

**PREPARING FOR THE PARLIAMENT
OF THE ENLARGED EUROPEAN UNION**

- STEERING COMMITTEE -

WORKING DOCUMENT No 9

FOR THE BUREAU

on

The language regime: additional options

Brussels, 29 August 2001

PE 305.382/BUR

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1. At its meeting of 2 July 2001, the Bureau welcomed the three-year plan on preparing for the Parliament of the enlarged European Union (PE 305.269/BUR.) as submitted by Mr Guido Podestà, Vice-President, and the Secretary-General. It suspended its deliberations so that the political groups and the Committee on Budgets might give their views, if they so wished, before the plan was finally adopted.
2. In a manner entirely consistent with the COT report¹ adopted by the Bureau during the previous parliamentary term, Mr Podestà, Vice-President, proposed the retention of full multilingualism and, hence, compliance with the fundamental principle of the equality of languages, combined with a full range of measures to improve efficiency and thus offset the costs. Like his predecessor, Mr Podestà, Vice-President, takes the view that multilingualism is a primary source of Parliament's democratic legitimacy. The COT report goes on: 'It follows that no decision would be more damaging to that democratic legitimacy than one whose effects would be to require language qualifications to be an MEP, to listen to Parliament's deliberations and to read and understand its decisions.' The three-year plan has confirmed that, for as long as that basic principle – enshrined in Parliament's Rules of Procedure – is upheld, Parliament's political and administrative authorities are obliged to take all the measures required to ensure that all Members may speak in and follow the debates, and take decisions on documents, in their own language. For Parliament, enlargement may not be accomplished at the expense of the principle of equal treatment of all its Members. The right conferred on elected Members to speak and write in their own language lies at the very heart of Parliament's democratic legitimacy.
3. Should this principle of equality be challenged in various particulars, or even abandoned, several other language arrangements would then become feasible.
4. The information supplied at the meeting of the Conference of Presidents of 5 July 2001, and at that of the Committee on Budgets of 11 July 2001, points to four scenarios concerning the language regime:
 - I. Scenarios for making radical changes to the language regime,
 - A. Monolingualism: abandoning multilingualism and replacing it with a single official and working language
 - B. Giving Member States responsibility for translation and interpretation into their national language or languages, if they so wish.
 - II. Intermediate scenarios involving the use of a limited number of working languages, possibly in conjunction with facilities for Members speaking the other languages.
 - A. Symmetrical system using 6 working languages (source and target languages)
 - B. Asymmetrical system (21 source languages and 1, 3 or 6 target languages).

¹ PE 278.274/fin. adopted by the Bureau on 13 April 1999.

- III. Controlled multilingualism: options selected by the Steering Committee with a view to maintaining the principle of the equality of languages as far as the Institution's core activities are concerned, while at the same time drawing on the previous scenarios with a view to introducing a maximum number of corrective management measures in respect of less essential activities.
- IV. The scenarios set out above may be compared with the current situation and with a 'pure' system of full multilingualism without the corrective management measures already implemented or planned.

Preliminary remarks

5. Each of the scenarios outlined under I. and II. would involve changes to Parliament's Rules of Procedure (Rule 117) and to Council Regulation No 1/58, and possibly even to the Treaty (Articles 21, 290 and 314). Setting aside the legal issues which would have to be resolved (e.g. the non-existence of legislation or preparatory documents in certain languages), Parliament must also decide whether it is prepared to take responsibility for an upheaval which would have a direct impact on EU citizens. By the same token, one might ask whether Parliament, in its capacity as an institution responsible, within the limits of the powers conferred upon it, for carrying out the tasks entrusted to the Community, does not have responsibilities, however subsidiary they might be, in the sphere of cultural diversity¹.
6. Any radical change would also have not inconsiderable social costs. Although the Staff Regulations provide for the placing of officials on non-active status in the event of reductions in the number of posts (Articles 41 and 50), it also stipulates that such officials should receive substantial compensation. The number of posts to be abolished under the scenarios outlined under I. and II. far exceeds the reduction in staff numbers provided for under the option chosen by the Steering Committee, which is based on an ad hoc scheme involving early or special retirement measures. Unlike that latter option, which allows some leeway for negotiations with staff representatives, the possibility of the abolition of large numbers of posts might be regarded as a breach of the trust which officials are entitled to expect the Institution to display towards them.

