**ERZSÉBET CSÓKA – CSOKOVA ALZBETA**

*Translator at the DGT of the European Commission**Working languages:* ***HU – EN – SK – CZ****Areas: EU law, competition law, texts related to foreign affairs and migration, international agreements*

***The Beginnings***

E

rzsébet Csóka was born in Komarno, Slovakia, and has learnt Hungarian and Slovak since her childhood. She studied English Language and Literature, as well as Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, and graduated in 1998. She chose this department because of her fondness of English language and 20th century literature. She participated in **a special training financed by PHARE**, their class was the second launched. Most of their teachers were native speakers and lots of their courses were not even listed in the traditional curriculum. She wrote her thesis on the female characters in Tennessee Williams’ literary works.

***From teaching…***

Based on her degree, she was a qualified teacher; therefore, upon graduation, the principal of her former secondary school asked her to teach there. She taught for two years as a secondary school teacher, where she had a class of each year.

*„As a beginner teacher, the fact that classes were formed based on age and not on level of knowledge proved to be a great challenge. This meant that sometimes I had to teach four different levels in a group, in a differentiated way, in 45 minutes.”*

The challenge, however, did not discourage her, teaching did not only mean to her delivery of the curriculum: she was attached to her students emotionally.

*“I really liked them, both small and big children. Unfortunately, the school did not put that much emphasis on language learning; therefore we were overshadowed by natural sciences, regardless of our results achieved at competitions.”*

Besides all that, she feels that teaching mixed classes was a very good experience and she learnt to put in practice the advantages of age-based differentiated teaching.

***….to translation***

Erzsébet has been an associate at the **European Commission** for nearly thirteen years: she works at the Hungarian Department of the **Directorate-General for Translation** (DGT) in Luxembourg as a translator and proofreader. She went abroad with the first wave, right after Hungary’s accession to the European Union in 2004.

*“(We,) translators arriving with the first wave practically continued translation based on union law material that was translated before accession. EU language use and terminology were developed; we often had to come up with completely new things.”*

Translation was not an unknown territory for her: earlier she had worked for a dubbing studio and they created bilingual programmes (SK-HU) at a Slovak regional TV channel. Although translation was involved in both jobs, working for the TV channel required a different set of skills.

*“Translating live speech (…) requires a completely different technique and/or approach than the translation of laws and other official texts.”*

During her work she mostly translates texts related to **competition law, foreign affairs, migration** and she also participated many times in translations of **international agreements**. Sometimes she makes use of her special language knowledge in cases of **agricultural texts,** and she often helps her Hungarian and other colleagues thanks to her knowledge of the two countries. Besides her job as a translator and proofreader, she has been playing a major role in **helping and tutoring translator trainees** arriving to DGT since the very beginnings. She also participates in **quality assurance**.

***The woman behind the translator***

Even though job circumstances satisfy most demands and the job itself is very reputable, daily in-house translation has its setbacks. Because of the intellectual work performed in ten-hour-shifts one’s brain might become tired, one cannot focus on multiple tasks at the same time, especially when one is in a foreign country with a different mother tongue: Erzsébet, besides her existing knowledge of **Hungarian, English, Slovak and Czech** languages, has started to learn **French** as well since she moved to Luxembourg. (She had also studied **Polish** for one and a half year, but this latter one enables her only proofreading tasks.) Due to these many activities is why she considers it important to find balance between work and private life, so that one can have time to relax, both physically and mentally.

*“One of the great setbacks of translating is that now, in the thirteenth year, the side effects of the sedentary job are indeed affecting us: eye, back, wrist and shoulder problems. (…) Surprisingly, I have not got bored of reading, although I am automatically proofreading, it became second nature to me, my eyes find the mistakes all the time.”*

Interpreting itself never attracted her.

*“I was never really interested in interpreting. I was once asked to interpret in three languages at a business meeting. It was an extremely difficult task, the topic was cattle farming. It was interesting, but I did not feel that I would like to do this on a regular basis.”*

***Is there a life beyond translation?***

Erzsébet is an extraordinarily lively, energetic woman, with whom one can always have a conversation about anything, and she always has some good advice. It is clear that work is not a burden for her: she enjoys what she is doing. When I asked her whether she was going to participate in tasks other than translation she gave the answer written below:

*“As tiresome the job might be, when I feel like I had enough there is always a new challenge that makes work enjoyable again. It would be nice to translate literature sometime, and I would like to deal more with project coordination in the field of translation. There are many things that I like doing as a hobby, but right now I cannot imagine to change job.”*