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On 26 March, the election of the new Board of the Association of French Archivists (AAF) took place to coincide with the acts organised to celebrate the association's centenary, to which the Association of Archivists of Catalonia (AAC) was invited. Henri Zuber replaced Elisabeth Verry as president of the AAF.

We therefore thought it apt to ask him for a text to appear in the main part of our Bulletin. What it expresses and our knowledge of the situation of French recordkeeping reveal that professionals on both sides of the Pyrenees encounter very similar challenges, problems and opportunities. Meeting points, areas to exchange experiences and new frameworks of communication must thus be sought to strengthen our professional relationship, improve our knowledge and guarantee a more solid future for our profession.

The AAF's centenary acts in Paris saw a wish for the creation of an inter-association of European archivists in the near future. Such an organisation may be the appropriate stage for different professionals in the European Union to meet.

WHY ARE ARCHIVES NECESSARY?

As happens every three years, we are once again at the start of a new period and have new members in the different sections, regional delegations and the central organisation of the Association of French Archivists. I would first like to express our acknowledgement to the members who decided not to stand again. Meanwhile, I would like to thank all those colleagues who have agreed to join the Council and to take part in the administration action for this 2004-2007 term. However long we devote to one job or another, all of us are very aware of the commitment this involved; this is even truer considering that our association exists because of the active and totally disinterested participation of its members.

Sometimes I wonder whether I am more aware now of an archivist's work than I was twenty years ago, when I was just starting out as an archivist to the Technical Service of the Directorate. Indeed, I think I am. I also wonder whether we have really made as much progress as it seems in increasing the awareness of the production sector. It seems so if we bear in mind recent progresses in regulation and the new law that is at last taking shape on the horizon. This is without taking into consideration the victory that the announcement of the National Archives Centre has meant for archives in France. Nevertheless, can we say that our professional has won the social recognition it deserves?

There seem to be new areas and new fields of work. Of course we shall not forget our traditional allies who are primarily researchers and historians (but not only these), but also genealogists, etc. and with whom we can all congratulate ourselves heartily on the scientific nature of our work. However, we should also transmit to society consideration for these professions.

The alliance with administrators, with businesspeople and even with government politicians is undoubtedly another essential point. This is the other

pillar that sustains the profession and is its information-documentation dimension. It is here where we must reassert our specific nature as specialists of context, our originality as managers of “organic” dossiers, which reflect the production structures of dossiers and documents. As we have the know-how, whatever the information format, we can provide extra benefit to businesspeople in processing habitual information, and are therefore better placed to form definitive archives generated by business.

Perhaps I could be called a dreamer - archivists have enough work as it is with entries, ordering, classification and the inventories and should not also work in preliminary phases, in services. Perhaps that is so. Our capacities will always be questioned. Perhaps consideration should be given to the different areas of work by archivists in accordance with the place in which they are exercised. In my opinion, this is an essential challenge for our profession.

This is the debate I would like to start because my main purpose in accepting the position of president of our association is to achieve the following: to improve recognition for and the prestige of this profession, a profession that we have chosen through passion, by undertaking constant dialogue with our colleagues in similar work and with our foreign colleagues. We need to deepen our relations. The personal ties that exist between the Association of French Archivists and the Association of Archivists of Catalonia are very cordial. My wish is that, starting from the Vienna Congress next August, we shall have the chance to deepen these relations within the framework of a European inter-association, the foundations of which we can create.

Henri Zuber

President of the Association of French Archivists