abroad to cover all the EU language combinations.

In early 2000, the Swedish government and Parliament (the Riksdag) put out calls for tenders for interpretation services in anticipation of the presidency. This is normal procedure for a country looking forward to a presidency, as the need for interpreters is greater than usual during a presidency and there are time constraints. Although many Swedish AIIC interpreters submitted individual tenders, only company tenders were shortlisted. At the end of the day a decision was made to ask the European Commission's Joint Interpreting and Conference Services (JICS) to organise most of the interpreting.

Conference Interpreting in Sweden

Still, the presidency will give Swedish conference interpreters an opportunity to raise awareness of our profession. Many people in Sweden have no idea what a conference interpreter does, and prior to Sweden's entry in the EU, very few AIIC members were domiciled in Sweden. Since then, however, there has been a virtual explosion, from a mere handful to some twenty today.

Now that Sweden is part of the EU, interpreting has become both a natural and a necessary part of life. Authorities and organisations have discovered that they need interpretation and interpreters. The conference interpretation program at Stockholm University's Institute for Translation and Interpreting (TÖI) is described elsewhere in this issue.
Most of TÖI's graduates are now well integrated into the work of the Swedish booth, both on the private market and at EU institutions, either as freelancers or staff interpreters. Practically all the new freelancers have applied for AIIC membership, which explains the burst of vitality in AIIC Sweden.

AIIC Information Campaign in Sweden

As the demand for interpreting services in Sweden now often exceeds supply, unqualified ill-prepared and inexperienced interpreters have found their way into the market. Many have little or no training and do not respect AIIC guidelines regarding working conditions and team composition, which are an integral part of quality interpretation. As many users of interpreting services do not know that not all "interpreters" are conference interpreters, the resulting poor quality has led to dissatisfaction with interpreting in general and has undermined the market for all conference interpreters in Sweden.

AIIC Sweden, a subdivision of the AIIC Nordic region, has invested a great deal of time and energy in circulating information about AIIC and interpretation in preparation for the Swedish EU presidency, with an intensified campaign targeting authorities and organisations in spring 2000. We began by setting up a home page to which we could refer prospective users for basic facts on interpreting and information about AIIC. We went on to send short emails to about 100 ministries and public authorities, providing them with a link to the home page. Our message was: when you book interpreters for your conference, request the agency you use to recruit AIIC members only so that you will have a guarantee of quality. We also carried out a survey of all the municipalities where Council meetings will be held, to identify the person responsible at local government level and whether there were conference facilities available. We sent corresponding AIIC information to these people this autumn and repeated our mailings to public authorities and organisations, this time also enclosing a brochure about conference interpreting and AIIC.

Our ambition was crystal clear: our campaign was meant to circulate information about AIIC and make ourselves available as consultants, rather than to make ourselves into a kind of interpretation recruitment agency. We regard this as one step in a long-term program, an effort to raise the profile of AIIC and of conference interpreting during the Swedish presidency, when interpreting will undoubtedly be in greater focus in Sweden than ever before. We wish to make AIIC a familiar name and to prove that AIIC membership is a quality guarantee. We hope that this will be to everyone's benefit both during and after the presidency.

Reactions to our information campaign have been extremely positive. Recipients have been extremely pleased to receive information on a field about which they knew little, but in which they needed some expertise in order to organise successful meetings.

For more information about the Swedish presidency, please go to:

- [www.riksdagen.se](http://www.riksdagen.se)
- [www.regeringen.se](http://www.regeringen.se)
- [www.utrikes.regeringen.se/eu](http://www.utrikes.regeringen.se/eu) (EU information from the Swedish government)

**AIIC Sweden's subregional home page can now be found at**

- [www.AIIC-sverige.org](http://www.AIIC-sverige.org)