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# REPORT

on ‘Towards more efficient and cost effective interpretation in the European Parliament’  
(2011/2287(INI))

Committee on Budgetary Control

Rapporteur: Esther de Lange

**CONTENTS**

	<b>Page</b>
MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION.....	3
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT .....	10
ANNEX I.....	12
RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE.....	13

## MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

### on ‘Towards more efficient and cost effective interpretation in the European Parliament’

(2011/2287(INI))

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to Article 286 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
  - having regard to its resolution of 5 September 2006 on the Court of Auditors’ Special Report No 5/2005 on interpretation expenditure incurred by Parliament, the Commission and the Council<sup>1</sup>,
  - having regard to the European Court of Auditors’ Special Report No 5/2005 entitled ‘Interpretation expenditure incurred by the Parliament, the Commission and the Council’, together with the institutions’ replies<sup>2</sup>,
  - having regard to the note to the members of the Bureau entitled ‘Resource-efficient full multilingualism in interpretation – implementation of the decision on the European Parliament’s budget 2012’,
  - having regard to the report by the Secretary-General of the European Parliament of 9 April 2013 entitled ‘Preparing for Complexity: European Parliament in 2025 – The Answers’<sup>3</sup>,
  - having regard to Rule 48 of its Rules of Procedure,
  - having regard to the report of the Committee on Budgetary Control (A7-0233/2013),
- A. whereas multilingualism is one of the key elements of the European Parliament, and of the Union as a whole, and whereas it ensures respect for cultural and linguistic diversity as well as equal treatment of EU citizens with different origins and backgrounds;
- B. whereas the principle of multilingualism in the European Parliament is the foundation of the institution’s political, co-legislative and communication work;
- C. whereas the principle of multilingualism in the European Parliament guards against unnecessary obstruction of the right of European citizens to stand for election to the European Parliament;
- D. whereas multilingualism guarantees the right of citizens to communicate with Parliament, in any of the EU’s official languages, thus enabling them to exercise their right of

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C 305 E, 14.12.2006, p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> OJ C 291, 23.11.2005, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Preparing for Complexity: European Parliament in 2025 – The Answers’, Secretary-General of the European Parliament, 9 April 2013.

democratic scrutiny;

- E. whereas Parliament's linguistic services facilitate communication, and, in so doing, make sure that Parliament remains open to all of Europe's citizens, ensuring transparency within the Union's unique multilingual structure based on 23 official languages;
- F. whereas Parliament's Rules of Procedure stipulate that Members may speak in the official language of their choice and that interpretation into the other official languages will be provided, thus respecting the democratic right to be elected to the European Parliament irrespective of one's language skills;
- G. whereas, as a result of successive enlargements, the challenge of multilingualism has reached a completely new dimension in terms of size, complexity and policy relevance, and whereas extensive multilingualism translates, naturally, into major and increasing costs for Parliament and therefore for the Union's citizens;
- H. whereas, with regard to Parliament's 2012 budget, considerable savings, including a reduction of EUR 10 million per year in the costs of interpretation services, were necessary in order to limit the budget's growth to 1.9 % compared with the previous year;

#### *Interpretation framework in the European Parliament*

1. Acknowledges that the European Union is the only entity in the world running an official policy of multilingualism based on 23 official languages, soon to be 24, with a total of 506, soon to be 552, language combinations to be covered; welcomes, in this connection, the very high quality of Parliament's interpretation services, but believes that ways of reducing the burden entailed by the complex structure of multilingualism and its considerable and increasing costs should be sought;
2. Notes that, of all the languages spoken in plenary in Strasbourg and Brussels from September 2009 to February 2013, English was used for 26 979 minutes (29.1 %), German for 12 556 minutes (13.6 %), French for 8 841 minutes (9.5 %), Estonian for 109 minutes (0.1 %) and Maltese for 195 minutes (0.2 %);
3. Notes that some multinational bodies, such as the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, operate only at intergovernmental level with no legislative function; points out in this connection that the UN, with 192 members, has a language regime with six official languages, and that NATO, with 28 members, uses mainly English, despite having two official languages;
4. Stresses, however, that Parliament is a directly elected political body, whose Members are elected regardless of their language skills; reaffirms, therefore, the right of every Member to speak in the official language of their choice, as a key principle of Parliament's operating arrangements;
5. Notes that the practical implications of the use of official languages in the European Parliament are set out in its Code of Conduct on Multilingualism, updated in 2008; notes the fact that the concept of 'controlled full multilingualism' laid down in that Code maintains equality among Members and citizens; points out that the implementation of

