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Translation in the Commission: where do we stand two years after Enlargement?

The European Union has now worked for two years with 25 Member States and 20 official languages. It is also preparing to welcome new Member States and new languages in 2007. The scale of its multilingual regime makes it unique in the world. Multilingualism is at the core of European integration, as it underpins citizens' rights and the legitimacy of the Union. The Union passes laws that are directly binding on its citizens and companies. If EU policies are to be applied correctly and make a difference on the ground, they have to be understood. Access to languages contributes to this. Everyone in the Union is also entitled and encouraged to play a part in building it, and must be able to do it in their own language. Incorporating nine new official languages – Czech, Estonian, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Slovak and Slovene – into the system at one go in May 2004 was an unprecedented situation for the Commission, and its language services have had to adopt some innovative approaches to deal with the resulting challenges. More than halfway through the transition period of the last enlargement, with the prospect of new countries acceding in the near future, the time is ripe for a review of the situation so far.

1. Who is responsible for what in terms of translation in the EU institutions?

Each institution (Commission, Council, European Parliament, European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Court of Justice, Court of Auditors) has its own translation service, which is responsible for translating the documents issued by that institution.

The Commission has a major translation task by virtue of its "right of initiative" in the Community legislation and its monitoring role.

The Commission's Directorate-General for Translation (DGT) is a service of some 2 200 people dedicated to meeting the Commission's needs for translation and linguistic advice with respect to all types of **written communication, including web material**, to supporting and strengthening multilingualism in the European Union and to helping to bring the Union's policies closer to its citizens, thereby promoting its legitimacy, transparency and efficiency.

When a country joins the EU, the existing EU law, the *acquis communautaire* – some 90 000 pages consisting of the Treaties and secondary legislation adopted up to the day the country joins – has to be translated into the language of that country. The responsibility for this work lies with the national government, the Community institutions being responsible for finalising and publishing the translated texts in the special edition of the Official Journal of the European Union.

The Commission usually provides support to accession countries by hosting temporary trainees, advising on translator training needs and building up terminology resources.

2. How is the Directorate-General for Translation (DGT) organised?

DGT is located in Brussels, where at present half of its staff are posted, and Luxembourg, which has the other half. A number of translators work in DGT Field Offices in most of the Commission Representations in the Member States.

For organisational purposes, DGT is divided along language lines, with a separate language department for each official language. The language departments are further divided into units specialising in particular subjects. A unit consists of 20 translators on average.

Within the language departments, translators specialise in translating documents dealing with particular areas of the European Commission's policies: agriculture, competition, financial and monetary issues, education and culture, employment, energy, environment, external relations, regional policy and many more.

In addition to the language-specific departments, DGT now has a cross-language unit specialised in web translation. This means citizens will soon have access to basic information on EU activities in the official languages on the internet.

3. What is the situation two years after the last enlargement?

Recruitment:

DGT's translators in the nine new languages are posted in Luxembourg, and in the Field Offices in the capitals.

By the end of April 2006, DGT had recruited **473 full-time translators**. This is **94%** of the total number of translators needed per language. More than two thirds of the translators are, however, still on temporary contracts, while the recruitment process is continuing.

The following table shows the current situation broken down by language.

Translators in place (Luxembourg and Field Offices) 1 April 2006

Dept	CS	ET	HU	LT	LV	MT	PL	SK	SL	Total
Number	46	60	53	64	53	30	58	55	54	473

Furthermore, DGT was entitled to recruit additional translators from the new Member States to serve as **seconded national experts** for fixed periods. There are now 8 staff as a result of the 2004 call. The new call of 2005 has yielded 7 confirmed applications.

The number of **support staff** (27) still falls short of the projected total of 126 by the end of 2006. Therefore, a new inter-institutional competition for support staff is planned for mid-2006. Similarly, recruitment of management staff is still ongoing.

DGT also outsources work to **freelance translators and translation agencies** selected by a call for tenders in 2003. There are some 200 contractors on its lists for the nine languages which joined in 2004.

The build-up of translation resources for the nine new languages is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2006.

Output:

The **total translation output of the DGT in 2005 was 1 324 231 pages**, taking all 20 official languages together.

As regards translation output in the nine languages during the first complete year of operation, the **total figure for 2005 was 455 232 pages**.¹ The output in each of these languages was around 52 700 pages, with the exception of Maltese, at about 33 500.² The statutory requirement that all EU law must be published in all 20 official languages in the Official Journal has been met starting from the date of accession, with the agreed exception of Maltese.

Demand management:

In May 2004 the Commission took practical steps, including introducing a demand-management strategy, to cope with the incorporation of nine new languages.

Firstly, Commission departments were instructed to produce **shorter documents**, with a standard length of not more than 15 pages for communications and explanatory texts (the pre-accession average was 37 pages). This measure was also introduced in order to improve communication with the citizens by making texts simpler.

Secondly, **priorities** for the documents to be translated were set. Top priority is given to those documents which the Commission has a legal obligation or a political commitment to translate. These are public messages to European citizens and companies, autonomous acts of the Commission, all proposals for legislation, and all merger, state aid and competition decisions.

In July 2005, after 15 months of operation, the demand-management strategy was reviewed in order to assess its functioning and to draw lessons especially with a view to the introduction of further official languages. The review demonstrated that the strategy had enabled the Commission to meet its legal obligations for translation under the Treaty. The Commission decided to **continue to apply the strategy** at least until the end of 2006 with **some adjustments**.

