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## REPORT

on Special Report No 9/2006 of the European Court of Auditors concerning translation expenditure incurred by the Commission, the Parliament and the Council  
(2007/2077(INI))

Committee on Budgetary Control

Rapporteur: Alexander Stubb

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## MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

**on Special Report No 9/2006 of the European Court of Auditors concerning translation expenditure incurred by the Commission, the Parliament and the Council (2007/2077(INI))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the European Court of Auditors' Special Report n°9/2006 on the translation expenditure incurred by the Commission, the Parliament and the Council together with the Institutions' replies<sup>1</sup>,
- having regard to Article 248(4), first 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 (A6-0215/2007),

### ***Respect for multilingualism***

1. Considers multilingualism to be a key feature of the EU, which highlights cultural and linguistic diversity and ensures equal treatment of EU citizens; it 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; notes that, at the same time, the linguistic services contribute to the EU institutions remaining open and transparent to the citizens of Europe;
2. Is of the opinion that the concept of "controlled full multilingualism", laid down in its Code of Conduct<sup>2</sup>, represents the only means of keeping the costs within acceptable budgetary limits, whilst maintaining equality among Members and citizens;
3. Regrets that more and more documents or communications, in particular compromise amendments when put to the vote in committee or, for instance, annexes to reports, are submitted in one language only;

### ***Cost of translations***

4. Stresses that the total cost of all the linguistic services of the EU institutions - translation and interpretation combined - represents merely 1 % of the total EU budget;

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C 284, 21.11.2006, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Code of Conduct on Multilingualism, adopted by the Bureau on 4 September 2006.

5. Notes that, in 2005, the volume of translations was 1 324 000 pages in the Commission (1 450 translators), 1 080 000 pages in the Parliament (550 translators) and 475 000 pages in the Council (660 translators);
6. Is surprised that institutions have so far calculated neither their total translation costs<sup>1</sup>, nor their costs per page; notes furthermore, that the European Court of Auditors (ECA) estimated the full cost of translation, in 2003, at EUR 414,2 million (2005: EUR 511 million), 214,8 million for the Commission (2005: EUR 257 million), EUR 99 million for the Parliament (2005: EUR 128 million) and EUR 100,4 million for the Council (2005: EUR 126 million); for the same year the average costs per page stood at EUR 166,37 (2005: EUR 196,3): EUR 150,2 for the Commission (2005: EUR 194), EUR 149,7 for the Parliament (2005: EUR 119), and EUR 251,8 for the Council (2005: EUR 276);
7. Welcomes, in that context, that its administration has managed to reduce translation costs by page in spite of enlargement;
8. Is concerned about the ECA's observation that the productivity of the Council's translation service is low;
9. Calls on the institutions to take the appropriate measures to further improve the productivity of the EU translation services;
10. Notices that the prices it paid for freelance translators were on average 12 % higher than the prices paid by the Commission; notes the explanation given by its administration, pointing out that the language range of Parliament's freelance translators is wider, that they must respect shorter deadlines and very high quality standards;
11. Welcomes the fact that the Commission and the Council have managed to limit the increase in translation volume after the EU-10 enlargement, thereby curbing the cost increase; notes that Parliament introduced the concept of "controlled full multilingualism", thereby enabling it to maintain the level of service while controlling costs;
12. Calls on the three institutions to establish clear and comparable cost parameters with a view to ascertaining both the total cost of translation and the price per page; stresses that the sums obtained should be used not only for budgetary purposes, but also to raise cost awareness among users;
13. Agrees on the principle<sup>2</sup> that verbatim reports of proceedings in the plenary should be published as a multi-lingual document in which the statements of the speakers only appear in the original language of the statement, on the understanding that filmed versions of the debates, together with live interpretation into all the official languages be made available free of charge to the general public on demand on an appropriate

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Court those figures entail costs for translators, secretaries, management, service staff, planning, building, IT, and human resource management (i.e. training).

<sup>2</sup> PE 368.524/BUR/Corr, minutes of Bureau meeting on 16 January 2006.

technical platform and that only the original text is authoritative, given that, legally, interpretation is not an oral translation ; is of the opinion that Members must be entitled to have access to extracts of debates translated into their languages, with the possibility of downloading them and without delay; is also of the opinion that provision must be made to keep a digital and searchable archive; requests the Secretary-General to draw up a formal proposal implementing that decision of principle, which would include anti-abuse clauses and identify, if indicated, potential changes to the Rules of Procedure (e.g. Rule 173) and to other internal rules necessary to put the envisaged new approach into practice;