full multilingualism, while based on the principle of ‘interpretation on demand’, will in the long term be contingent upon making users of language services fully aware of the costs of providing those services, and hence of their responsibility to make the best possible use of them;

6. Believes that the principle of sound financial management needs to apply to interpretation as well, and that, with a view to ensuring the best value for money for European taxpayers, critical analysis should continually be undertaken to assess where and how efficiency can be improved, and costs controlled or limited;

#### *Efficient use of interpretation resources*

7. Notes the decision on ‘Resource-efficient full multilingualism in interpretation’ taken by Parliament’s Bureau in 2011, which increases the efficiency of interpretation services and reduces their structural costs in the following ways: (i) matching the needs arising from travel by Parliament delegations with the financial and human resources available, (ii) giving priority to interpretation for trilogues during committee weeks, (iii) spreading committee meetings more evenly over the week, (iv) applying the rules on the duration of evening meetings more stringently;
8. Welcomes the fact that, as a result, the budgetary resources devoted to interpretation services in Parliament have started to decrease; points out that in 2010 the budget outturn figure was EUR 54 990 000, that in 2011 it was EUR 56 964 283 and that it currently stands at EUR 47 000 000 for 2012, although the final outturn for 2012 will not be known until 31 December 2013 and may be higher;
9. Notes that the estimated 2013 budget figure for the interpretation DG is EUR 58 000 000, of which EUR 53 000 000 is directly linked to interpretation services; asks to be informed in detail and on a regular basis about the concrete results of the ‘Resource-efficient full multilingualism’ initiative as regards the 2013 budget, in particular in terms of expected cost reductions or increases;
10. Notes, furthermore, that while Parliament’s interpretation services cost EUR 157 954 283 in the three year-period leading up to the end of 2012, a reduction of 17 % was achieved when comparing the budgetary outturn figures for 2010 and 2012; notes that the smart savings achieved in interpretation services did not jeopardise the principle of multilingualism and insists that equal access to language services needs to be ensured for Members and that proper working conditions need to be upheld for the services concerned;
11. Welcomes the fact that Parliament’s estimates of revenue and expenditure for the financial year 2014 propose reducing interpretation costs by 23 % compared with the 2013 budget figure of EUR 58 000 000; asks for detailed information proving that the proposed cuts are feasible and that the excellent quality of interpretation can be maintained;
12. Emphasises that the implementation of ‘resource-efficient full multilingualism’ has led to considerable gains being made through a more even spread of committee meetings during the week, without any reduction in the overall number of committee meetings; notes that, as a result, the total number of interpreter days decreased from 105 258

(EUR 107 047 386) in 2011 to 97 793 (EUR 100 237 825) in 2012, leading to savings of EUR 6 809 561;

13. Notes with concern that, according to the reports on the Code of Conduct on Multilingualism, requests for interpretation services originating from committees, delegations and political groups were still affected by a high and growing level of late cancellations, as illustrated by the following figures:

<b>Committees</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>
Requests	984	1712	2213	2448
Late cancellations	76	172	238	359
%	7.72 %	10.05 %	10.80 %	14.70 %

<b>Delegations</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>
Requests	624	813	836	832
Late cancellations	116	93	102	171
%	18.59 %	11.44 %	12.20 %	20.60 %