Quality assurance:

DGT uses a quality assurance system based on classifying documents by category. All translations that are intended for publication, whether done in-house or externally, are always revised. Translations requested for information or comprehension purposes only are revised if necessary.

Consistency in terminology is guaranteed by the use of translation memories and data bases of Community-relevant core terminology. For the EU-10 languages and the expected new languages, these resources began to be built up at the time of translating the *acquis communautaire*. Before and since enlargement, development work has continued with the support of DGT.

¹ A standard page for Commission purposes is defined as 1500 characters not including spaces.

² On 1 May 2004 the Council adopted, **at the request of the Maltese authorities**, a **derogation** by which for a period of three years, beginning on 1 May 2004, the European Union does not have to publish all legislative acts in Maltese in the EU Official Journal.

Training:

DGT's training policy with regard to enlargement is twofold. DGT offers training to its own staff to create capacity to translate from the new languages into the current EU languages. For example, training in the EU-10 languages started as early as 1998. In April 2006, **88** translators from different existing language departments were studying these languages; **111** had already reached full proficiency and were operational in these languages. In addition, **79** translators have started training in Bulgarian, Romanian, Croatian and Turkish to prepare for the next enlargements. To date, **27** have reached full proficiency.

For the translators recruited from the new Member States, DGT provides training in the most widely used languages (typically English or French), in the information technology environment and translation tools of DGT and in the subject matters dealt with by the Commission.

4. How is the European Commission preparing for the arrival of new languages?

Bulgarian and Romanian:

DGT has set up a **Task Force for "Enlargement 2007"** to ensure that the arrival of Bulgarian and Romanian is well prepared.

In February 2005, DGT had meetings in Bucharest and Sofia to **discuss the linguistic preparations** with the national authorities, the translation coordination units responsible for translating the *acquis communautaire* into Romanian and Bulgarian up to the date of accession, and with the universities which train professional translators and the professional associations of linguists.

Field Offices for translation were opened in the Commission Delegations in Bucharest and Sofia in 2005.

In January 2006, the first **20 Romanian and 16 Bulgarian translators** arrived, recruited by DGT as contract staff to prepare the translation infrastructure and tools. **The final target figure is to recruit 60 translators per language.** The objective is to provide the same level of service for those languages from the date of accession as will, by then, be provided for the nine languages introduced in 2004.

An **inter-institutional recruitment competition** for permanent officials was published in November 2005. The written tests are due at the end of July, and the reserve list is expected to be available in January 2007.

As the result of a selection procedure for **support staff**, a reserve list of 8 Romanian and 8 Bulgarian assistants has been established. Recruitment from these lists is expected by the end of 2006.

Irish:

Irish was granted the status of an official EU language by a Council Regulation adopted in June 2005. Translation into and from Irish will start in practice on 1 January 2007, when the Regulation comes into force. However, due to a **derogation** similar to the one requested by the Maltese authorities, not all acts will be translated into Irish for a transition period of five years. **Only the regulations adopted jointly by the European Parliament and the Council and correspondence from and to the citizens will be translated.**

DGT has established an **Irish language translation unit.** An inter-institutional **recruitment competition** will be launched by summer 2006.

Spanish regional languages:

In December 2005, the Commission concluded an administrative arrangement with Spain on the use of Basque, Catalan and Galician in the Commission. The arrangement is based on the conclusions adopted by the Council in June 2005 allowing the use in the EU institutions of regional languages which have the status of official languages on part of the territory of a Member State. The **Spanish government has designated a body** for translation from these three languages into Spanish and vice versa.

5. How much of the *acquis communautaire* remains to be translated and what is the state of play?

The translation of the pre-accession *acquis* into **Bulgarian and Romanian** has been the responsibility of translation units in the countries concerned. Finalised texts checked by the Legal Services of the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament will be forwarded to the Office for Official Publications to be published in the Special Edition of the Official Journal as soon as they become available.

To date, an average of less than **50% of the documents** forming the *acquis* has been finalised in Bulgarian and Romanian.

Pending publication in the OJ, the finalised texts become available in electronic form in the EU's legal database Eur-Lex, as authenticated by the legal revisers in the Council and the Commission.

The primary legislation has been available in **Irish** since the country's accession in 1973. The responsibility of translating the rest of the *acquis* into Irish lies with the Irish government.

6. How much does translation cost to the EU budget?

In **2003**, before enlargement and with a population of 379 million, expenditure on translation by all the EU institutions came to **EUR 541 million** per year. Translation by DGT cost EUR 230 million. The corresponding cost to each citizen was EUR 1.45 (all institutions) and EUR 0.60 (Commission only) per year.

At the end of 2006, which marks the end of the transition period of the 2004 enlargement, with a population of 453 million, the cost of translation by all institutions, once they are operating at full speed, is forecast to be around **EUR 800 million** per year, including **EUR 300 million** for DGT. This represents a cost to each citizen of around EUR 1.76 and EUR 0.66 per year respectively.

The cost of translation includes salaries, social security, overheads, external translation and operating costs, but not the cost to the Member States of, among other things, the education and training of translators or the translation of the *acquis*.

With Irish becoming an operational official language, and Bulgaria and Romania joining the EU on **1 January 2007**, the cost of translation is expected to rise by **around EUR 30 million** for all institutions.

For more information :

http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/translation/index_en.htm

http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/lang/languages/index_en.html