Towards more efficient and cost effective interpreting in the European Parliament

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The Committee on Budgetary Control adopted the own-initiative report by Esther DE LANGE (EPP, NL) on a more efficient and cost effective interpretation framework in the European Parliament.

Members recall 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. They welcome, in this connection, the very high quality of Parliament's interpretation services, but believe that **ways of reducing the burden entailed by the complex structure of multilingualism and its considerable and increasing costs should be sought**.

Interpretation in the European Parliament: the report notes that 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, and the concept of '**controlled full multilingualism**' laid down in that Code maintains equality among Members and citizens.

The report 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.

Members welcome the fact that, as a result, the budgetary resources devoted to interpretation services in Parliament have started to decrease. 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. The report 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.

Although the implementation of 'resource-efficient full multilingualism' has led to considerable gains, Members note 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**.

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.

Proposed measures: Members insist 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.

The Bureau is called upon 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.

The Secretary-General is expected 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.

Members consider that the **Committee on Budgetary Control should be informed regularly** about changes in the cost of interpretation. 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.

Lastly, Members ask the **Court of Auditors** 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. This report should provide information on whether the institutions involved have adequate tools and procedures to ensure that: (i) the services provided do not exceed the real needs; (ii) all the services needed can be provided; (iii) the services are provided at the lowest possible cost; (iv) the services provided are of high quality.