

Joseph Sheils

Madam Deputy Secretary General, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

Today we are happy to acknowledge and honour in a special way the truly unique personal contribution that John Trim made to language education in Europe, and particularly between 1971 and 1997 when he was Project Director and Adviser for our programmes at the Council of Europe.

I have had the privilege of being associated with John since 1979, initially outside and later within the Secretariat.

However, my renowned predecessor Antonietta de Vigili, was his indispensable counterpart in the Secretariat for over 25 years, and for that reason I would like to begin with a message from Antonietta, who regrets very much that family matters have prevented her from sharing in this wonderful occasion.

John, who know her skills as a polyglot, might expect her message to reflect her habitual manner of communication – an utterance would often start in French, continue in English, and finish in Italian, with perhaps an afterthought in German. She would not even have noticed the change of languages. This message is in her eloquent French.

*« « Evoquant, avec vive nostalgie plus d'un quart de siècle de coopération intense, vécue presque jour après jour, je désire exprimer à John Trim, à l'occasion de cette journée qui l'honore dans le cadre - on ne peut plus approprié - du 10<sup>ème</sup> Anniversaire du Centre Européen pour les Langues vivantes, - des sentiments d'estime, de profonde reconnaissance, de fidèle amitié.*

*C'est une tâche ardue que de rappeler ici ce que John a été pour le Conseil de l'Europe et son action pour la promotion de l'apprentissage des langues et la compréhension interculturelle, car il a été à la fois*

- l'architecte-en-chef des fondements conceptuels et méthodologiques de l'approche du Conseil*

- *le remarquable pilote qui a guidé l'application progressive de principes et instruments novateurs*
- *l'ambassadeur extraordinaire des objectifs du Conseil dans le domaine de la communication interculturelle*
- *le « communicateur » respecté et persuasif des nouvelles approches à des milliers d'enseignants et formateurs à travers l'Europe (et au delà)*
- *l'interlocuteur indispensable, recherché et écouté, des autorités nationales, pour toute initiative importante de réforme et de planification.*

I know that all of us who have enjoyed the privilege of working with John share these sentiments.

His close association with the work of the CoE actually began in the 1960s and in the mid 1970s he headed a project group that developed the fundamental guiding principles of language teaching and learning that still underpin our work today.

The projects under John's expert guidance were characterised by radical innovation in the 70s and 80s, with the development and dissemination of new ideas and what became widely known as 'the Council of Europe approach'.

Under John's guidance the Council of Europe's work became the single most influential factor in the reforms in course design, textbook authorship, testing and examinations, and teacher training that occurred throughout Europe.

The impact of planning tools such 'Threshold Level', Waystage, Vantage was unique. Threshold level descriptions of communicative objectives were elaborated for over 30 national or regional languages. John's untiring personal guidance to the authoring teams for these languages represents a unique contribution to the promotion of linguistic diversity and mutual understanding in Europe.

The influence of the projects that John directed is captured in a 1995 publication entitled 'The work of the Council of Europe and second language learning' (Macmillan):

*One of the major achievements of the Council of Europe has been to integrate activities in the learning of a variety of different foreign languages into a coherent set of policies.....Particularly, the power and originality of the functional models it created enabled it to be a focus for world as well as European foreign language teaching.'*

*'The ideas introduced by the Council of Europe have become so much a part of my own thinking that it is difficult to know how that thinking would hold together without them.'*

John's personal qualities were also a key factor in the success of the programmes. One of our most eminent experts, Prof. Louis Porcher described John's modus operandi as follows – in French:

*'John Trim tranchait, décidait, arbitrait, conduisait avec une générosité, une clairvoyance, une rigueur au-dessus de tout éloge.....John incarnait la patience, une relative lenteur, pesant longuement le pour et le contre et, en fin de compte, prenait toujours la décision la plus riche, la plus féconde, la mieux appropriée.'*

I imagine that most people came to know and appreciate John when he directed the series of international workshops for initial and in-service teacher education in the 1980s and 1990s. He was centrally involved with 70 workshops in many different countries. John was a busy man!

But he generously put his time and expertise at the service of the Council of Europe's programmes. No task was too small, no request for assistance was ever refused. He was always there to offer support and wise guidance in his own diplomatic, reflective, patient and caring way. He became, and remains, adviser and friend to many throughout Europe.

His strong commitment and intensive work with the Council meant that John was often away from home. We are very grateful also to John's wife Marion - herself a distinguished academic in her chosen field of speech therapy - who supported him in those halcyon days of European co-operation..

Although we do still call on John's wealth of experience from time to time, we hope that we are not interrupting your peaceful retirement together too much these days.

The success of these series of workshops under John's direction, and the need to ensure their continuation on a permanent and properly structured basis, was instrumental in the motivation that led to the setting up of the ECML here in Graz. Our close co-operation with Austria has grown increasingly stronger over the years, symbolised here in this Centre of excellence.

We are very pleased that John's vast library, including his own substantial publications, have found a good home here. I wonder what will now fill those once heavily laden saging shelves in the annex of the Trim's house in Cambridge.

Perhaps there will now be place for the 24 translations of the 'Common European Framework of Reference for Languages' developed during John's last stint as Project Director. John led the Framework authoring group and made an outstanding personal contribution to the intellectual structure and content of this document which is used throughout Europe and indeed in many parts of the world for planning curricula, textbooks, assessment and teacher training, and has been adopted by the EU as the European benchmark. And there will be space for the 70 European Language Portfolios developed so far – an instrument to support lifelong language learning that John was also instrumental in conceiving and developing.

JOHN,

It may be that many will never fully appreciate the true origins of some of the policies and practices underlying their language learning. But one thing is certain: over 800 million citizens in our member states, and many others beyond Europe, are the lucky beneficiaries of the impact of the remarkable work carried out by the Council of Europe under your guidance as Project Director and Adviser. We are all in your debt.

You have left an invaluable legacy – and thankfully you are still working on this legacy! Long may we continue to benefit from your vast experience and expertise, and share in your warm friendship which we value so much.

I will conclude with a final comment by Antonietta on your many qualities so appreciated by us all.

*Et pour ceux et celles qui ont eu le privilège de partager avec lui ces années d'activité européenne, John était et il RESTERA toujours l'homme de savoir et de culture que l'on admire et estime pour la rigueur intellectuelle et l'intuition géniale, pour l'attitude d'ouverture et d'écoute, et pour la compréhension profonde de l'identité culturelle de personnes de différentes nationalités.*

*Je forme le vœu que dans sa quête intellectuelle (jamais achevée !) John puisse continuer à découvrir des idées-force pour améliorer la communication et la compréhension mutuelle des hommes et des femmes de notre chère, vieille Europe. ! » »*

The numerous awards and honours bestowed on you, John, are a reflection of the truly high esteem in which you are held throughout Europe and beyond.

Today, with the award of the Council of Europe *Pro Merito* medal, as friends and colleagues we salute once again your remarkable contribution to improving communication and deepening mutual understanding on our continent through your dedicated and pioneering work with the Council of Europe over three decades.

Thank you John.