### ***Quality of translations***

14. Welcomes the fact that the quality and timeliness of translations into the EU-15 languages, according to a client satisfaction survey carried out by the ECA, is considered generally satisfactory, although some problems persist in relation to technical and legal terminology;
15. Is concerned, however, about the considerably lower quality of the EU-10 translations in some institutions in 2004, mainly caused by a lack of qualified translators; notes that - in the meantime - the Commission has addressed the problem and that all institutions, with the help of the Member States, have made progress in recruiting qualified translators;
16. Calls on the Commission to organise a critical review of EPSO's failure to recruit the staff needed from the EU-10 countries;
17. Is generally of the opinion that the institutions must take the necessary measures to guarantee a high quality standard of translations; calls on the Council, the Parliament's administration and the Commission, therefore, to report on measures taken to monitor and improve the quality of translations in time for the 2006 discharge procedure;
18. Calls on the institutions to set up tools for measuring user satisfaction; in addition, calls for random quality checks and client satisfaction surveys to be conducted on a regular basis;

### ***Procedures for managing translation demands***

19. Notes that the ECA criticised ambiguous procedures for requesting translations, and also unclear guidelines with regard to what documents must be and need not be translated;
20. In this context, welcomes the Commissions readiness to address the authorisation procedure and the screening of translation requests in 2006; also welcomes that, in 2003, the Council established a list of core documents, thereby limiting the translation of other texts;

21. Recommends that greater use be made of documents that are limited in length and written summaries;
22. Encourages parliamentary committees and delegations -whenever possible - to provide texts only in the languages of committee and delegation members and their substitutes; considers that additional language versions should be provided upon request;
23. Highlights the importance of committees, delegations and political groups in the drawing up of monthly translation forecasts<sup>1</sup>; stresses that, in return, users should be informed of the costs incurred by their requests for translation;

### *Efficiency of the translation process*

24. Calls on the institutions to develop qualitative and quantitative performance indicators with a view to facilitating the monitoring of translation processes for management purposes;
25. Regrets that its translation service does not yet make systematic use of translation tools; calls, therefore, on its management to take the necessary steps to ensure the systematic use of such tools, in particular translation memory systems (i. e. Euramis), in which the potential for re-use - and hence for qualitative gains - is high;
26. Calls on the Parliament, the Council and the Commission to make efficient and effective use of the internal and external resources, such as data bases, computer-assisted translations, teleworking and outsourcing;
27. Welcomes the improving inter-institutional cooperation between the translation services of the different institutions, in particular the creation of a common terminology data base, the development of common translation memories and the sharing of resources by means of the workload-balancing-project;

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

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<sup>1</sup> Article 12(2) of the Code of Conduct on Multilingualism.

## **EXPLANATORY STATEMENT**

On 13 September 2006 the European Court of Auditors (ECA) presented its Special Report n°9/2006 concerning translation expenditures incurred by the Commission, the Parliament and the Council to the Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT).

Twenty-one languages have the status of official and working languages of the European institutions. Each EU institution has its own translation service. The institutions which, on account of their activities, have to provide the largest volume of translations are the Commission, the Parliament and the Council (approximately 70° %).

For practical reasons the languages most frequently used within the institutions are reduced in number, but documentation received from, and sent to Member States is in their official languages. The translation of incoming and outgoing documents is therefore vital to the sound running of the institutions, and for communicating with Member States and their citizens.

### Respect for multilingualism

Multilingualism<sup>1</sup> is one of the key features of the European Union, which highlights cultural and linguistic diversity and ensures equal treatment of EU citizens. It 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. At the same, time the linguistic services contribute to the EU institutions remaining open and transparent to the citizens of Europe.

In Parliament the use of official languages is governed by its 'Code of Conduct on Multilingualism', updated in 2004; 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.

The total cost of all the linguistic services of the EU institutions, translation and interpretation combined, represent approximately 1 % of the total EU budget.

While multilingualism is an expression of the EU's cultural diversity, the increasing number of official languages calls for pragmatic solutions in the preparatory work within the institutions.

### Objective of the audit

The objective of the audit was to assess the extent to which the Commission, the Parliament and the Council manage their translation resources and expenditure efficiently and effectively. The Court addressed three questions:

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<sup>1</sup> The principle of multilingualism is laid down in Articles 21, 290 and 314 of the EU Treaty

- Is translation demand met and are there adequate procedures to avoid unnecessary translations?
- Are translations timely and of adequate quality for their purpose?
- Were the institutions able to keep the cost of translations under control?

The audit principally covered the years 2003 and 2004, but changes which occurred in 2005 as a consequence of enlargement were also taken into consideration.

### Management of interpretation demands

Clear guidelines would be necessary to establish criteria for translation requests. However, according to the Court, none of the institutions has established consistent and clear procedures defining who can request a translation, which types of documents should be translated (when and into which languages), criteria for authorising non-mandatory translations and procedures for monitoring the enforcement of "translation policy".

Requests for translations concerning the EU-15 languages were generally met by the institutions, whereas the situation was different for the 10 new enlargement languages (EU-10) due to an insufficient number of translators from the new Member States.

