



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2009 - 2014

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*Committee on Budgetary Control*

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**2011/2287(INI)**

2.5.2013

## **DRAFT REPORT**

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

Committee on Budgetary Control

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## 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: 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 '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 25 January 2013 entitled 'Preparing for Complexity – European Parliament in 2025'<sup>3</sup>,
  - having regard to Rule 48 of its Rules of Procedure,
  - having regard to the report of the Committee on Budgetary Control (A7-0000/2013),
- A. whereas multilingualism is one of the key features of the European Parliament, and of the Union as a whole, which respects cultural and linguistic diversity and ensures equal treatment of EU citizens with different origins and backgrounds;
- B. whereas multilingualism guarantees the right of citizens to communicate with the European Parliament, in any of the EU's official languages, thus enabling them to exercise their right of democratic scrutiny;
- C. whereas the linguistic services of the European Parliament facilitate communication, and, in so doing, make sure that Parliament remains open to all of Europe's citizens, ensuring ~~democracy~~ and transparency within the Union's unique multilingual structure based on 23 official languages;
- D. 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;

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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 / EP, Secretariat General, 9 April 2013 .

- E. 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 the European Parliament and therefore for the Union's citizens;
- F. whereas for the European Parliament's 2012 budget considerable savings were necessary to limit the growth of the European Parliament's budget to 1,9% compared to the previous year, including a reduction in the costs for interpretation services by ten million euro per 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 regard 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 out of all Languages spoken in plenary from September 2009 until February 2013 in Strasbourg and Brussels, 26979 minutes (29, 1%) of English was spoken, 12556 minutes (13, 6%) of German, 8841 minutes (9, 5%) of French, 109 minutes (0.1%) of Estonian and 195 (0,2%) of Maltese was spoken.
3. Notes that some multinational bodies, such as the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 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. Underlines however that the European Parliament is a directly elected political body, whose Members are elected independently of their respective language skills; reaffirms therefore the right of every Member to speak in the official language of their choice, as a key principle within the functioning of the European Parliament;
5. Notes that the practical implications of the use of official languages in the European Parliament is governed by 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, while based on the principle of "interpretation on demand" the implementation of full multilingualism in long term will be contingent on making the 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 assuring the best value for money for the European tax-

payer a critical analysis should permanently assess where and how efficiency can be improved and costs can be controlled or limited;

### *Efficient use of interpretation resources*

7. Takes note of the decision on 'Resource-efficient full multilingualism in interpretation' taken by the Parliament's Bureau in 2011 that increases the efficiency of interpretation services and reduces their costs through: 1. Parliament's delegation Travel, matching the needs with the financial and Human resources available 2. Priority to be given to interpretation for trilogues during Committee weeks 3. Committee meetings to be spread more evenly over the week 4. More stringent application of the duration of meetings in the evening ;
8. Welcomes the fact that the budgetary resources devoted to interpretation services in Parliament have as a result started to decrease; points out that in 2010 the budget outturn figure was EUR 54.990.000, in 2011 it was EUR 56.964.283 and in 2012 it currently stands at EUR 47.000.000, although the final out-turn for 2012 will not be known until 31.12.2013 and may be higher;
9. Notes that the estimate for the 2013 budget is EUR 58.000.000 for the interpretation DG, 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 for 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 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 the fact 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 (107.047.386 €) in 2011 to 97.793 (100.237.825€) in 2012, resulting in 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 by these late cancellations represent a considerable part of the overall interpretation budget: in 2011 EUR 4.350.000 (7,6 % of the interpretation budget) and in 2012 EUR 5.480.000 (11.9% of the interpretation budget) was spent on interpretation services made available but not used due to late requests or cancellations; calls on the Bureau to provide the Committee on Budgetary Control with a detailed analysis of the growing trend in late cancellations and to introduce a mechanism to increase awareness of the lost resources due to late cancellations and to significantly reduce the number and percentage of such cancellations;

