

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2004



2009

Session document

FINAL
A6-0261/2006

24.7.2006

REPORT

on the European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 5/2005: Interpretation
expenditure incurred by the Parliament, the Commission and the Council
(2006/2001(INI))

Committee on Budgetary Control

Rapporteur: Alexander Stubb

CONTENTS

	Page
MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION.....	3
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT	7
PROCEDURE.....	10

MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the European Court of Auditors' Special Report No 5/2005 : Interpretation expenditure incurred by the Parliament, the Commission and the Council (2006/2001(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the European Court of Auditors' Special report No 5/2005: Interpretation expenditure incurred by the Parliament, the Commission and the Council, together with the institutions' replies¹,
- having regard to Article 248(4), second subparagraph, Article 276(3) and Article 280(5) of the EC Treaty,
- having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
- having regard to the report of the Committee on Budgetary Control (A6-0261/2006),

Respect for multilingualism

1. Considers that multilingualism is one of the key features of the European Union, which highlights cultural and linguistic diversity and ensures equal treatment of EU citizens;
2. Considers that multilingualism guarantees citizens' right to communicate with the EU institutions in any of its official languages, thus enabling them to exercise their right of democratic control;
3. Considers that the linguistic services of the EU institutions facilitate communication, and that, in so doing, the institutions remain open to the citizens of Europe;
4. Considers that the total cost of all the linguistic services of the EU institutions, translation and interpretation combined, represent merely 1 % of the total EU budget;
5. Considers that its Rules of Procedure stipulate that Members may speak in the official language of their choice and that interpretation into the other languages is provided; considers that, in addition, the use of official languages is governed by its 'Code of Conduct on Multilingualism', updated in 2004;
6. Considers that multilingualism is an expression of the EU's cultural diversity, which must be preserved, and that, therefore, while the increasing number of official languages calls for pragmatic solutions in the preparatory work within the institutions, multilingualism must be guaranteed to ensure the legitimacy and diversity of the European Union;

With regard to all institutions

¹ OJ C 291, 23.11.2005, p. 1.

7. Welcomes with satisfaction the high quality of interpretation in the EU institutions; is furthermore of the opinion that the high quality of interpretation must be continuously evaluated and guaranteed;
8. Notes that the overall cost of interpretation in 2003 was EUR 57 000 000 as regards the European Parliament and EUR 106 000 000 as regards the Council, the Commission, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and some agencies;
9. Is, however, very concerned that in 2003 approximately 16% (EUR 25 900 000) of the total interpretation costs of EUR 163 000 000 represented costs for services supplied but not used and for stand-by arrangements;
10. Is of the opinion that the Parliament, the Council and the Commission should endeavour to reduce 'implicit or explicit stand-by duty', these arrangements accounting for EUR 18 000 000 spent on interpretation services supplied but not used; notes that reserve interpreters should be available for ad hoc meetings with a short request time;
11. Calls on its administration, the Council and the Commission to improve inter-institutional cooperation;
12. Calls on the Parliament and Commission interpretation services, in order to be more efficient, to exchange interpreters and create mixed interpretation teams, and to make possible the use of available interpreters where and when they are requested in order to meet real needs;
13. Calls on the institutions to encourage and facilitate the use of 'local interpreters', language combination allowing, and stresses that national administrative provisions must not be an obstacle; notes that a high quality of interpretation must be guaranteed;14. Considers that the Parliament and the Commission should establish an overview on the official/free-lance ratio per language in time for the 2006 discharge;
15. Calls on the Commission to reinforce, in coordination with other institutions, cooperation with Member States in training interpreters from their respective countries;
16. Calls on the EU institutions to renegotiate the agreement with the Auxiliary Conference Interpreters (ACI) with regard to travel arrangements, remuneration, inter-institutional cooperation and administrative simplification;
17. Notes the high share of travel and accommodation costs; urges meeting organisers and interpretation services to reduce travel and accommodation costs; calls for better coordination, planning and organisation of travel and accommodation arrangements;

