

■ engineering practice

Speechless in Europe!



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A good command of English is essential in international business; our students and younger employees are well aware of this. Internet, student exchange and post-graduate programmes, years abroad have led to a remarkable English language competence. Even tricky FIDIC contracts don't hold any fears for our engineers. Get your teeth into it – think it through – get to the bottom of it – take up a position and argue it. That's how we are trained. We're familiar with that.

The development in CEE and SEE which has been so beneficial to Central Europe has fuelled internationalisation. This wave of investments, know-how, contracts, expert services rolled in English. Now it seems the tide is changing. National languages are gaining in importance, with all the barrier effects this entails, especially in Eastern Europe with its high number of small countries and languages. Apparently, this seems to protect the national economies, in the long term it costs money and puts the European economy at a disadvantage in global competition.

Representatives of large economies feeling powerful just now sometimes categorically refuse to communicate in a foreign language. Are not able to? Don't want to? Are not allowed to? Whole projects are running solely with translators; with all the deficits in direct understanding which can't be compensated even by the best translation.

For us engineers in international project management there are two consequences:

1. Continue to learn languages, English and the languages of our neighbours, our business partners
2. Don't stop to encourage us Europeans to adopt a "lingua franca", one or a few languages accepted and understood by all.

P.S. For once we are here addressing explicitly men. Let us start with ourselves, every one himself, to connect more with others, to take the first step, to overcome barriers, to remedy speechlessness. Are we not sometimes accused of acting like lone wolves, of preferring fighting over communication. In fact wolves are pack members. Clear leadership is not incompatible with good communication, on the contrary.

At regular - irregular intervals we present practical experiences for discussion, food for thought for us all, serious issues treated with more or less humour, to make reading and learning not too difficult.