I. SCENARIOS FOR A RADICAL CHANGE IN THE LANGUAGE REGIME

7. These radical scenarios highlight the cost of multilingualism and the efforts already made to reduce those costs.

A. Monolingualism

8. As indicated in the Secretary-General's report to the members of the Bureau on Parliament's estimates for 2002 (Annex I), multilingualism in the form currently practised can be said to account for almost 30% of Parliament's budget, i.e. EUR 274 million. In theory, a large proportion of this expenditure could be eliminated if Parliament were to work in a single language.

¹ Spelt out in Article 151(4) of the EC Treaty.

9. However, not all of this figure of EUR 274 million could be saved, since, whatever language the Union chose, large parts of the globe would not use it, and a language unit would have to be retained in order to facilitate external relations. This is the case, for example, in the US Congress. Other language-related departments would also be needed, should the Member States wish to continue with the publication of European legislation in their national languages, should the Court of Justice and the CFI continue to hear cases in a number of languages, and should Parliament wish to continue supplying electors with information in their own language, etc. For the purposes of this document, it has been estimated that 10% of the language staff would have to be retained (135 persons), spread across the 21 languages. The total saving, setting aside social costs, would be reduced from EUR 274 million to about EUR 249 million.
10. It might also be necessary to strengthen certain non-language-related departments, in particular in order to assist Members who had not (yet) learnt the single working language.
11. Finally, the option of employing a single working language - monolingualism - would lead to the abolition of no fewer than 1300 posts, the estimated cost of which would be EUR 75 million per year on average over ten years.

B. Nationalisation of the language services

12. In this connection, consideration has also been given to the scenario of allowing the Member States themselves to take responsibility for interpretation and translation into their own language or languages. Without going into detail concerning the legislative changes involved, they would nevertheless be substantial and complex, if the equality of the Union's citizens before the law was to be maintained. It would also appear difficult to formulate equitable criteria for sharing the financial burden amongst the Member States.

a. Transfer of financial responsibility alone

13. National funding of language-related costs might be organised in several ways. The simplest would be to leave the current organisation and staff in place, and to invoice each Member State for its share of the costs. This method would probably also be the least expensive, since any other solution would require major accompanying measures in the area of the coordination of work and quality control.
14. The savings to be made by comparison with the current situation rest on the assumption that certain Member States would be prepared to do without some or all interpretation or translation into their language. The discontinuation of translation and interpretation into a given language would ultimately reduce expenditure by EUR 24.9 million per year. However, this would be offset by the immediate costs generated by the abolition of posts: EUR 7 million per language per year over ten years. In the case of the languages retained, the cost would of course be transferred from the Community budget to national budgets.

b. Transfer of the complete workload

15. Even if the Member States were to be given the task of recruiting and managing interpreters and translators and organising their work, a sizeable number of staff and a wide range of facilities would still be required at Union level. It is likely that the Institution would have to supply, at the very least, all the relevant facilities: interpreting booths in conference rooms, databases, and transmission systems for translators, etc. In this sphere, then, there would be few savings. In order to ensure that the Institution could function, it would also be essential for Parliament itself to supply interpretation and translation into at least one working language.
16. It would therefore be necessary to retain and even increase the number of language staff dealing with the language chosen. Since there would no longer be any direct link with the staff dealing with the other languages, the management and coordination teams would also have to be strengthened and arrangements made for checking the quality of the work carried out at national level. Since the Institution would no longer have multilingual translation divisions or a multilingual parliamentary acts division, full responsibility for ensuring the consistency of the translations carried out at national level of the legislation adopted by Parliament would be transferred to the Legal Service, which would certainly require a very substantial increase in its staff complement as a result.
17. On the basis of the scenarios outlined here, an initial assessment indicates that 20-30% of the language staff complement, and, hence, the corresponding budget appropriations, would have to be retained. The impact in respect of the languages phased out remains the same as that outlined above. However, in the case of the languages retained, the savings to the European budget would no longer be EUR 24.9 million but roughly EUR 18 million per year, on the assumption that funding for the posts abolished would amount to EUR 5 million per language per year over ten years.

