

# Procedure file

Basic information	
INI - Own-initiative procedure	2007/2077(INI)
Procedure completed	
Court of Auditors' special report No 9/2006 on the translation expenditure incurred by the Commission, the Parliament and the Council	
Subject	
8.40.09 European officials, EU servants, staff regulations	
8.70.03 Budgetary control and discharge, implementation of the budget	

Key players			
European Parliament	Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
	<b>CONT</b> Budgetary Control	PPE-DE <a href="#">STUBB Alexander</a>	20/06/2006
European Commission	Commission DG <a href="#">Competition</a>	Commissioner KALLAS Siim	

Key events			
06/07/2006	Non-legislative basic document published	N6-0013/2007	Summary
26/04/2007	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
05/06/2007	Vote in committee		Summary
08/06/2007	Committee report tabled for plenary	<a href="#">A6-0215/2007</a>	
10/07/2007	Results of vote in Parliament		
10/07/2007	Decision by Parliament	<a href="#">T6-0315/2007</a>	Summary
10/07/2007	End of procedure in Parliament		

Technical information	
Procedure reference	2007/2077(INI)
Procedure type	INI - Own-initiative procedure
Procedure subtype	Initiative
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 54
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	CONT/6/48802

Documentation gateway					
Non-legislative basic document		<a href="#">N6-0013/2007</a> <a href="#">OJ C 284 21.11.2006, p. 0001</a>	06/07/2006	CofA	Summary
Amendments tabled in committee		<a href="#">PE388.606</a>	08/05/2007	EP	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		<a href="#">A6-0215/2007</a>	08/06/2007	EP	
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		<a href="#">T6-0315/2007</a>	10/07/2007	EP	Summary
Commission response to text adopted in plenary		<a href="#">SP(2007)4170</a>	29/08/2007	EC	
Commission response to text adopted in plenary		<a href="#">SP(2007)4733</a>	24/09/2007	EC	

## Court of Auditors' special report No 9/2006 on the translation expenditure incurred by the Commission, the Parliament and the Council

**PURPOSE:** to present Special Report 9/2006 from the Court of Auditors concerning translation expenditure incurred by the Commission, the Parliament and the Council.

**CONTENT:** the Court of Auditors carried out this audit in order to assess the extent to which the Commission, the Parliament and the Council manage their translation resources and expenditure efficiently and effectively. In particular, the Court addressed three questions:

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

The audit has shown that the institutions have adopted different approaches when responding to rising translation demand. Both the Commission and the Council have taken adequate measures to reduce the number of documents translated into all languages. A significant part of all translation requests is, however, not governed by the translation guidelines adopted by each institution, and none of the institutions has a clear and coherent procedure for requesting translations.

The three translation services audited generally manage to deliver translations into the EU-15 languages on time and with the required quality. However, in 2004 there were significant problems for the EU-10 languages.

With the exception of the Commission for 2002, none of the institutions had calculated their total translation cost or the average cost per page translated. A calculation made by the Court shows that in 2003 the full cost of translation was about EUR 100 million each for the Parliament and for the Council and EUR 215 million for the Commission. Following the increase in the number of languages after the May 2004 EU enlargement, the cost of translation has risen to approximately EUR 128 million for the Parliament, EUR 126 million for the Council and EUR 257 million for the Commission in 2005. The average cost per page in 2003 was EUR 150 at the Parliament and at the Commission, and EUR 254 at the Council. In 2005, the average cost per page rose to EUR 194 at the Commission and EUR 276 at the Council, but dropped to EUR 119 at the Parliament.

The report states that internal translation is more expensive than freelance translation, but comparison is difficult as texts translated externally are of a different nature and the quality of internal translation is recognised to be higher.

While the Commission and the Council have certainly been successful in reducing demand for translations into the EU-15 languages this has also resulted in overcapacity and below-average productivity. The Court, however, noted significant differences in the productivity and the outsourcing percentages of the different language units of the different institutions.

The Court considers that savings could be achieved by further increasing interinstitutional cooperation, in particular by ensuring that spare capacity in one institution is made available to other institutions in order to reduce their outsourcing to freelance translators. However, lack of forecasts and insufficient communication of available translation capacity make it difficult for the institutions to take full advantage of temporarily available capacity at other institutions.

