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Mission

Why must we work in ALL official languages, instead of using just a couple as other international organisations do?

The **Directorate-General for Translation** (DGT) is one of the world's largest translation services. Its mission is to:

- meet the Commission's needs for translation and linguistic advice with respect to all types of written communication;
- support and strengthen multilingualism in the European Union; and
- help bring the Union's policies closer to its citizens.



The DGT works in all the official languages of the European Union and, as new countries join the EU, their languages are added to the number.

Why must we have such a complicated system, instead of using just a couple of languages as other international organisations do?

The answer lies in the very nature of the European Union, and in the Commission's role as 'guardian of the treaties' which provide the legal basis for the EU.

EU law is transposed into national law and must be observed by all EU citizens. For citizens and national courts to be able to read and understand EU law in their own language, it must be published in the official languages of all Member States.

But well before that point, proposals must be aired for the widest possible debate at all levels — European, national and local — in forms accessible to non-linguists and non-diplomats. Everyone in the Union is entitled to contribute to the discussion in the official language of his or her choice. It is a question of transparency and democracy.

This is why, right from the outset of that European project that evolved into the European Community and now the European Union, it was decided that the official languages would be those (initially four in number) of the Member States. This principle is enshrined in Regulation No 1 of 1958, which is amended each time a new country joins the EU to include its language or languages.

But legislation is not the whole story. The European Union institutions have to be as accessible and open as possible, to the general public as well as to government departments and official and unofficial interest groups of all kinds. The Commission sees it as its duty to foster a democratic culture in which individual, local, regional and national characteristics are respected and safeguarded.

This too is reflected in Articles 20 and 24 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which stipulates that the residents of the Member States have the right to communicate with EU staff in their own language.

Equal status for the official languages does not mean that all texts are translated into all the official languages.

A letter to an individual or an internal memo, for example, will be sent in only one language, which may or may not involve translation. A committee may decide to work in a limited number of languages until it produces a proposal for wider discussion, which must then be made available in all the official languages.



In the interests of cost-effectiveness, the Commission conducts its internal business in English, French and German, going fully multilingual only when it communicates with the other EU institutions, the Member States and the public.

As the EU grows, the practical difficulties of according equal status to all official languages also grow; but any approach that failed to respect all official languages would betray the very foundations of the EU's philosophy.

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Organisation

Within the language departments, translators specialise in translating documents about particular thematic areas.

For organisational purposes, the Directorate-General for Translation is divided along language lines, with a separate language department (or unit, as in the case of Irish) for each of the European Union's **23 official languages** (as at 2011). These departments make up the three translation directorates.

If more official languages are added in the future, the structure of the DGT will, of course, be adapted accordingly.

As well as translation proper, the individual **language departments** also take charge of terminology and documentation and are responsible for keeping linguistic standards high and consistent in the DGT's output in each of the official languages.

There are a **further three directorates** dealing with administrative issues and strategy, and providing support for translators.

Geographically, the DGT is split approximately half and half between Brussels and Luxembourg.

Except for the Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Hungarian, Slovenian, Maltese, Czech and Slovak language departments, whose staff are located only in Luxembourg, and the Irish unit, whose staff are in Brussels, all language departments are split between Brussels and Luxembourg.



How the Directorate-General for Translation works

Types of document

Translators do not handle only legislative texts. The range of texts to be translated is very wide:

- speeches and speaking notes,
- briefings and press releases,
- international agreements,
- policy statements,
- answers to written and oral parliamentary questions,
- technical studies,
- financial reports,
- minutes,
- internal administrative matters,
- staff information,
- scripts and captions for films and other promotional material,
- correspondence with ministries, firms, interest groups and individuals,
- all kinds of web pages and publications for opinion-formers and the general public, and much more besides.



Translators must be able to capture the register needed for each type of translation. On top of a perfect command of the target language, they need adaptability, discrimination and judgement, along with the ability to grasp varied and often complex issues.

Within the language departments, translators specialise in translating documents about particular thematic areas.