<b>Political groups</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>
Requests	1922	2310	2297	2146
Late cancellations	285	378	266	292
%	14.83 %	16.36 %	11.60 %	13.60 %

14. Notes with concern that the costs incurred as a result of these late cancellations represent a substantial proportion of the overall interpretation budget; notes in this connection that in 2011 the sum of EUR 4 350 000 (7.6 % of the interpretation budget), and in 2012 the sum of EUR 5 480 000 (11.9 % of the interpretation budget), was spent on interpretation

services made available but not used on account of late requests or cancellations; calls on the Bureau to provide the Committee on Budgetary Control with a detailed analysis of the growing trend towards late cancellations and to introduce a mechanism aimed at increasing awareness of the resources lost as a result of late cancellations and significantly reducing the number and percentage of such cancellations;

15. Reiterates that, while maintaining a high standard of work, it is also necessary to make more efficient use of language resources and to control their costs by looking at the overall workload for each language section and ensuring that the costs generated by the late cancellation of meeting requests and delegation visits with interpretation, in contravention of the deadlines laid down in the Code of Conduct, are reduced; insists that committees, delegations and political groups should be made aware of the rules laid down in the Code of Conduct;
16. Calls on the Bureau to develop a system with a penalty clause in order to combat late cancellations of interpreter bookings;
17. Calls on the administration to make full and efficient use of Members' updated language profiles when making language arrangements for committees, delegations and political groups both in and outside the places of work; insists that all Members' language profiles should be updated every year; points out, in addition, that a copy of the updated profiles should be forwarded to the secretariats of the committees, delegations, political groups and working groups;
18. Insists that, with due regard for the decision of Parliament's Bureau of December 2011 on 'Resource-efficient full multilingualism', interpretation into an official language during a delegation visit should be provided only on the explicit written request of a participating Member of the European Parliament; stresses that during a delegation visit the number of interpreters should not exceed the number of participating Members of the European Parliament;
19. Recalls the proposal by the Secretary-General to introduce measures to raise awareness among users of interpretation services, including committees, delegations and political groups, and is of the opinion that future proposals should include virtual billing of users;
20. Calls on the administration to continue having the head of the team of interpreters, at the end of each meeting and in agreement with the secretariat of that meeting, draw up a list of interpretation facilities requested but not used; notes that a copy of that list should be forwarded to the secretariat of the meeting concerned; considers that the list should also take account of those using webstreaming or video on demand;
21. Calls on the Bureau to forward to the Committee on Budgetary Control the report on the use of language services sent to it every six months by the interpretation and translation services; notes that the report should include an analysis of the language facilities provided in relation to the requests submitted by users and of the costs incurred in the provision of these services;
22. Takes note of the new Interpretation ad personam (IAP) service offered to Members and established following the pilot project which started in 2010; notes that this new service

entailed costs of EUR 157 000 in 2011 and EUR 115 000 in 2012; believes that the service should be reviewed in order to look for ways to improve it;