II. INTERMEDIATE SCENARIOS INVOLVING THE USE OF A LIMITED NUMBER OF WORKING LANGUAGES

18. Should equality between languages no longer be regarded as the cornerstone of multilingualism, a number of 'intermediate' scenarios could be put forward with a view to securing a reduction in expenditure.

A. Full multilingualism reserved for a limited number of working languages

19. Provided that the existing corrective measures could continue to be implemented, it may be estimated that staff numbers and appropriations would be reduced on a pro rata basis depending on the number of languages phased out (EUR 24.9 million per year per language). Scaling down a system based on 21 languages to 12 languages would thus give rise to savings of EUR 224 million; scaling it down to six languages would give rise to a saving of EUR 374 million. From a financial point of view, the decisive factor is the number of languages. The actual choice of languages to be retained has only a marginal bearing on costs (e.g. longer training and transitional periods).
20. Given that several of the existing languages would be phased out, substantial costs linked to the abolition of posts would also have to be factored into the calculations. If six languages were to be phased out, the cost would be EUR 40 million per year over ten years.

B. Asymmetric multilingualism

21. Under this scenario, all Members would be able speak and write in their own language (source language) but would receive interpretation or translation only into a limited number of other languages (target languages), e.g. 1, 3, 6 or 12. This assumes that the working method already employed, on a pragmatic, limited basis, for delegation meetings outside the places of work and for meetings of the group coordinators in the committees, etc., would be used across the board. This scenario would require an improvement in cooperation with the other institutions so as to avoid paradoxical situations where, for example, the Commission would be translating into all the languages a proposal submitted for debate in the other institutions under more restricted asymmetrical arrangements.

a. Interpretation

22. This system requires each interpreting booth to be able to cover at any time, either directly or indirectly, all the other languages, including the new languages. It is unlikely that we shall be able to find enough interpreters capable of working from several of the 'smaller' source languages into one of the target languages. Even if only a small number of target languages were to be retained, provision would have to be made for a system of pivot languages. For safety reasons, there would always be two pivot languages. In accordance with the rules in force, up to 20 interpreters per booth would be needed for these two languages, but two or three interpreters per booth would be enough for the other target languages.
23. By way of illustration, one could take the example of the European Council when it holds a session with the representatives of the applicant countries. In Nice, for a session with 21 source languages, 11 of which were also target languages, provision had to be made, over and above the usual four interpreters per target language, for an additional six French interpreters and two English interpreters so as to ensure that each source language was covered by at least one pivot interpreter. Moreover, under ordinary circumstances, i.e. at longer meetings, provision would have to be made for at least two pivot interpreters!
24. In broad terms, therefore, provision would have to be made for at least six interpreters per booth. Accordingly, for the languages in question, it would be necessary to double both staff numbers and appropriations. Provided that this system were to be employed for all meetings, including plenary meetings, these additional costs would be offset by the disappearance of booths for the other languages. However, the system would be attractive in financial terms only if, for each language retained, at least one other language were to be phased out. The number of target languages must therefore remain below half the number of source languages: five under the current system of 11 working languages, or ten under a system involving 21 working languages.
25. Should Parliament nevertheless decide to retain full multilingualism for certain meetings, e.g. the plenary, the Conciliation Committee and certain group or committee meetings, interpreters for the languages 'phased out' elsewhere would also have to be retained, perhaps 50% of the current staff complement. This would substantially reduce the scope for savings. Under that scenario, the system would reduce costs only if, for each language

retained, at least two others were to be phased out. The number of target languages must therefore remain below one-third of the number of source languages: three under the current system involving 11 working languages, or six under a system involving 21 working languages.

