

TAKING STOCK OF AN EMERGENCY

THE CIRCULATION OF IDEAS IN EUROPE

In June 2009, on the initiative of Editions EHESS, about fifty European publishers and researchers issued a “Manifesto for Truly Europe-wide Publications in the Humanities”. Their starting point was the observation that past and future enlargement of the European Union, often deemed a mere “technical matter” by politicians and the public, has not led to adequate reflection on the dissemination of ideas, texts and books.

In a context in which research is increasingly collective and international, it is certainly necessary to affirm that “translation is the language of Europe”. Yet this truth might just remain empty words if no large-scale transnational programme exists to foster exchanges and, in particular, **translation**.

How can exchanges and translations be boosted in Europe? The signatories of the manifesto, drawing on their individual yet representative experiences, believe that action must be taken urgently in order to build a Europe of knowledge. They put forth the following four priorities:

→ **Intellectual production is still often dependent on national framework, and the circulation of books and texts among countries is insufficient.**

Book-industry professionals and researchers regularly reiterate the need for a space in which information on disseminating texts and ideas can be shared and pooled. As of present, however, no significant response has come from the common institutions of the European Union. This is the case, for instance, of the “**European Observatory on Translation**” recommended by Barbara Cassin, a researcher at France’s National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), in her 2008 report to the European Commissioner for Multilingualism. In particular, it would be interesting to establish at the European level “a library of ‘missing’ works”, to increase the number of summaries of works published in other languages, and to develop a general database of publications that incorporates multilingual access and referencing tools.

→ **No translation without outside financial aid.**

Existing aid programmes, generally shouldered by the ministries of culture, are indispensable. Indeed, they have enabled many works to be published. These programmes, however, are insufficient, since they remain linked to promoting a national culture, whereas knowledge must be “**denationalised**”, especially if Europe is to be made into a space where ideas can circulate freely.

We believe that in the next legislative term, the European Union’s Culture Programme must include **aid for the translation of non-fiction texts**, with a special emphasis on innovative, jointly published research, which must not be reserved solely for specialists. Translation also needs to occupy a more significant place **within European social-science research programmes themselves**.

→ **Translation opens up new areas of exploration and must be regarded as a scientific endeavour.**

We believe that translation is a **scientific endeavour** in its own right giving rise to the creation of often original wording. Translating an articulated thought is not merely transmitting a piece of information. We therefore ask that translation be recognised by research-evaluation systems as a scientific endeavour. Some recent initiatives have highlighted the translation process in the drafting and questioning of works.

→ **Henceforth, it is urgent to work on subjects for publication that, from the start, can be deemed transnational, or even multilingual, and the object of upstream co-editions.**

What themes should be given priority for analysis within a transnational, or even European, framework, rather than a national one? Some topics lend themselves more readily to a discussion of our “common realities” (e.g. European wars, migration issues, minorities, environmental matters, etc.). Generally, though, it is the approach rather than the subject that makes the latter transnational. Electronic publishing and its new possibilities for writing and reading (e.g. interaction, networks, multiple translation, etc.) will be at the heart of such reflection.

The signatories of the manifesto have affirmed “**the fecundity** of linguistic plurality and approaches to the social sciences”. The only way to preserve and foster such plurality is to affirm the importance of the language in which a text is written. Translation is the yardstick measuring plurality of thought. The debate over the role of English in the dissemination of ideas seems outdated to us today. English can be a preferential language of communication without the place of other languages being negated, for they must also remain the languages in which research is conducted.

The signatories of the manifesto are not seeking to act in isolation, but rather to join broader actions undertaken by publishing-sector professionals, and to engage in collective initiatives to boost intellectual exchanges in Europe.