The report highlights that while advanced IT tools are available at the audited translation services, they are not used in a consistent manner. At the Parliament the actual use of IT tools thus varies widely from one translation unit to another. The efficiency and the harmonisation of the translations could be improved by increased use of computer tools, better planning, stricter adherence to deadlines for requesting translations and closer supervision of outsourcing decisions in order to avoid the use of freelance translators while staff translators are available. Furthermore, consistent monitoring through the use of performance indicators and procedures for ensuring adequate management information should be implemented.

The Court's analysis of the nature and the timing of supply and demand shows that whereas all institutions face structural difficulties in providing a sufficient volume of translations of an acceptable quality into the EU-10 languages, there are clear differences as far as the EU-15 languages are concerned. English translators, for instance, face the highest workload of all languages at the Commission DGT, but the lowest at the Council and the Parliament. As Council and Parliament work with very short delivery deadlines and widely fluctuating demands, they also have temporary spare capacity during some periods.

The audit showed that translation needs in the EU-15 languages can generally be met. However, the accession of small countries has created a large increase in demand in small translation markets, where supply is rather limited. The difficulties encountered with the launching of EPSO competitions to select staff translators for the EU-10 languages have meant a shortage of translators from the new Member States. As a result, during the first year after enlargement, the institutions were not capable of satisfying translation needs for the new languages.

There is a current weakness in the current system of workload balancing that documents which are normally outsourced and translations into the EU-10 languages are excluded from the system. In addition, the institutions do not sufficiently inform each other of the spare capacity available and have no real incentive or obligation to accept a translation request just from another institution. In 2005, the Parliament and several Commission DGs outsourced a large number of pages of non-urgent documents in the same languages which could have been translated by another institution. Total payments of about EUR 11 million for freelance translations could thus have been avoided.

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The Committee on Budgetary Control adopted, unanimously, the initiative report by Mr. Alexander STUBB (EPP-ED, FI) on the translation expenditure incurred by the Commission, the Parliament and the Council. In doing so, the MEPs consider multilingualism to be a key feature of the EU, which highlights cultural and linguistic diversity and ensures equal treatment of EU citizens. They are of the opinion that the concept of "controlled full multilingualism" represents the only means of keeping the costs within acceptable budgetary limits, whilst maintaining equality among Members and citizens. However, this controlled multilingualism may have negative consequences. They regret that more and more documents or communications, in particular compromise amendments when put to the vote in committee or, for instance, annexes to reports, are submitted in one language only.

Cost of translations: the committee stresses that the total cost of all the linguistic services of the EU institutions ? translation and interpretation combined - represents merely 1 % of the total EU budget. In 2005, the volume of translations was 1 324 000 pages in the Commission (1 450 translators), 1 080 000 pages in the Parliament (550 translators) and 475 000 pages in the Council (660 translators). It is surprised that institutions have so far calculated neither their total translation costs, nor their costs per page; notes furthermore, that the European Court of Auditors (ECA) estimated the full cost of translation, in 2005, at EUR 511 million; EUR 257 million for the Commission; EUR 128 million for the Parliament and EUR 126 million for the Council; for the same year the average costs per page stood at EUR 196.3; EUR 194 for the Commission; EUR 119 for the and EUR 276 for the Council.

The committee welcomes the fact that the Commission and the Council have managed to limit the increase in translation volume after the EU-10 enlargement. It also notices that the prices it paid for freelance translators were on average 12 % higher than the prices paid by the Commission. The three institutions are called upon to establish clear and comparable cost parameters with a view to ascertaining both the total cost of translation and the price per page. It agrees on the principle that verbatim reports of proceedings in the plenary should be published as a multi-lingual document in which the statements of the speakers only appear in the original language of the statement, on the understanding that filmed versions of the debates, together with live interpretation into all the official languages be made available free of charge to the general public on demand on an appropriate technical platform and that only the original text is authoritative. It requests the Secretary-General to draw up a formal proposal implementing that decision of principle, which would include anti-abuse clauses and identify, if indicated, potential changes to the Rules of Procedure (e.g. Rule 173) and to other internal rules necessary to put the envisaged new approach into practice.