26. Under the system involving 21 source languages, the restriction in the number of target languages to three would generate savings of up to EUR 33 million. Such solutions would also entail the abolition of posts and, hence, social costs totalling EUR 51 million per year, or EUR 65 million if only one target language were retained. That said, it should be pointed out that in the COT report adopted in April 1999 the concept of asymmetric interpretation is regarded as an option which 'because of its inherent inequality [...] would be applied only to certain non-decision-making/non-legislating meetings'.

b. Translation

27. A comparable system could be developed for translation: all Members would be able to write in their own language, but texts would be translated into only a small number of languages. Unlike in the case of interpretation, where a booth must be staffed by a sufficient number of interpreters to cover all languages at all times, regardless of whether a language is frequently or rarely spoken, staff numbers in translation might be tailored more effectively to the actual workload.
28. One solution might be to retain translators for just the target language or languages selected. Given a 15-20% increase in their numbers, they could provide translations from all the source languages to the target language or languages. Where necessary, e.g. for certain legislative and similar documents (roughly 75% of the workload), translations from one of the target languages to another language would be contracted out. Under a system involving 21 source languages, the theoretical saving would be EUR 47 million if six target languages were retained, EUR 62 million if three target languages were retained and EUR 79 million per year if only one target language were retained.
29. These are hypothetical figures, however. Should Parliament wish to check the quality of external translations, provision would have to be made for revisers for all the languages (+EUR 8 to 11 million). Should the standard deadlines for external translations not be deemed adequate, compensatory measures would be required which would have an impact on the budget (EUR 4.5 to 6 million). Should the drop in the quality of the language services provided necessitate an expansion of the departments offering support to Members, the gap between the options might be reduced even further. Finally, the cost of abolishing posts would have to be met (EUR 30 to 40 million per year over 10 years).

III. CONTROLLED MULTILINGUALISM: OPTIONS SELECTED BY THE STEERING COMMITTEE

30. However, whilst respecting the principle of the equality of languages, substantial savings have been achieved, and further savings are possible: the key has been the use of the system of full multilingualism accompanied by management measures designed to curb costs.

A. System outlined in the 1999 COT report

31. The final report drawn up by the Working Party, chaired by Mr Cot, on multilingualism in the context of enlargement, adopted on 13 April 1999, makes it clear that, with a view to safeguarding the principle of equality between working languages, and on obvious budgetary grounds, there is a need to alter some of the arrangements governing the operation of multilingualism. It puts forward two proposals in particular: greater use of pivot languages in the sphere of translation and the application to the new languages of the bi-active interpretation system which proved its worth in connection with Finnish. It also proposes measures designed to avoid the recruitment of interpreters for meetings at which no Member speaking that language will be present.

B. Additional measures proposed by the Steering Committee in the three-year plan

32. These concern in particular:
- (i) exclusive use of the bi-active interpretation system for the new languages and the gradual extension of that system to the current languages; the organisation of professional training and recruitment in such a way that greater use may be made of the bi-active system as soon as the first new Member States join the Union and so that the system may be employed across the board before the end of the next parliamentary term, in 2009;
 - (ii) closer examination of the scope for the gradual introduction of the arrangements and facilities required for remote interpreting, i.e. by interpreters located outside the conference room;
 - (iii) starting with the first accessions, the stipulation that interpretation into a given language will be guaranteed only for full members of Parliament bodies and parliamentary committees;
 - (iv) adoption of measures designed to achieve a better spread of meetings across working days, including by means of efforts to make interpretation and translation users more aware of their responsibilities (e.g. invoicing on the basis of fixed budgets).