***Interpretation in the European Parliament: the way forward***

23. Welcomes the fact that the interpretation services have achieved efficiency gains and cost reductions in recent years while maintaining an excellent quality of work; emphasises that interpretation and translation expenditure continues to take up a significant proportion of Parliament's budget and therefore believes that the challenge of multilingualism at reasonable costs requires Parliament's continual attention;
24. Believes that the Committee on Budgetary Control should be informed regularly about changes in the cost of interpretation; calls for the annual Code of Conduct report prepared by the interpretation services and sent to the Secretary-General to be made public to members of the committee;
25. Takes the view that situations in which interpretation into certain languages is offered without being used should be avoided as far as possible; stresses the need for measures to reduce the costs of unneeded interpretation at meetings, and calls, therefore, for the development and urgent implementation of a system that prevents situations in which interpretation is made available into languages that are not actually spoken at a given meeting or requested by webstream users;
26. Expects the Secretary-General to present, by the end of the year, a detailed analysis of the interpretation languages provided for all (working) group, committee and delegation meetings and of the languages actually spoken in these meetings, as well as an overview of the derogations from the general interpretation rules adopted by the Bureau on 12 March 2012<sup>1</sup> which are requested by and granted to delegation visits;
27. Calls on the Bureau to adopt a further decision on multilingualism by the end of the year, dealing specifically with possible scenarios for 'interpretation on demand' and the efficiency gains expected to be achieved as a result;
28. Regrets the fact that the Court of Auditors has not provided a follow-up to its report on interpretation expenditure incurred by Parliament, the Commission and the Council since 2005;
29. Asks the Court of Auditors, therefore, to provide Parliament, within a reasonable time frame and at the latest by March 2014, with a special report on the interpretation and translation expenditure incurred by Parliament, the Commission and the Council, assessing the soundness of the financial management involved and updating the findings made in its Special Report No 5/2005; notes, furthermore, that this report could be produced periodically and used for the discharge procedure; reiterates that the report should provide information on whether the institutions involved have adequate tools and

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<sup>1</sup> It was decided specifically that, while delegations would continue to benefit from the full interpretation entitlement of up to five languages – as laid down in the Code of Conduct on Multilingualism – during weeks set aside for external parliamentary activities (green weeks), delegations requiring derogations for travel during committee weeks would only be provided with a limited language regime not exceeding interpretation into one language.

procedures to ensure that:

- the services provided do not exceed the real needs,
- all the services needed can be provided,
- the services are provided at the lowest possible cost,
- the services provided are of high quality;

30. Notes also that this follow-up report should carefully compare the cost-effectiveness of Parliament's interpretation services with that of the interpretation services provided by the Council and the Commission, and compare the actual costs of the three institutions' interpretation services with those recorded in the audit reference period;
31. Insists, furthermore, that Parliament address, as a matter of priority, the considerable number of late cancellations and invites the Bureau to present a detailed action plan for reducing it;
32. Reiterates that interinstitutional cooperation is essential in order to exchange best practices that promote effectiveness and allow savings to be made; considers that interinstitutional cooperation should be improved as regards interpretation; calls for a thorough review to be carried out, with priority being given to more effective sharing of available resources among all the institutions and concrete measures in the area of freelance interpretation;
33. Stresses the importance of software applications as management instruments and insists that more funding be allocated for this purpose in next year's budget; notes that a higher level of efficiency can be obtained if Parliament's administrative services are provided with appropriate management information; considers it regrettable that certain DGs are still lagging behind in terms of the software applications available, despite improvements in the IT sector since 2010;
34. Calls on its relevant services to assess whether the considerable efficiency gains made in the area of interpretation can serve as an example for improvement within other DGs;

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35. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.

## EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

On 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. In the case of the Parliament the aim of the special report was to explore possible improvements by focussing on organisational issues and ensuring Members rights to speak in and listen to the official language of his/her choice. The report showed inefficient use of the interpretation services and a need for more awareness of the interpretation costs and waste of resources.

The European Union (EU) is the only entity in the world running an official policy of multilingualism based on 23 official languages<sup>1</sup>, soon to be 24. In 2011 5263 session took place and approximately 100.000 interpreters' days, of which 47.74% external interpreters were hired and 52.26% staff interpreters.

The use of official languages in the European Parliament is governed by its 'Code of Conduct on Multilingualism', updated in 2008. The Parliament stated its intention to develop the concept of 'controlled multilingualism' in its resolution of 14 May 2003 on its 2004 estimates, and called on the Bureau to submit practical proposals concerning the more effective use of resources, whilst maintaining equality among languages. In its resolution of 1 June 2006 on its 2007 estimates, Parliament considered that multilingualism is a sine qua non condition for the Institution and its Members, but recognised the high cost involved in maintaining a vast translation and interpretation service. In its resolutions of 5 September 2006 and of 10 July 2007, Parliament considered that multilingualism enables citizens to exercise their right of democratic control and that the linguistic services help the EU institutions to remain open and transparent and it welcomed with satisfaction the high quality of the language services.