15. Reiterates that, while maintaining a high standard of work, it is also necessary to achieve a more efficient use of language resources and to control their costs by looking at the overall workload for each language section and by 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 administration to make full and efficient use of the updated language profiles of Members when making language arrangements not only for committees, delegations and political groups in the places of work but also 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;
17. Recalls the proposal by the Secretary-General to introduce awareness-raising measures amongst users of interpretation services, including committees, delegations and political groups, and is of the opinion that future proposals should include virtual billing of users;
18. Calls on the administration to continue drawing up a list of interpretation facilities requested but not used at the end of each meeting by the head of the team of interpreters in agreement with the secretariat of the meeting; notes that a copy of that list should be forwarded to the secretariat of the meeting concerned;
19. Calls on the bureau to forward to the Commission Budgetary Control a report sent every six months by the interpretation and translation services to the bureau, on the use of language services for submission to the bureau; Notes that the report shall include an analysis of the language facilities provided in relation to the requests submitted by the users and of the costs incurred in the provision of these services.
20. 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 a review of the service should be held in order to look for ways to improve it;

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

21. Welcomes the efficiency gains and cost reductions achieved by the interpretation services in recent years, while maintaining an excellent quality of work; Emphasises the fact 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 the Parliament's permanent attention;
22. Believes that the Committee on budgetary control should be informed regularly about the development of costs of Parliament's services, including the interpretation service; demands that annual Code of Conduct report prepared by the interpretation services and sent to the Secretary-General should be made public to Members of the Committee;

23. Is of the opinion that situations in which interpretation into certain languages is offered without being used should be avoided where possible; stresses the need for measures to decrease the costs of unneeded interpretation at meetings and therefore requests 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;
24. Expects the Secretary-General to present by the end of the year a detailed analysis of the interpretation languages provided in all (working) group, committee and delegation meetings and the languages actually spoken in these meetings, as well as an overview of the derogations from the general interpretation rules taken by the bureau on 12 March 2012<sup>1</sup> requested by and provided to delegation visits;
25. Requests the Bureau to adopt by the end of the year a further decision on multi-lingualism, specifically dealing with possible scenario's for 'Interpretation on Demand' and the efficiency gains expected to be achieved as a result;
26. Regrets that the Court of Auditors has not provided a follow up to its report on interpretation expenditure incurred by the Parliament, the Commission and the Council since 2005;
27. Therefore asks the Court of Auditors to provide, within a reasonable time frame and at the latest by March 2014, a special report to Parliament on the interpretation and translation expenditure incurred by Parliament, the Commission and the Council that assesses the soundness of the financial management involved and brings up to date the findings observed in its Special Report No 5/2005; notes, furthermore, that this report could be annual and could be used for the annual discharge procedure; reiterates the fact that the report should provide information on whether the institutions involved have adequate tools and 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 are of high quality;
28. Further notes that this follow up report should effectively compare the cost efficiency of the interpretation services of the Parliament against the same services in the Council and the Commission, as well as, compare the actual costs of the three institutions interpretation services with those existing in the audit reference period;

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<sup>1</sup> it was decided specifically that whilst Delegations would continue to benefit from the full interpretation entitlement of up to 5 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.



29. Insists furthermore that the Parliament address with priority the considerable amount of late cancellations and invites the Bureau to present a detailed action plan to reduce such late cancellations;
30. Reiterates that inter-institutional cooperation is essential in order to exchange best practices that favour effectiveness and allow for savings; considers that interinstitutional cooperation should be improved as regards interpretation; requests that there should be a thorough review, with the priority being to improve the sharing of the available resources among all the institutions, as well as take concrete measures in the area of freelance interpretation;
31. Stresses the importance of software applications as management instruments and insists that more funding should be allocated for this purpose in next year's budget; notes that a higher level of efficiency can be obtained if the administrative services of the Parliament dispose of the right management information; regrets that certain DGs are still short in the software applications available despite the improvements in the IT sector from 2010 onwards;
32. Invites the Parliament to assess whether the considerable efficiency gains made within the area of interpretation can serve as an example for improvement within other DGs;

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33. 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 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

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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.

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>