Court of Auditors Special Report No 5/2005 on interpretation expenditure incurred by the Parliament, the Commission and the Council

2006/2001(INI) - 14/02/2006

The Council made the following conclusions:

- it welcomed the Court's special report on interpretation expenditure incurred by three institutions and considered it very useful as the audit covers the period of the accession of 10 new Member States, increasing the number of official and working languages to 21;

- it agreed that sound financial management in the field of interpretation involves providing cost-effective and high quality interpretation services where needed without, however, exceeding real requirements;

- it noted with satisfaction that the institutions have been successful in containing interpretation expenditure although the number of working languages has increased, but underlined nevertheless that an amount of EUR 24 million has been spent for interpretation services requested but not used because of meeting cancellations;

- it recommended that efforts be made by reducing late cancellations, last-minute meeting requests and unequal distribution of meetings over the course of the week and the year;

- further savings are possible through a better management of meetings, on-request linguistic arrangements, a review of the level of resources kept on standby, a further integration of computer services and interinstitutional cooperation between all institutions;

- it stressed the need to maintain the high quality of interpretation provided in the institutions while controlling costs, and invited all institutions to assess the quality of interpretation, including making inquiries of the final users;

- it agreed that procedures to avoid the provision of interpretation services exceeding real requirements are an absolute necessity for all institutions. Therefore, it encouraged them to apply one another's best practices in order to set up efficient systems in this respect, including forecasting the expected use of languages, monitoring actual use, maintenance of updated interpretation language profiles by users, keeping a list of interpretation facilities requested but not used and surveys to assess such cases;

- the European institutions do not only employ permanent staff interpreters whose working conditions, remunerations and reimbursement of expenses are governed by the Staff Regulations, but also freelance interpreters (AICs), governed by an agreement signed between the International Association of Conference Interpreters (IACI) and the three institutions, which affect the interpretation cost in different ways. The Council is in favour of the renegotiation of this agreement with the IACI aiming at reducing all elements of the costs;

- the policy of providing interpretation either by permanent staff or ACIs has to be examined carefully to have an appropriate availability of interpretation resources either local or non-local, permanent or freelance, taking into account the balance between permanent and freelance interpreters for working languages involving high travel expenses;

- it also stressed the importance of the availability of interpretation services in all languages and therefore, invited the Commission to ensure that sufficient competitions are organised on time.

Lastly, the Council asked for an independent evaluation concerning the possible costs and benefits of the creation of one single interinstitutional Office providing interpretation services to all EU institutions, compared with those achieved by an increased interinstitutional cooperation.