



## From the Foreign Secretary

*The Foreign Secretary, Professor Nicholas Mann FBA reflects on his first months in office.*

The President was good enough to comment, at the September 1999 meeting of Council, that the new Foreign Secretary had 'hit the ground running'. It seems to me that I have hit the ground flying: the new season of diplomatic activity took me, and Jane Lyddon, to four countries in as many weeks. The principal motive for this almost frenetic flurry was the formal renewal of the Academy's existing Exchange Agreements with the Academies of

Latvia, Estonia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia; for good measure the annual meeting of the Royal Society's European Science Exchange Programme (of which the afternoon session is the province of the Academy) was this year held in Slovakia, in the neo-gothic castle of Smolenice, some 50 km from Bratislava, which was formerly a rest-home for exhausted Eastern Bloc academicians.

The formal signing ceremonies, and the different manners of laying out tables and flags, and disposing persons, for them, would provide a fertile field for a structural anthropologist. An early acquaintance with the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss left me with a rich appreciation of cultural differences, and of varieties of formality and solemnity, but also, in all seriousness, of the overwhelming welcome extended by our hosts, their commitment to the development of the Agreements, and, especially in the Baltic States, the real need for the kind of assistance that the Academy can provide.

There was, furthermore, a not very hidden agenda to the visits: to gain as much information as possible about academic structures and needs in the countries concerned, and to discuss fruitful ways of extending collaboration beyond the traditional confines of the Exchanges, which are habitually out of balance (though happily in the



Above: *The Foreign Secretary, Professor Nicholas Mann FBA, and Professor J Velemínský, Deputy Director of the Board of International Cooperation, sign the Agreement between the British Academy and the Czech Academy of Sciences, watched by (L-R) Dr M Mráz (Director of the Philosophy Institute), Mr A Magala (desk officer, British exchanges), Professor V Herold (Head of the Division of Humanities and Social Sciences), Ms J Lyddon (Assistant Secretary, British Academy), Professor F Šmahel FBA (Director of the Centre for Medieval Studies, Prague) and Mr PWH Brown (Secretary, British Academy).*

Below: *Copies of the British-Czech Agreement are exchanged as Mr Magala, Dr Herold, Ms Lyddon, Professor Šmahel and Mr Brown look on.*



*Professor Juri Engelbrecht, President of the Estonian Academy of Sciences, and the Foreign Secretary sign the new Agreement in the grand hall of the Estonian Academy, Tallinn.*





*The Foreign Secretary and Dr Dušan Kováč (Scientific Secretary of the Slovak Academy of Sciences) sign the new British-Slovak Agreement at Smolenice Castle, watched by Dr I Horváth (Head of the Foreign Relations Department, Slovak Academy) and Mr PWH Brown (Secretary of the British Academy).*



*The President of the Latvian Academy of Sciences, Professor J Stradiņš, and the Foreign Secretary exchange signed Agreements, watched by (L-R) Dr D Šveica (Head of the International Department), Ms I Skrīvele (responsible for British exchanges) and HE Stephen Nash, the British Ambassador.*

direction of those most in need). In pursuit of this purpose, we were able, between Riga, Tallinn, Tartu, Prague and Bratislava, to pay formal visits to nine Institutes or university departments, one university library and one university museum, and thereby to gain considerable insight into both the problems and, as it is usual to say these days, the opportunities facing our hosts. Whereas in some countries the old Soviet model of the monolithic Academy of Sciences with a cast of thousands distributed across numerous client-institutes has been maintained, it appears more usual for the national Academies to divest themselves of their institutes and to revert to the role of learned societies, sometimes (as for example in Estonia) endowed with an advisory role to Government.

At the level of individual disciplines, in so far as these were represented by the Institutes that we visited, it was noteworthy that philosophers were both the most eager to engage in collaboration with foreign partners, and at the same time perhaps the best equipped to do so by reason of their existing networks of international contacts. It

is clear, however, that the new-found ability of the Overseas Policy Committee to fund a variety of joint activities presents a real chance to diversify the Academy's role, to promote the research of younger scholars, and to forge new relations where they can be of real value.



*The President of the Estonian Academy of Sciences and the Foreign Secretary toast future British-Estonian relations.*