# 2005 discharge: EC general budget, European Parliament

2006/2071(DEC) - 08/02/2007

**Special Report 9/2006 from the Court of Auditors** concerns translation expenditure incurred by the Commission, the Parliament and the Council.

The objective of the audit was to assess the extent to which the Commission, the Parliament and the Council manage their translation resources and expenditure **efficiently and effectively**. The Court addressed three questions:

1. Is translation demands 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.

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. 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 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.

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.

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.

In 2005, the Parliament and several Commission DGs outsourced a similar 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.

The Court notes that while advanced IT tools are available at the audited translation services, they are not used in a consistent manner.

**Council conclusions**: following the reception of the Special Report 9/2006 on 15 September 2006, the Permanent Representatives Committee instructed the Budget Committee to examine it and draw the relevant conclusions. Following that examination, the Antici Group was tasked with examining certain language aspects of the draft conclusions. A special Council group (the Antici Group) highlighted the importance of **multilingualism** in order to better communicate with citizens and to take account of national parliaments was stressed in particular.

At the ECOFIN Council on 27 February 2007, the Council approved the conclusions on EU translation expenditure (refer to the Council conclusions for more details). It advocates inter-institutional cooperation being reinforced to all institutions in order to improve the efficiency and the procedures and to reduce the costs in the field of translations. These conclusions do not constitute a change of policy as regards translation.