These thematic areas are as follows:

- external relations,
- employment and social affairs,
- education, culture and youth,
- internal market and services,
- energy and natural resources,
- maritime affairs and fisheries,
- research, science and technology,
- health and consumer protection,
- trade,
- information society and media,
- agriculture,
- justice and citizens' rights,
- regional policy,
- statistics,
- taxation and customs,
- the environment,
- entrepreneurship,
- transport,
- administration,
- competition,
- economic and financial affairs.

Quality

There are mechanisms to guarantee the quality of translated texts through revision, checking and supervision, and translators receive ongoing training and information.

It should also be noted that all external translations undergo systematic assessment with feedback given to translation providers. Consistency in terminology is guaranteed by, amongst other things, the use of translation memories and databases of core EU terminology.

One vital prerequisite for a good translation is a well-written original text. Clear, concise documents written to a high standard are essential to any public authority, especially a multilingual

organisation in which most of the writers are not working in their own languages.

Over recent years, English has replaced French as the principal drafting language in the Commission.

To make sure this material is up to the required standard, the DGT has an Editing Unit whose task is to correct and edit the language of original texts and to provide advice to authors and originating departments. This Editing Unit also provides drafting support for colleagues in other directorates-general, who, unlike the translators, often write in a language that is not their mother tongue.

For this reason, too, the DGT has run a number of campaigns to promote clear and concise writing in the Commission.

Staff numbers

The DGT currently has around 2 500 members of staff (translators as well as people with management, secretarial, communications, IT and training functions).

Pages

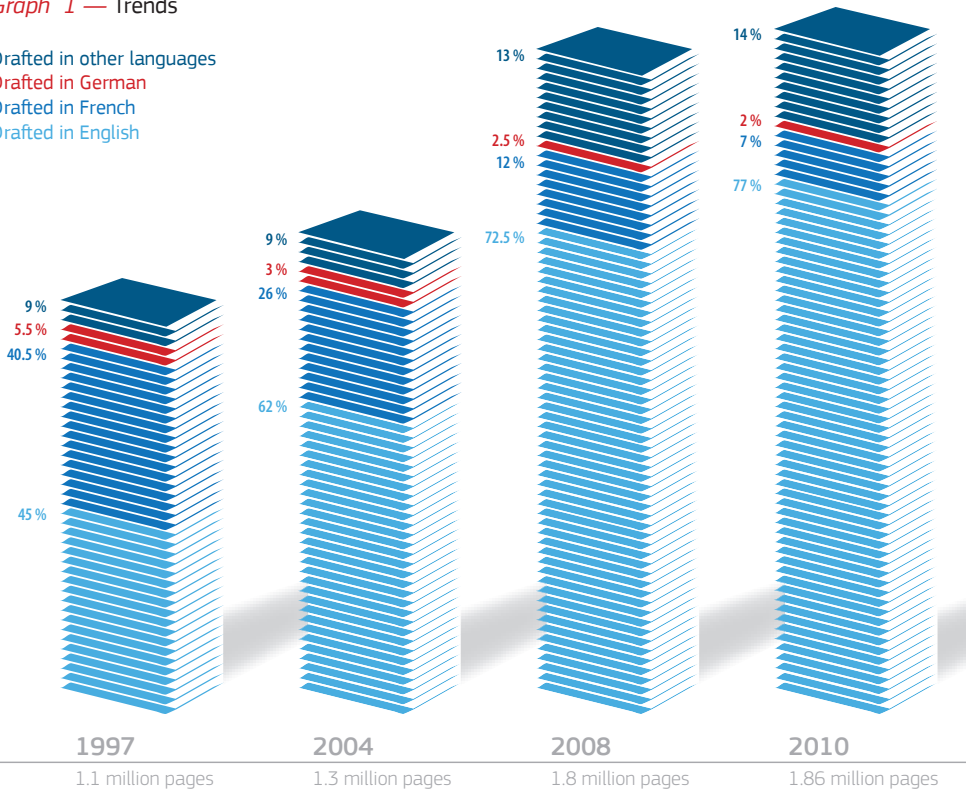
The last 10 years have seen a constant rise in the number of pages translated by the DGT.

The breakdown by source language (Graph 1) illustrates the trend towards drafting original texts in English.

