

Mitteilung Februar 2012

Liebe Mitglieder,

am 11. Februar 2012 hat in Paris eine außerordentliche Vollversammlung der Association internationale des Études Byzantines (AIEB) stattgefunden.

Zum neuen Präsidenten wurde dort Prof. Johannes Koder, Wien, gewählt. Das Büro besteht jetzt außer ihm aus Sophia Kalopissi-Verti, Michel Kaplan, Athanasios Markopoulos und Arietta Papaconstantinou.

Der Antrittsbrief von Herrn Koder an die Nationalkommittees liegt zu Ihrer Information bei.

Mit den besten Grüßen



Albrecht Berger



15-2-2012

Dear members of the Association,

Thank you for electing me as president of the AIEB. This is a great honour for me, I accept your decision and appreciate your faith in me.

I am very glad that this election could take place in an atmosphere of friendship and positive discussions.

I am optimistic that the new Bureau, Sophie Kalopissi-Verti, Michel Kaplan, Athanasios Markopoulos, Arietta Papaconstantinou and the undersigned, will cooperate confidently until the next International Congress. We will do our very best to promote Byzantine Studies and to support the National Committees in this concern.

Let me sketch some thoughts about two fields of necessary activities, *1. Crisis management in Byzantine Studies* and *2. Amendments to the organization*.

1. Crisis management in Byzantine Studies

The field of Byzantine Studies is in crisis. This is no news, because if I am not mistaken, after the Second World War our field was flourishing and expanding over the course of some forty years, a period which witnessed only some minor crises, whereas since the late eighties of the last century the institutional development of Byzantine Studies turned to stagnation and soon also into a nearly uninterrupted decline, a crisis of *longue durée*.

The decline of Byzantine Studies in our own time may be explained partially by the well-known economic crisis, and indeed we have felt it even more strongly in the last five years. But the turning point has to be dated earlier and has its roots in a negative development and change of public opinion over the last thirty years.

Television and its viewers have some favourite subjects in the humanities, for example Egyptology and its mummies, but for the majority of research fields the lack of interest is growing and correlates with the reluctance of many public and some private institutions to support the humanities.

It is impossible to recommend uniform remedies or recipes, because the potential motivations and arguments for the better support of Byzantine Studies cannot be the same for all the regions which are represented by the Association. The attempts for a better standing of Byzantine Studies should therefore be prepared with different arguments and individual aims for each country. They depend on the differing interests in Byzantium and its civilization, on differing traditions of supporting the humanities and on the differing private or public funding structures. These parameters may vary from nation to nation.

Let me emphasize that only with the cooperation and the constant support of all of you can the members of the Bureau can make efforts in the following directions:

1. To encourage the national committees to strengthen support for young scholars, in order to strengthen Byzantine Studies over the coming generations – Here I refer to the proposal of the British Committee to establish a Development Commission. Let me quote the related part in the minutes of Samokov (p. 19): « l'établissement d'un *Development Committee* dans l'Association selon la proposition du Comité britannique ... est renvoyé à la prochaine assemblée générale, lors de l'intercongrès en Grèce, après avoir été étudiés par le nouveau bureau peut-être en composition élargie, comme le propose M. Kaplan». I regret that we made no decisions in Samokov and I hope that we can find a solution for an – at least informal – earlier start of the activities of the Development Commission as soon as possible, and not to begin only in two or three years.

2. The Bureau should also encourage the national committees to take action at universities and other research institutions of their countries with the objective to promote or strengthen Byzantine Studies, especially in the field of philology and linguistics, at least at a postgraduate level. This necessity results from the fact that

many students of Byzantine Studies have a weak command of the languages of the written sources, even of Greek.

3. The Bureau and the national organizations should support the development of interdisciplinary cooperation – by adapting methods from other disciplines and by encouraging contacts between Byzantinists and scholars in the other humanities, especially in the field of Mediterranean and of Middle East Studies. With these measures we could try to open ways for new fields of research and continuous methodological innovations.

2. Necessary amendments to the organization

Experience during the last decade suggests that some changes should be discussed and realized as soon as possible:

1. We need a smooth modernization of the structure of International Congresses, based on the ideas and propositions of the national committees. In the next years in particular the national institution, which organizes the XXIIIth International Congress should be involved. The idea of the Danish Committee to consider shorter intervals between congresses should be discussed.

2. The transparency and effectiveness of the activities of the Bureau and its contacts with the national committees should be improved

by publishing short annual reports, based on data which have to be provided mainly by the national committees;

by a quarterly updating of the website, again with the active support of the national committees, and by opening the website for direct discussions between the national committees – this needs a professional care by a webmaster under the control of our secretary;

by regulations which make the procedures before the decisions on future venues of the International Congresses and before the elections for the Bureau more transparent – The search and proposal of candidates for the Bureau should primarily be a task of the national committees, not of the members of the Bureau.

3. Finally, many of you will agree that the Bureau should be enlarged by the possibility to elect a vice-president or a deputy president. – If this new member of the Bureau should normally only participate in the consultations of the Bureau and become active only when the president resigns or for other reasons is not able to fulfil his /her duties, or if she / he should have also certain (clearly defined) formally delineated responsibilities; this should be discussed before making decisions.

For some of the proposed innovations the statutes of the Association have to be modified again. According to article 12 amendments of the statutes may be decided only by an extraordinary General Assembly acting on a proposal listed as an item on the agenda. This should be realized in the context of the next Intercongress Meeting and confirmed at the next International Congress respectively. But the informal discussion on amendments of the Statutes should begin today.

I invite all national committees to contribute to our efforts with a productive discussion and an intensified collaboration with the Bureau.

Thank you again and best wishes,

Johannes Koder m. p.