Quality of translations: although the committee welcomes the fact that the quality and timeliness of translations into the EU-15 languages is considered generally satisfactory, they remain concerned about the considerably lower quality of the EU-10 translations in some institutions in 2004, mainly caused by a lack of qualified translators. It calls on the Council, the Parliament's administration and the Commission, therefore, to report on measures taken to monitor and improve the quality of translations.

Procedures for managing translation demands: criticisms have made about the ambiguous procedures for requesting translations, and also unclear guidelines with regard to what documents must be and need not be translated. The committee recommends that greater use be made of documents that are limited in length and written summaries. Parliamentary committees and delegations are urged -whenever possible - to provide texts only in the languages of committee and delegation members and their substitutes. Additional language versions should be provided upon request. The report stresses the importance of committees, delegations and political groups in the drawing up of monthly translation forecasts and also points out that, in return, users should be informed of the costs incurred by their requests for translation.

Efficiency of the translation process: the committee believes that the institutions should develop qualitative and quantitative performance indicators with a view to facilitating the monitoring of translation processes for management purposes. It regrets that its translation service does not yet make systematic use of translation tools and calls on its management to take the necessary steps to ensure the systematic use of such tools, in particular translation memory systems (i. e. Euramis), in which the potential for re-use - and hence for qualitative gains - is high. The Parliament, the Council and the Commission are called upon to make efficient and effective use of the internal and external resources, such as data bases, computer-assisted translations, teleworking and outsourcing. Lastly, MEPs welcome the improving inter-institutional cooperation between the translation services of the different institutions, in particular the creation of a common terminology data base.

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The European Parliament adopted the resolution based on the initiative report by Mr. Alexander STUBB (EPP-ED, FI) on the translation expenditure incurred by the Commission, the Parliament and the Council. It accepted the recommendations made by the committee responsible on the following issues:

- Cost of translations: MEPs stress that the total cost of all the linguistic services of the EU institutions ? translation and interpretation combined - represents merely 1 % of the total EU budget. In 2005, the volume of translations was 1 324 000 pages in the Commission (1 450 translators), 1 080 000 pages in the Parliament (550 translators) and 475 000 pages in the Council (660 translators). It is surprised that institutions have so far calculated neither their total translation costs, nor their costs per page. The Parliament welcomes the fact that the Commission and the Council have managed to limit the increase in translation volume after the EU-10 enlargement. It also notices that the prices it paid for freelance translators were on average 12 % higher than the prices paid by the Commission. The three institutions are called upon to establish clear and comparable cost parameters with a view to ascertaining both the total cost of translation and the price per page. The Parliament agrees on the principle that verbatim reports of proceedings in the plenary should be published as a multi-lingual document in which the statements of the speakers only appear in the original

language of the statement., on the understanding that filmed versions of the debates, together with live interpretation into all the official languages be made available free of charge to the general public on demand on an appropriate technical platform and that only the original text is authoritative. It requests the Secretary-General to draw up a formal proposal implementing that decision of principle.

- Quality of translations: although the Parliament welcomes the fact that the quality and timeliness of translations into the EU-15 languages is considered generally satisfactory, they remain concerned about the considerably lower quality of the EU-10 translations in some institutions in 2004, mainly caused by a lack of qualified translators. It calls on the Council, the Parliament's administration and the Commission, therefore, to report on measures taken to monitor and improve the quality of translations.
- Procedures for managing translation demands: criticisms have been made about the ambiguous procedures for requesting translations, and also unclear guidelines with regard to what documents must be and need not be translated. The Parliament recommends that greater use be made of documents that are limited in length and written summaries. Parliamentary committees and delegations are urged - whenever possible - to provide texts only in the languages of committee and delegation members and their substitutes.
- Efficiency of the translation process: the institutions should develop qualitative and quantitative performance indicators with a view to facilitating the monitoring of translation processes for management purposes. Parliament regrets that its translation service does not yet make systematic use of translation tools and calls on its management to take the necessary steps to ensure the systematic use of such tools, in particular translation memory systems (i. e. Euramis), in which the potential for re-use - and hence for qualitative gains - is high. The Parliament, the Council and the Commission are called upon to make efficient and effective use of the internal and external resources, such as data bases, computer-assisted translations, teleworking and outsourcing. Lastly, MEPs welcome the improving inter-institutional cooperation between the translation services of the different institutions, in particular the creation of a common terminology data base.