None of the institutions was able to meet its targets for recruitment of staff translators and support staff for the new language units.

Over recent years the institutions have managed to limit the increase in translation volume using the following measures:

- establishing a list of "core documents",
- limiting the maximum length of texts,
- offering executive summaries in different languages rather than complete translation,
- concentrating on translating the final version of documents,
- encourage users to exercise restraint.

### Quality control

The quality of translations into the EU-15 languages was generally considered to be good. However, the Court noticed quality problems for translations into the EU-10 languages.

About 90% of translations were finished within the agreed deadlines.

At the Commission, the Directorate General for Translation (DGT) divides all translations into five categories of "translation quality types" (TQT), with a different degree of revision and/or quality evaluation according to the type of document. In addition, some Commission DGs, such as DG Competition, systematically review the translations they receive.

The Parliament and the Council do not allocate translations to quality categories and their quality control procedures are therefore less structured. As a result, revision practices vary



significantly, although legislative acts are always revised by lawyer-linguists before publication.

In addition, the Parliament uses bi-monthly random checks to verify spelling and grammar.

None of the institutions' translation services has put in place specific tools to measure users' satisfaction or formulated procedures for handling complaints about quality.

### Cost and efficiency of translations

In the past the institutions have calculated neither their total translation costs, nor their costs per page.

For 2003 the Court estimated the full costs of translations<sup>1</sup> at EUR 414.2 million: Commission - EUR 214.8 million, Parliament - EUR 99 million and Council - EUR 100.4 million.

The average cost per page was EUR 166.37: Commission - EUR 150.2, Parliament - EUR 149.7 and Council - EUR 251.8.

External translations were approximately 30% cheaper than in-house translations.

In general, the institutions did not produce sufficient indicators and management information to monitor the translation process.

Given the character of its (political) work, reliable forecasts of demand are difficult to estimate in the Parliament and the Council.

It seems to be common practice that translators decide on the use of IT-tools (computer assisted translation), research tools and voice recognition software themselves.

Productivity, defined as the number of standard pages translated internally per internal translator ("full time equivalent" = FTE), fluctuates widely from one language division to another and from one institution to another

The productivity of the EU translation services is considered lower than in the private sector<sup>2</sup>.

The productivity of the Commission DGT (approximately 5 pages a day) was slightly lower than the Parliament's translation service. The lower productivity can to some extent be explained by the Commission's role as initiator of the legislative process. The Council's

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<sup>1</sup> Full costs entail, according to the Court, costs for translators, secretaries, management, service staff, planning, building, IT, and human resource management (i. e. training).

<sup>2</sup> See also PriceWaterhouseCoopers, Comité Economique et Social (CES) & Comité des Régions (CdR), "Analyse comparative de la productivité des départements de traduction des institutions européennes", Bruxelles, 4 août 2000, p. 24: "Il est à noter que la productivité d'un traducteur d'un établissement privé tourne aux environs de 8 à 10 pages par jour sans tenir compte de la production via "Translation Memory" (une page correspondant à 350 mots)" (350 words = 2 100 characters = 1,4 standard pages).

productivity was systematically lower than that of the Commission and the Parliament, due to a high share of legislative documents requiring particular attention and highly fluctuating demand.

The institutions did not dispose of a comparable set of performance indicators which would allow monitoring the translation process in the institutions in the same way.

## PROCEDURE

<b>Title</b>	Special Report No 9/2006 of the European Court of Auditors concerning translation expenditure incurred by the Commission, the Parliament and the Council
<b>Procedure number</b>	2007/2077(INI)
<b>Committee responsible</b> Date authorisation announced in plenary	CONT 26.4.2007
<b>Committee(s) asked for opinion(s)</b> Date announced in plenary	
<b>Not delivering opinion(s)</b> Date of decision	
<b>Enhanced cooperation</b> Date announced in plenary	
<b>Rapporteur(s)</b> Date appointed	Alexander Stubb 20.6.2006
<b>Previous rapporteur(s)</b>	
<b>Discussed in committee</b>	2.5.2007
<b>Date adopted</b>	5.6.2007
<b>Result of final vote</b>	+ 18 - 0 0 0
<b>Members present for the final vote</b>	Jean-Pierre Audy, Herbert Bösch, Paulo Casaca, Antonio De Blasio, Szabolcs Fazakas, Christofer Fjellner, Ingeborg Gräble, Rodi Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou, Jan Mulder, Francesco Musotto, José Javier Pomés Ruiz, Alexander Stubb
<b>Substitute(s) present for the final vote</b>	Daniel Caspary, Edit Herczog, Bill Newton Dunn, Paul Rübig, Margarita Starkevičiūtė
<b>Substitute(s) under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote</b>	Monica Maria Iacob Ridzi
<b>Date tabled</b>	8.6.2007