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

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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.