In 1997, French and English were still on a par (including texts drafted outside the Commission). Now, more than 10 years on, most texts are drafted in English.

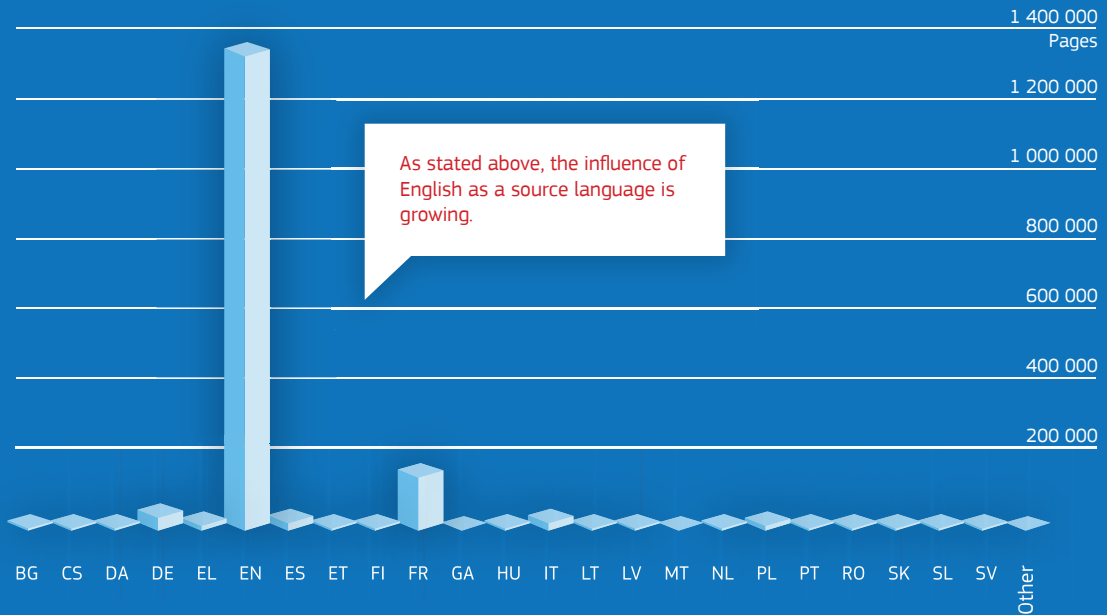
Graph 1 — Trends

Drafted in other languages
 Drafted in German
 Drafted in French
 Drafted in English