With regard to the Parliament

18. Expects its administration to provide estimates of the average total daily cost of ACIs and permanent interpreters in time for the 2005 discharge report;

19. Notes that the full cost for an interpretation day is almost 30% higher in Parliament than in the Council or the Commission, one reason being that very few local interpreters can be used during Strasbourg sessions, which increases Parliament's interpretation costs in Strasbourg by 13 %;
20. Notes its refusal to take part in an evaluation with a view to creating an inter-institutional office providing interpretation service to all EU institutions, this having been considered by the Bureau on 4 September 2005, as incompatible with the interests of Parliament;
21. Calls on its administration to continue to establish meaningful 'session reports', i.e. reports from the head of an interpretation team about the active and passive use of languages during group, committee and delegation meetings, and report back on its findings in time for the 2005 discharge procedure;
22. Urges its administration to raise Members' awareness of interpretation costs; asks if it makes best possible use of the language profiles of Members; stresses that this should not lead to a ranking of official EU languages;
23. Recalls that, pursuant to Article 1 of the Code of Conduct on Multilingualism of 19 April 2004, resources should be allocated taking into consideration the users' real needs;
24. Calls on its administration to study how the Council's 'request system', the Council of Europe's internal billing system, or UNESCO's quota system for interpretation could be used by the Parliament;
25. Notes that in 2003, it spent EUR 4 000 000 on interpretation services made available but not used due to late requests or cancellations; asks that last-minute cancellations and last-minute requests be discouraged; furthermore calls on the interpretation services to be more flexible in their service planning and request system;
26. Calls on its responsible bodies to adapt its calendar of committee, group and plenary session weeks in order to achieve a better balance between needs and resources available;

o o

o
27. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the European Court of Auditors.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

The report covers just interpretation, not translation services.

The European Court of Auditors Special Report: Introduction

On 14 November 2005 the European Court of Auditors (ECA) presented its Special Report No 5/2005 concerning interpretation expenditures incurred by Parliament, Commission and Council to the Committee on Budgetary Control.

21 languages have the status of official and working languages of the European Institutions. Commission services provide for interpretation in the Council, the Commission, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and some agencies, whereas the European Parliament has its own interpretation service and provides for the European Ombudsman, the Commission and the ECA in Luxembourg, and on some days for the Committee of the Region.

In 2003 a total of 150 000 interpretation days were provided, of which the Council accounted for approximately 39 %, the Commission in Brussels for 26 %, the Commission in Luxembourg 4 % and the European Parliament 21 %.

A calculation made by the Court shows that in 2003 the overall cost of interpretation was:

- EUR 57 000 000 at the European Parliament, and
- EUR 106 000 000 at the European Commission, the Council, the Committees and some agencies.

The average cost per interpreter of an interpretation day was EUR 1 476 at the European Parliament and EUR 1 046 at the Commission and the Council.

Between 2000 and 2003 the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission have reduce the interpretation service supplied to them.

Purpose of the ECA audit

The audit aimed at establishing whether the institutions had adequate tools and procedures to ensure that:

1. the interpretation services provided do not exceed the real needs;
2. all the interpretation services needed can be provided;
3. interpretation services needed can be provided at the lowest possible cost;
4. interpretation is of a high quality.

1) Procedures applied to avoid providing interpretation services which exceed real needs

On occasions the interpretation services provided exceed the real needs.

Due to the character of parliamentary work it is difficult to forecast precisely the need of interpretation facilities in the *European Parliament*. However, the ECA is of the opinion that a greater effort could be made in view to establishing the real needs and to increasing cost awareness.

Before enlargement the *Council* determined interpretation provisions for preparatory bodies mainly by practice. As of 1 July 2004 a 'request system' was set up, whereby for preparatory bodies active or passive interpretation is only provided, if requested by a national delegation. To cover the costs, delegations can draw on a financial allocation of EUR 2 000 000 per language. 66 % of any unused amount is transferred to the budget appropriations covering delegates' travel costs. The Council considers that the new approach is working well, respecting fully the principle of equal treatment of all official and working languages.

