

Private Market/Inter-Regional Meeting in Bangkok: Revival of the Silk Road?

The Private Market Sector's [next meeting](#) will be held in Bangkok from 19 to 21 January 2007, jointly with an Inter-Regional Meeting of the [Asia-Pacific](#) and [Turkish](#) Regions. One might wonder what these two AIIC regions at opposite ends of Asia have in common. No doubt the participants will come up with some interesting answers over the three days.

By [Nur DERIS OTTOMAN](#)

Asia-Pacific extends over a vast, culturally diverse area and enjoys a well-deserved seniority amongst AIIC regions, while Turkey is AIIC's newest region, admitted by the [Brussels Assembly](#) in January this year, and covers but a single country. With only 7 AIIC members for a long time, things began to change in Turkey two years ago when the Italian Region reached out to its Turkish colleagues through the [Teranga Network](#). The first contact was established in January 2004 when two Turkish members attended the Private Market Sector meeting in Florence, during which an invitation to hold the PriMS January 2005 meeting in Istanbul was accepted. The prospect of a first-ever AIIC meeting in Turkey was met with great enthusiasm by local colleagues. Representatives of various AIIC committees and groups joined in to introduce the association to potential members, triggering a wave of applications. Before the end of the year, the ranks had swollen to 26, enough to form a region.

A new region built on collective experience

The budding Turkish Region, however, enjoyed [a wealth of professional experience](#). The first interpreters began their careers in the 1960s, and in 1969 the first professional organisation of interpreters was founded, inspired by AIIC principles. It later became the United Conference Interpreters' Association of Turkey ([BKTD](#)), and all AIIC colleagues in Turkey today are long-standing members and have drawn on their collective experience to develop professional standards in the country.



The Turkish Region has already organised two major events this year in collaboration with the BKTD. The first aimed at raising awareness of technical standards and is covered by Hande Guner's article in this issue.

The second event targeted AIIC as well as non-AIIC interpreters and was held on October 14 and 15 in Ankara and Istanbul respectively. It reviewed the importance of professionalism for interpreters, including how to establish oneself, team strength and working hours, booth manners, language combination/classification, etc. The participation of Adrienne Clarke-Ott, member of AIIC's Admissions Committee, and her presentation on [language classification and admissions criteria](#) was particularly appreciated. Other participants included AIIC's [Vega](#) Program and the BKTD. The target audience included students in MA programs in conference interpreting, young interpreters, and experienced colleagues.

For both events the Turkish Region received support from members of the faculty of the Department of Interpreting of Bogazici University (Istanbul) whose Masters Program in Conference Interpreting is an associate member of the European Masters in Conference Interpreting ([EMCI](#)).

Building bridges with Teranga

Major structural changes in recent years have buoyed the Turkish interpretation market. This process, marked by the start of accession negotiations with the European Union, has given further impetus to an already bustling market.

Although it is too early to say whether Turkish will soon become a working language in international organisations, it would be fair to say that Turkey has a lot in its favour, including its geo-strategic location, its possible role as a mediator in regional conflicts, its vibrant domestic economy, and its close ties with the nations of the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Indeed, apart from being spoken by the country's 70 million inhabitants, Turkish has the potential to become the *lingua franca* of Central Asian countries where Turkic languages are spoken in one form or another. [Turkic languages](#) - Turkish, Azeri, Turkmen, Tatar (Ouz group), Uzbek, Uighur, Kazakh, Khirgiz, etc - form a linguistic family of the larger [Altaic](#) (including Mongolian, Manchu, etc) group. This group is usually linked with the [Finno-Ugrian](#) languages (Finnish and Estonian on the one hand, and Hungarian on the other), to form the [Ural-Altaic family](#), itself a sub-group of the even vaster group of [agglutinative languages](#), which includes

Japanese and Korean. On the other side of the Pacific, languages such as [Quechua](#) in South America and the [Aztec and Nahuatl](#) families are also usually classified as agglutinative.

After a long interruption, in recent decades the historic and cultural ties linking the Turkic-speaking peoples of Anatolia and Central Asia have been revived along with flourishing economic ties. The Turkish private sector has set up schools that hold classes in Turkish. An increasing number of students from Central Asian countries benefit from scholarships in Turkish universities where they learn not only Turkish but also English. The growing presence of the Turkish press and media has further enhanced familiarity with Turkish in these countries. It remains to be seen if Turkish will eventually replace Russian as a common language in these former Soviet-block countries. For the moment Russian retains its importance, as does Uzbek on a more local level, while English, a language offering a much wider range of opportunities, reinforces its presence day by day.

At present there are several interpreters from the former Soviet-block countries working in Turkey. And although they may have a native language of Turkic origin, they do not use it professionally on the local market, working mainly with Russian, English and Turkish. There being no AIIC members in the Central Asian countries, our knowledge of the interpretation market there is limited. AIIC's Teranga Network, however, is keen on reaching out to that part of the world and sees the Turkish Region as an important partner in doing so.

Accession of Turkey to the EU would extend Europe's eastern border to these countries. The Turkish Region welcomes Teranga's challenge and is eager to build a linguistic bridge between a western-bound Turkey and its eastern neighbours. Who knows, this eastward perspective may well open the way to a linguistic revival of the ancient Silk Road, which traditionally started in China in what used to be called *l'Extrême Orient*- better known today as the Asia-Pacific region.

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