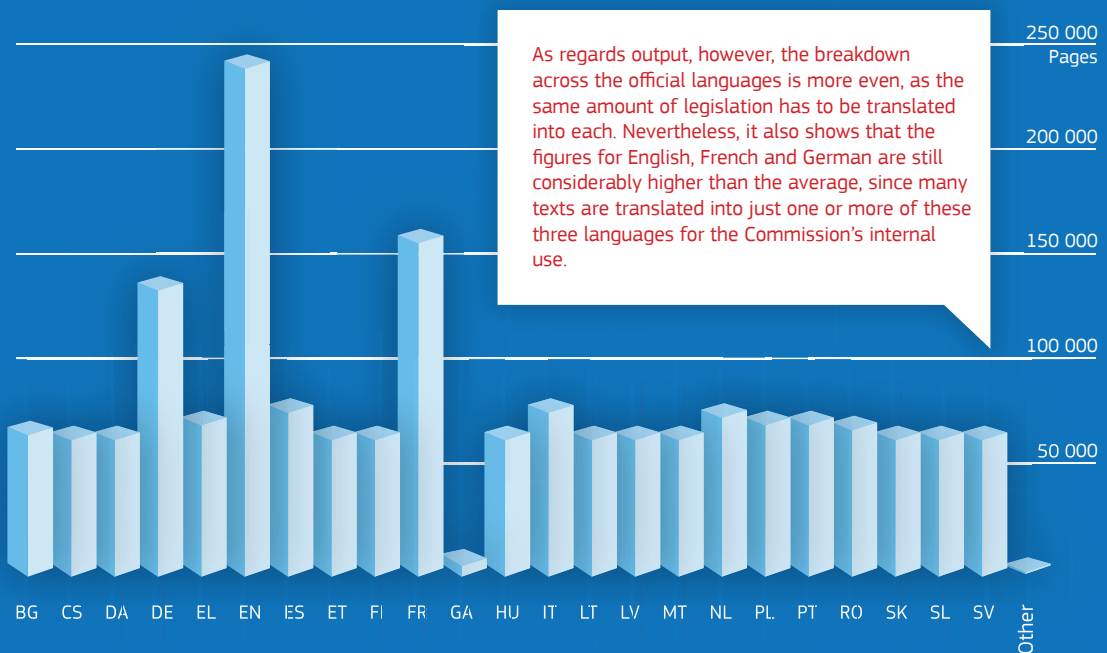




Graph 2 — Breakdown by source language — 2010



Graph 3 — Breakdown by target language — 2010



Web translation

The need for the Commission to communicate effectively with people via the web led to the creation of a Web Unit specialised in translating and editing web texts. The teams for the various languages work seamlessly and flexibly together, with the editing of originals interwoven with translation and revision to ensure a high quality.

The unit helps the various directorates-general of the Commission to write the top-level content on their websites,

using the different registers, formats and processing tools required for web content. As a pioneering group, its everyday work includes testing new tools and collaborating to develop the next generation of web authoring at the Commission.

In many cases, the unit collaborates closely with requesting departments in designing the website even before any content is created.



External translation

Political events can cause the volume of translation to rise and fall. Since these fluctuations are not always predictable and the DGT has a limited capacity, it regularly calls on external translation providers. At the moment, the proportion of pages being translated externally stands at almost 30 %.

The DGT has a dedicated computer system to manage external translation contracts and to process all requests for such translations. To ensure transparency, equal treatment and efficiency, all transactions with contractors are carried out via a web-based portal called eXtra.



Selection

The DGT periodically launches invitations to tender or calls for expressions of interest, which are published in the Official Journal and announced on the Europa website.

Tenders may be submitted by translation companies and individual freelance translators. The selected tenderers are entered in a ranking list according to the price and quality of their services. They conclude a framework contract with the European Commission without, however, receiving any guarantee as to the volume or frequency of work.

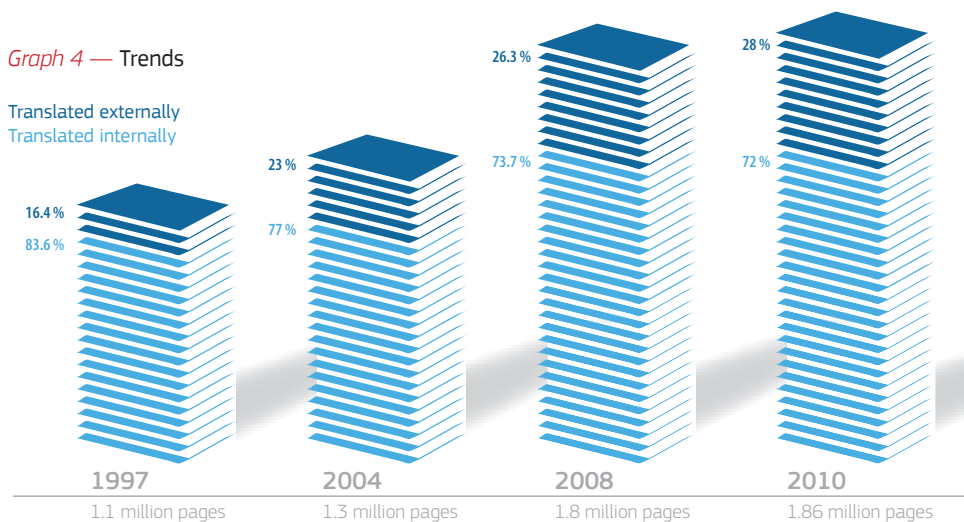
Support for external translators

As the Commission works in all the official languages of the European Union, translations often have to stand on their own as original documents. The quality required is therefore very high. To help them do their work as efficiently as possible, the DGT provides its external contractors with translation support in the form of background information and help with terminology.