In 2011 the Parliament's Bureau approved measures to reduce the overall amount of the draft estimates of 2012 of the EP by implementing the 'Resource efficient full multilingualism in interpretation' that increases the efficiency of interpretation services and reduces their costs with 10 million Euros.

The Parliament's interpretation service is of very high quality. Despite measures taken by the bureau on 'resource efficient full multilingualism in interpretation', costs are still considerable and resources are not always used efficiently. In 2010 €6.05 million was available but not used, due to late cancellations in 2011 it was €4.4 million and in 2012 for €5.48 million Euros. The last 3 years €15.93 million was lost due to late requests and cancellations.

One of the key aims of this report is to raise awareness about the need to improve efficiency in multilingualism, without compromising overall quality and without questioning the right of Members to use in Parliament the official language of their choice. As described in the Code

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to the 23, Catalan, Basque and Galician have official language status within Spain, so certain EU texts are translated from and into these languages at the cost of the Spanish government.

of Conduct, language facilities in Parliament shall be managed on the basis of the principles governing ‘controlled full multilingualism’. The resources to be devoted to multilingualism shall be controlled by means of management on the basis of users’ real needs, measures to make users more aware of their responsibilities and more effective planning of requests for language facilities.

The report consists of 3 parts, looking respectively into:

- the general interpretation framework applicable to the European Parliament,
- the recent efficiency gains made partially as a result of the agreement on the 2012 EP budget, which demanded a EUR 10 million cut in the interpretation budget and
- future steps to be taken, notably through the concrete implementation of ‘interpretation on demand’, the reduction of late cancellations and an update of the 2005 Court of Auditors report on interpretation expenditure.

The report also requests the Parliament to better inform the Committee on Budgetary Control about the development of costs in the area of interpretation, about its decisions affecting the interpretation services and the efficiency gains and cost reductions achieved, for example through the publication to all Members of the Committee of the annual Code of Conduct reports.

## ANNEX I

### Languages spoken in plenary from September 2009 until February 2013

Language	Minutes	%
English	26979	29,1%
German	12556	13,6%
French	8841	9,5%
Italian	7908	8,5%
Polish	7115	7,7%
Spanish	5357	5,8%
Greek	4528	4,9%
Romanian	2831	3,1%
Hungarian	2596	2,8%
Dutch	2570	2,8%
Portuguese	2495	2,7%
Czech	1651	1,8%
Slovakian	1573	1,7%
Swedish	1338	1,4%
Finnish	1108	1,2%
Danish	805	0,9%
Bulgarian	612	0,7%
Lithuanian	476	0,5%
Slovene	450	0,5%
Gaelic	265	0,3%
Latvian	239	0,3%
Maltese	195	0,2%
Estonian	109	0,1%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>92.597</b>	<b>100,0%</b>

## RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

<b>Date adopted</b>	18.6.2013
<b>Result of final vote</b>	+: 20 -: 0 0: 0
<b>Members present for the final vote</b>	Marta Andreasen, Jean-Pierre Audy, Zigmantas Balčytis, Zuzana Brzobohatá, Tamás Deutsch, Martin Ehrenhauser, Ingeborg Gräßle, Jan Mulder, Paul Rübig, Petri Sarvamaa, Theodoros Skylakakis, Bart Staes, Michael Theurer
<b>Substitute(s) present for the final vote</b>	Cornelis de Jong, Esther de Lange, Karin Kadenbach, Ivailo Kalfin, Markus Pieper
<b>Substitute(s) under Rule 187(2) present for the final vote</b>	Vasilica Viorica Dăncilă, Verónica Lope Fontagné, Janusz Władysław Zemke