C. Number of pivot languages

33. At the meeting of the Conference of Presidents of 5 July 2001, the issue arose as to the number of pivot languages and which those languages would be.
34. As regards translation, the answer is simple. The vast majority of texts for translation are drafted in English, French or German¹ and translated directly into the other languages. In this way, in very many cases, the longer deadlines required for translation via a pivot language may be avoided. Texts arriving in one of the eight or nine other languages would first be translated, depending on the workload at any given moment, into English, French or German and then from that language into the other languages. In other words,

¹ In 2000, the corresponding percentages were: English 35.6%, French 29.5% and German 11.1%.

with three pivot languages, current translation deadlines could be maintained for 76% of texts, with a balanced distribution of the workload across the various divisions being guaranteed. By comparison with a system not employing pivot languages, a saving of EUR 26 million would appear to be realistic. Any further reduction in the number of languages would only generate additional savings of EUR 2.9 million.

35. By contrast, in the area of interpretation, the situation is more complicated. As in the case of translation, the use of a pivot language slows down work and brings with it the risk of a loss of quality. Moreover, the reduction in the number of pivot languages would produce much more significant gains in terms of ease of management and control of staff numbers. Subject to certain precautions, cutting back the number of pivot languages should make it possible to reduce the number of interpreters per booth. Taking this hypothesis to its logical conclusion, under a system employing a single pivot language for all meetings and bi-active interpretation on an across-the-board basis, the interpretation division for the language in question could in theory be abolished. (In other words, if all interpretation goes through pivot language P, the interpreters' booth for language P becomes redundant because all the other booths would be interpreting into that language).
36. Of course, it remains to be seen whether the solution involving a single working language with no native speakers working into that language is a sound one, but there are also obvious reasons for favouring a solution involving several (two to four) pivot languages, in particular the situation on the market: in the short and medium term; it will not be possible to recruit a sufficient number of interpreters to make a system involving a single pivot language feasible.

D. Field stations in the Member States

37. As in the case of the previous enlargements, the Commission intends to set up in the applicant countries field stations responsible for checking the translation of secondary legislation carried out by those States. One of the options under consideration is that of leaving those field stations in place following accession – their status would be determined at that juncture. Roughly 15% of the translators for each language would be involved, the remaining 85% being recruited to the normal places of work. Parliament would be required to transfer to the Member States a maximum of ten persons per language. The cost of living in the various Member States points to savings in respect of the languages of most of the applicant countries and of certain existing Member States (EUR 200 000 to 250 000 per language). In the case of other countries, the cost of living is similar to that in Luxembourg, or even considerably higher. Since differences in treatment between Member States would scarcely be acceptable, the system would have to be applied identically to all countries, and the overall saving would be unlikely to exceed EUR 2.5 or 3 million.
38. Noting that the type of work which could be allocated to the translators in the field stations is very similar to that generally sent out to freelance translators, the Translation Directorate has opted instead to increase the proportion of texts sent out to freelance: the current figure of 20% should increase to 40% even before the enlargement. The number

of staff translators would thus be reduced from an average of 48 to 35 per language. The savings generated in this way greatly exceed those expected from the field stations.

39. The theoretical possibility of transferring all the translators and their support staff to the Member States is no more likely to generate budget savings, given that the reduction in expenditure on pay and facilities may well be offset by accompanying measures in connection with the coordination of work, with management and with the training of the officials transferred and quality control, which will give rise to additional staffing needs. Moreover, in the past, when the Commission considered less radical solutions designed to meet its own needs, doubts arose as to their conformity with the Staff Regulations of Officials.