In the *Commission* Directorate General Interpretation receives and processes interpretation requests centrally. The number of active and/or passive languages assigned is often lower than the number initially requested. Still, on the basis of 'interpretation session reports' indicating which translation facility was used and which was not, the ECA came to the conclusion that 1750 interpreter days were paid for but not used, costing between EUR 1 500 000 and EUR 2 000 000.

2) Capacity to provide the interpretation service needed

Up to early 2004 requests for interpretation concerning pre-enlargement official languages were generally met.

However, Directorate General Interpretation was unable to meet 37 % of requests - mainly coming from the Council - between May and December 2004. There were not enough interpreters for the 'new' languages.

3) Costs of interpretation

European Parliament could not provide estimates of the average full daily cost of auxiliary and permanent interpreters.

DG Interpretation calculated the average cost for an interpreter 'being made available'. The service did not calculate the costs of interpretation actually used, not the overhead costs or pension contribution.

The ECA calculated the average costs per interpretation day, after tax and pension contribution, at EUR 1 476 for the European Parliament and EUR 1 046 for the Commission. A full-day meeting with interpretation would cost about EUR 40 000 and EUR 34 500 respectively before enlargement (11 languages), and EUR 88 500 and EUR 63 000 respectively after enlargement in 2004 (20 languages) for three interpreters per booth. A fourth interpreter would bring up the costs to EUR 118 000 in the European Parliament and EUR 84 000 for the Commission.

If meetings could be held in three languages costs would drop to EUR 8 900 in the European Parliament and EUR 6 300 for the Directorate General Interpretation.

In 2003, the *European Parliament* spent EUR 4 000 000 on interpretation services made available but not used due to late requests or cancellations. Parliament underlines that the costs are half as high as 70 % of the interpreters not used can be re-assigned.

The costs of interpretation in the European Parliament are also influenced by the way the Code of Conduct on Multilingualism is applied. The rapporteur wants to ensure Members' rights to speak in and listen to the official language of his/her choice, guaranteed by Parliament's Rules of Procedure; he would, however, like to explore possible improvements by focussing on organisational issues.

According to the *Council's* own estimate the EUR 2 400 000 of interpretation expenditure represented payments for cancelled meetings in 2003.

Due to 'implicit or explicit stand-by duties' the *Commission* spent EUR 4 000 000 on interpretation services made available but not used.

Over the years inter-institutional co-operation has improved

- by creating a European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO);
- by using a joint selection procedure and a joint list of accredited Auxiliary Conference Interpreters (ACI);
- and by establishing a common system and unit for payments to ACIs.

4) The quality of interpretation

The quality of interpretation was generally considered very high.

PROCEDURE

Title	Interpretation expenditure incurred by the Parliament, the Commission and the Council
Procedure number	2006/2001(INI)
Committee responsible Date authorisation announced in plenary	CONT 19.1.2006
Committee(s) asked for opinion(s) Date announced in plenary	
Not delivering opinion(s) Date of decision	
Enhanced cooperation Date announced in plenary	
Rapporteur(s) Date appointed	Alexander Stubb 12.9.2005
Previous rapporteur(s)	
Discussed in committee	21.2.2006 19.4.2006 19.6.2006
Date adopted	13.7.2006
Result of final vote	+ 19 - 0 0 0
Members present for the final vote	Inés Ayala Sender, Herbert Bösch, Mogens N.J. Camre, Paulo Casaca, Petr Duchoň, Szabolcs Fazakas, Markus Ferber, Ona Juknevičienė, Edith Mastenbroek, Jan Mulder, Borut Pahor, José Javier Pomés Ruiz, Bart Staes, Margarita Starkevičiūtė, Alexander Stubb
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Valdis Dombrovskis, Edit Herczog, Bill Newton Dunn, Paul Rübig
Substitute(s) under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote	
Date tabled	24.7.2006
Comments (available in one language only)	