Evaluation

Translations supplied by external contractors are checked for quality and evaluated by the requesting translating units. The ranking of contractors is regularly adjusted to take into account the evaluations given on all work they provide.

Graph 4 — Trends



Translation and workflow tools

Our translators have a wide range of electronic aids at their disposal for translation, some of which can also be accessed by other Commission officials and translators in the other EU institutions and bodies.

In addition, a number of workflow tools have been developed in order to manage the logistics of an operation producing almost 2 million pages a year and to monitor and document this production process. A summary of these tools is given below.

Translation tools

Translation memories

Since 1997, the translators have been able to use a computer application enabling them to create **local translation memories**. It is particularly useful for the translation of highly repetitive texts, since it allows the translators to search for identical or similar passages in other documents translated previously and to incorporate them as and how they wish into their own translations.



Since texts drafted in the Commission are often based on previous texts or existing legislation, reusing previously translated words or passages saves a considerable amount of time and makes for consistent terminology, which is very important in legislative texts.



Euramis

Euramis (European advanced multilingual information system) is a system developed at the Commission. It consists of a set of web applications combined with electronic mail to give access to a whole range of services in the area of language processing.

Euramis works on a common platform linking together all the DGT's translation aid systems.

One of the most important services is the **central translation memory**. Whenever a translation request is accepted, the original document is sent automatically to Euramis, and any previous translations are extracted from the central memory.

The result can be imported directly into a local memory. Once the translation has been completed, the translator uploads the local memory into the Euramis central translation memory.

Machine translation

The Commission has been using machine translation (MT) since 1976. The system it originally used offered 18 operational language pairs and could produce 2 000 pages of raw translation per hour. Since mid 2010, prototype MT systems have been developed based on more modern statistical MT technology. They are currently being tested and will be available for daily use in 2013. The service will also be available to staff in other EU institutions and to public administrations in the Member States. Depending on its length, the translation will usually be returned to the requester within minutes.

In the test phase, currently ongoing (2011), translators can use machine translation to obtain a rough draft translation which they then edit to the quality of a human translation. The machine translation is principally used to give a basic understanding of the text, but it also serves as a stop-gap when translations are required at very short notice. In the latter case, the raw machine translation should always be corrected. The corrections made can then be fed back to further improve the quality of machine translation.



The DGT library

The DGT has its own library, with branches at its two sites in Luxembourg and Brussels. Its aim is to help translators find the documentation and resources they require and to respond to their needs in this area.

The library's collection comprises:

- dictionaries, both specialist and general,
- reference works and encyclopaedias,
- periodicals and newspapers in all EU languages plus a few others,
- EU documents (the Official Journal, Court reports, the various reports issued by the Commission and the EU bulletins).

The library also has a large number of electronic dictionaries and other resources accessible via the DGT's intranet.

The DGT has also created a multilingual virtual library called 'MultiDoc', which contains documentation — not only about the European Union — in all the EU's official languages. This documentation takes the form of thousands of links to websites and databases maintained by universities, government departments, semi-official bodies and international organisations all over the world.

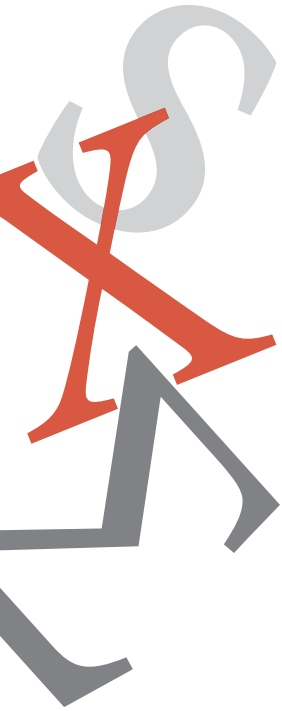


Terminology

Terminology work in the DGT falls under the responsibility of the 23 language departments, whose terminologists provide support for all the official languages of the European Union. This includes:

- answering requests from translators and other officials of the Commission and the other EU institutions for help with terminology;
- proactively preparing terminology for technically demanding dossiers prior to translation;
- cooperating with colleagues of terminology services in other EU institutions, as well as with national bodies and terminology organisations;
- feeding and consolidating IATE, the world's largest multilingual terminology database, which contains terminological data from all the EU institutions.