IV. PURE FULL MULTILINGUALISM WITH NO CORRECTIVE MANAGEMENT MEASURES

40. The current system of multilingualism was originally designed in such a way that each language division could cover translation/interpretation from all of the other languages into its own. Each time a new language is added, therefore, either existing staff translators and interpreters must be asked to learn the new language in question, or new officials must be recruited.
41. In the current situation, in which we are preparing for the addition of up to ten new languages as from 2004, it is illusory to believe that we shall be able to convince enough linguists to learn new languages in the time available (given, above all, the time required to learn each language), so that additional linguists will have to be recruited to the existing language divisions.
42. If 'pure' multilingualism were to be introduced, the corrective measures currently employed so successfully, i.e. the coverage of certain language combinations via pivot languages or by means of asymmetric arrangements (Members may speak in their own language but must take interpretation in another language), would have to be abandoned.
43. Under such circumstances, the application of the current rules agreed with the IACI (International Association of Conference Interpreters) might lead to up to 20 interpreters¹ being earmarked for each booth for any given meeting. A more cautious estimate still points to a need to double both the current language staff complement (119 posts per language) and the appropriations to cover the work of freelance interpreters and service providers. Thereafter, the same steps would have to be taken for the divisions translating or interpreting into the new languages (166 instead of 83 per language), not to mention the repercussions for the management and administrative departments (ten posts per existing and new language; additional offices, and rooms with booths large enough to accommodate six or even more persons, etc.).
44. In broad terms, therefore, the budget for multilingualism would have to be increased fourfold: doubling of the number of languages and doubling of the staff complement for each language.

¹ Without the use of a pivot language, direct interpretation into each language would require one interpreter per language (= 20 interpreters per booth).

CONCLUSION

45. The estimated cost of multilingualism in an enlarged Union of course still depends on many parameters yet to be defined. The amounts indicated in this document are therefore to be treated with caution, but, since they have identical baseline data as their starting point, they provide a good idea of the relative financial impact of the various options, including by comparison with the current situation (EUR 274 million for 11 languages):

Recapitulation of the cost of the various multilingualism options (scenario involving 10 new languages, i.e. a total of 21)	Operating costs	Social costs per year	
		1st year	Years 2-10
I.A. Monolingualism	25	95	75
I.B. Transfer of language work to the Member States	145	69	55
II.A. System of six working languages (source and target)	149	42	33
II.B.i Asymmetrical system (21 source languages and one target language)	322	82	65
II.B.ii Asymmetrical system (21 source languages and three target languages)	348	64	51
II.B.iii Asymmetrical system (21 source languages and six target languages)	389	42	33
III. System proposed by the Steering Committee	443	7	4
IV.A. Full multilingualism with corrective measures (current system applied to 21 languages)	521	-	-
IV.B. 'Pure' full multilingualism with no corrective measures	1042		

46. The Steering Committee therefore considers that:
- (a) Only the controlled multilingualism solution proposed as part of the three-year plan¹ would make it possible to reduce substantially the cost of multilingualism whilst respecting the principle of the equality of languages, Members and citizens.
 - (b) Should, however, departures from the principle of equality be regarded as acceptable, the only option that would achieve substantial savings and maintain a minimum of functionality would be an asymmetrical system with a single working language. Should the Bureau favour that option, more detailed consideration of the legal and practical implications would be essential before any final decision is taken.

¹ PE 305.269/BUR

CURRENT COST OF MULTILINGUALISM

(extract from the Secretary-General's report to members of the Bureau on the preliminary draft estimates of Parliament for 2002, PE 300.424/BUR.)

Staff directly involved in multilingualism:

Directorate-general	%	Amount (EUR)
Translation	100%	91 707 693 ¹
Interpreters	100%	36 029 504 ²
Auxiliary session interpreters and freelance translators	100%	33 192 000
Other DGs	15%	34 289 377 ³
	TOTAL	195 218 574

Other multilingualism-related costs:

Heading	Amount (EUR)
Language courses/grants	1 600 000
Share in Members' secretarial allowance	9 375 000
Immovable property expenditure and ancillary costs	15 895 498
Other expenditure (operations, telecommunications, etc.)	15 445 089
Publishing and information expenditure	25 131 818
Contribution to political group expenditure	11 286 330
TOTAL	78 733 735

SUMMARY

HEADING	Amount (EUR)
STAFF	195 218 574
OTHER EXPENDITURE	78 733 735
TOTAL	273 952 309
% of total 2002 preliminary draft estimates	30%

¹ Establishment plan for DG VII, Translation Directorate, minus abatement: 765 staff, made up of 445 A/LA, 31 B, 286 C & 3 D

² Establishment plan for DG VI, Interpretation Directorate, minus abatement: 257 staff, made up of 239 A/LA, 3 B and 15 C.

³ Multilingualism-related staff in other DGs: 318.