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European Union of the Deaf
A European Non-Governmental Organisation in official
liaison with the European Parliament, the European
Commission and the Council of Europe



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European Day of Languages



COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Language Policy Division
www.coe.int/lang

European Centre for Modern Languages
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The Council of Europe celebrates the 10th Anniversary of the European Day of Languages 26 September 2011

The Language Policy Division has pleasure in inviting members of staff and
Permanent Representations to this event

*Sign languages: a unique contribution
to our linguistic and cultural diversity*

Interpretation in 3 languages: International Sign, English, French

SUMMARY OF PRESENTATIONS

Mark Wheatley, EUD Executive Director

What are sign languages? They are not only a representation of the spoken word; they are fully-fledged languages that differ across communities and countries. Some countries even have more than one signed language (e.g. Spain or Belgium) and many sign languages have more than one dialect. Countries that have the same spoken language do not necessarily have the same sign language (e.g. Austria and Germany). There are 29 sign languages in the EU and many more in the Council of Europe area. There is no such thing as an 'International Sign Language' – 'International Sign' is often referred to as an 'auxiliary language' that is used between signers from different countries. It is not a (real) sign language but more of a pidgin that uses highly iconic signs and common grammatical features; signers often negotiate specific meaning during a conversation. Sign languages are recognised at different levels – this ranges from recognition at constitutional level to European level recommendations and sign language references in various laws, such as educational or disability law.

Humberto Insolera, EUD Board Member

What is the Deaf Community? What is Deaf Culture? The Deaf Community is often seen as a disability group but due to its unique language people also refer to it as a minority group. The Deaf Community has its own distinctive culture with theatre, poems and other arts often based on visual effects and with sign language being the central point. Sentences such as 'Turn the light on, I can't understand you', are common among the Deaf albeit alien to someone who lives in a hearing world. As there are a number of sign languages, there are also a number of signs for one English word. Humberto Insolera will give examples from several sign languages to illustrate the variety of signs for one single word.

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Ádám Kósa, Member of the European Parliament

What is it like to work at the European Parliament as the first and only Deaf MEP? MEP Ádám Kósa will explain in detail how he works with a number of sign language interpreters in various sign languages and how the Hungarian Law on Sign Language changed his accessibility at the European Parliament.

Christophe Berna, Accident and Emergency doctor, Anne Besançon, bilingual French/French Sign Language (FSL) doctor and Roberto Biedma, sign language mediator and Deaf teacher (Strasbourg Hospital) assisted by Danièle Baly, French/FSL interpreter

The communication problems that arose during a CBRNE (chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosives) 'Red Plan' exercise in 2005 initiated an innovating collaboration between an accident and emergency doctor and the Deaf Patients' Care Unit of Strasbourg Hospital that resulted in the development of a medically-oriented visual and gestural code enabling efficient communication between all those operating in an emergency situation. Training in this code is provided by a Deaf teacher, ensuring that hearing students are immediately and fully immersed in visual and gestural communication.