The terminology work is coordinated by a central body.



IATE

IATE (InterActive Terminology for Europe) is an interinstitutional terminology database that is available not only to staff of the European Commission, but also to the general public.

It combines terminological data from all the European institutions and bodies, containing more than **8 million terms** and **560 000 abbreviations**. It covers all the official languages of the EU plus Latin.

The development and maintenance of the database is the responsibility of an interinstitutional team, whereas its language-specific content is built up and updated by the language departments. The terminology contained covers all the fields of activity of the European institutions.

Sources of further information

All DGT staff have a PC workstation equipped with the usual range of office automation programs and access to the Internet.

Translators also have access to a number of internal and external databases via the

Commission's internal network and the Internet. The most widely used of these tools are **DGTVista** (the DGT's electronic documents archive, containing roughly 2 million documents in all the official languages) and **EUR-Lex**, the EU law database, which contains the EU treaties, all other EU legislation (e.g. directives and regulations), judgments of the European Court of Justice and legislative proposals.

Some of these tools are also accessible to the public via the EU's Internet portal, **Europa**, and are of particular interest to freelance translators.

Computerised workflow

To manage its workflow more effectively, the DGT has a set of instruments to keep track of a document from the moment it leaves the department requesting its translation right up to the time when the end-result is delivered in the desired languages.

Other instruments are used to monitor the production process over time and to produce a wide range of production-related statistics on a weekly, monthly and yearly basis.

Training

Since all the technical and policy areas of the Commission will sooner or later be reflected in the texts to be translated by the DGT, and since advances in computers play an ever greater role

in the work of translation, the DGT provides its own internal training as well as the opportunity to go on European Commission or external courses (such as language courses).

Open to the world

There is widespread interest in the EU's language policy, and the DGT receives many visitors who are curious to see how parity of status for 23 languages works in practice. Visitors come not only from EU Member States but from other parts of the world as well.

Visiting translator scheme (VTS)

The DGT operates a 'visiting translator' scheme (VTS) whereby DGT staff who know or are learning one of the EU's official languages can be sent, on official duty, to a university in a country where the language is spoken.

During the visit, which lasts a few weeks, they brief the teaching staff and students on the work of the DGT and its linguists and encourage graduates to apply for jobs with the translation services of the EU institutions. At the same time they improve their knowledge of the local language.

European Master's in Translation (EMT)

The EMT is a partnership project between the European Commission and higher education institutions offering master's-level translation programmes.

The main goal of this project is to establish a quality label for university translation programmes which meet agreed standards in education. University programmes must apply for this quality label and, if successful, become members of the EMT network.

The EMT aims to ensure that an increasing number of programmes are based on a valid, skills-orientated framework of competences. The EMT translator competence profile — drawn up with a group of prominent European experts — details the skills translators need to work successfully in today's market.

In the long run, the EMT sets out to enhance the status of the translation profession in the European Union.



Juvenes Translatores (JT)

In order to promote multilingualism and make young people aware of the

translating profession, the European Commission created the **Juvenes Translatores (JT)** translation contest.



In this contest, schoolchildren can try their hand at the translator's job and translate a page-long text from one of the 23 EU official languages into another official language of their choice. The winners from each Member State are then invited to Brussels to an award ceremony at the European Commission's headquarters.

The DGT field offices

To facilitate communication with the public, the DGT has set up field offices in the Member States. Its staff in these field offices are responsible for adapting the information communicated by the Commission in Brussels to the local context and the target audiences. They are also engaged in developing links with civil society and are thereby helping to put into practice the EU's policy of getting closer to its citizens.

Their main tasks are to organise exhibitions, congresses or similar events and take part in major seminars and workshops on language questions.

They also contribute significantly to the success of the Juvenes Translatores translation contest, the EMT project and the European Day of Languages (EDL).



In addition, they encourage translator-training institutions in the Member States to consider the DGT's requirements when designing their courses.

They also maintain contacts with professional associations of translators, and indeed all sectors of the language professions.

New Member States — new languages

The DGT has had to cope with several enlargements in the course of its history (as shown in the table in the next column).

