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UND HÖRGESCHÄDIGTENKOMMUNIKATION
der Fakultät für Kulturwissenschaften am Institut
für Sprachwissenschaft und Computerlinguistik

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Dear Mrs. Villar!

The Bureau de Liaison of Carinthia (Austria) was so kind to inform you about my/our interest to hand in a proposal concerning article A-3022. As a follow up I send you a short description of this planned proposal the subject of which is:

Founding a „European Deaf University“ connected with systematizing higher education for deaf people.

The situation:

As you perhaps know, deaf people are strongly dependent for their education on the use of sign language (mostly as their preferred language) in a special bilingual context. Since the last 10 years several European countries made major improvements in deaf education (e.g. by installing bilingual education, university courses etc.). But still Gallaudet University (near Washington, USA) is the only acknowledged deaf university in the world. European students (normally 60-80) get grants for their studies there. Many others would like to study at such an university, but for financial reasons cannot. Additionally, some of these students do not return to Europe but stay in the USA, so the European deaf therefore lose some of their best educated people. Naturally, there are several

European universities which offer deaf studies (e.g. Bristol, UK).

The structure of a European Deaf University:

We think that the best way to install such a university is not to found it on a unique location. Instead a 'virtual university' should be developed which can offer an adequate mixture of:

- Existing successful deaf studies for interested students
- Developing missing deaf studies

These deaf studies should be possible (depending on different factors) either as a presence-only study, a study with changing phases of presence and distance learning, or as mainly distance learning ones.

Reasons for a special deaf university:

One reason is the above-mentioned special linguistic situation of the deaf. Their chances for a better education (and hereby for the labour market) can be enormously increased by offering studies adapted to this linguistic situation. One component of such an adaptation is that - especially in case of distance learning - deaf need on-line help in their respective sign language. A special deaf university would allow to create jobs for the most talented and educated deaf people which would mean an important long-term social improvement for all deaf. Such a development could instigate the improvement of all deaf education from the preschool and primary levels on.

Problems of a European Deaf University:

Differing from the USA where the American Sign Language (ASL) can be seen as an unifying language e.g. at least for all Gallaudet students, the European sign languages differ to a degree which cannot be neglected. International sign is not elaborate enough to be used like ASL and perhaps would get the same problems of acceptance like Esperanto or similar spoken 'planned languages'. So the linguistic situation would be rather complicated at the beginning of a deaf university. A second problem is that the education of European deaf is still rather different so that their competences have to be adjusted. For those countries where deaf education still leads to results which do not reach the standards for visiting university, special propedeutics are to be offered. On the other side we can see a movement of the deaf communities in the European Union which

leads to common perspectives and a developing common culture, deaf people perhaps being able to be predecessors of European integration. Therefore - in spite of the problems - the founding of such an university would be an important task for the access of deaf people to educational possibilities which in the average European country is nowadays normal only for hearing people.

Organizational necessities for a European Deaf University:

The representatives of European deaf, e.g. the European Union of the Deaf (EUD) and also all interested national deaf organisations, should be members of the founding project, the deaf perspective being guideline for all activities. Therefore we would do nothing for such a project without the explicit participation of EUD and interested national deaf organisations as well as interested deaf researchers.

Yours sincerely

Franz Dotter