Most of these new Member States brought with them new official languages.

To prepare for accession, each acceding country bringing in a new language sets up a unit under one of its ministries to translate the whole body of EU legislation into the national language.

During the period before accession, the DGT does its bit to smooth the integration of a new country by:

- providing technical assistance, training, professional advice and support for the national translation unit;
- setting up a field office and liaising with it in the country;
- prospecting and developing the freelance market in the country; and

1973	Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom
1981	Greece
1986	Spain and Portugal
1995	Austria, Finland and Sweden
2004	the Czech Republic, Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia
2007	Bulgaria and Romania

- encouraging and advising the universities there on the content of training courses for translators, thus helping to ensure that their graduates meet the present and future needs of the DGT and the language industry in general.

Every year, the DGT also hosts a number of trainees from future Member States.

Work opportunities

Translators working at the European Commission have the status of permanent staff, temporary staff or contract staff.

Selection procedures for permanent staff (officials)

Like other established staff at the Commission, translators are recruited by open competition. Competitions for translators at the Commission are always held to recruit staff with a particular main language.

The competition notices are published in the *Official Journal of the European Union* and, at the same time, in the press in the EU country or countries concerned and on the Internet. The EU institutions have delegated the recruitment procedure to an EU agency, the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO).

Translation competitions are generally held every 3 years or so for a given target language. They consist of:

- preselection tests done on computer (verbal and numerical reasoning);
- tests of translation into the main language;
- a multi-part test in an assessment centre.

The whole procedure takes an average of 5 to 9 months.

Successful candidates are placed on a **reserve list** that remains valid for a number of years. The validity of the lists may be extended, but getting a place on the reserve list is no guarantee of recruitment. As vacancies arise in the various translation units, they are filled by appointing candidates selected from the list whose personal profile matches the requirements of the post (qualifications, languages and specialised knowledge) and the DGT's needs.

General requirements

To enter an open competition for translators, you must:

- be a national of a European Union Member State;
- have graduated from a higher education establishment after at least 3 years' study (in languages, economics, law, science, etc.).

When new countries are due to join the EU, their nationals may apply to sit competitions to recruit translators into their languages before the countries join, but those who pass the tests will not be appointed to permanent posts until their countries have become EU Member States.



Since recruitment through the open competitions is at the basic grade within the career bracket, no professional experience is required.

However, experience of working in one or more of the European Union's spheres of activity (economics, law, administration, etc.) may be useful for a placement in a particular translation unit.

Candidates must have a perfect knowledge of the target language and demonstrate a thorough knowledge of at least two other official languages.

Knowledge of additional languages is an advantage. Except in special, well-defined circumstances, translators work exclusively into the language they regard as their main language, generally their mother tongue. For certain languages, however, an ability to translate out of the main language is regarded as an asset.

Temporary agents

There are specific selection procedures for temporary agents. The DGT publishes the relevant calls for expressions of interest.

Temporary contracts are signed with the successful applicants.

Contract agents

There are also specific selection procedures for contract agents.

Here, too, temporary contracts are signed with the successful applicants.



Traineeships

The DGT offers 5-month traineeships, in both Brussels and Luxembourg, for graduates of any nationality, EU or not, who wish to gain in-house professional translation experience after completing their studies.

The applicants selected for these traineeships are usually assigned to one of the translating units. They do the same work as their staff colleagues, translating into their main language from at least two other EU languages. Their work is revised by experienced senior staff. Some trainees are assigned to terminology work or to other translation-related tasks.

Trainee translators receive a monthly grant to cover living expenses.

The training periods at the European Commission run from 1 March and 1 October.

The deadlines for submitting applications are:

- 1 September for a traineeship starting in March, and
- 31 January for one starting in October.



More information on all these topics (such as a brochure on tools and workflow) can be found, together with contact details, at:

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/translation/index_en.htm

*Europe Direct is a service to help you find answers
to your questions about the European Union*

**Freephone number (*):
00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11**

(*) Certain mobile telephone operators do not allow access to 00 800 numbers or these calls may be billed.

More information on the European Union is available on the Internet (<http://europa.eu>).

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