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Translation as a strategy for multilingualism

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Stimate domnule comisar Orban,

Arvoisa pääjohtaja Lönnroth,

Mesdames, messieurs,

Cari colleghi e amici,

In its booklet entitled *Translation for a Multilingual Community*, published last year, the Directorate-General for Translation rightly traces its remit and current practice to the first ever Council regulation. The truly historic Regulation No 1 of 15 April 1958 confirmed the equality of the official state languages of the Member States and their status as official and working languages of the European institutions, especially with regard to the institutions' external communication. In practical terms, this meant, above all, three things. (i) Authorities and residents in Member States had the right to correspond with the institutions in any one of the official languages. (ii) Documents sent by the institutions to authorities and residents in a given Member State had to be drafted in the language of the State in question. (iii) "Regulations and other documents of general application" were to be drafted, and the Official Journal was to be published in all the official languages. This principle was retained at each accession.

While it is perfectly legitimate to regard Regulation No 1 as the origin of the Union's current policy, practices, and attitudes regarding multilingualism, the situation today is vastly different from that fifty years ago.

In its Final Report of September 2007, the Commission's High Level Group on Multilingualism described multilingualism as

- the co-existence of different language communities in one geographical or geo-political area or political entity; and
- the ability of societies, institutions, groups and individuals to engage, on a regular basis, with more than one language.

If we take this definition as a point of departure, we shall understand why and in what ways the situation today differs from that fifty years ago – what is new about current EU policy, about the language constellation in the EU, and about demands and

practices regarding interlingual communication in general, and translation in particular.

Regulation No 1 was revolutionary in that it said farewell to linguistic hegemony. The nation-state, as a rule, adhered to and promoted the principle of one official language - to the extent that certain states claimed that their own specific language was superior to others. The supra-national European Communities, to which Member States voluntarily transferred part of their sovereignty, could only function properly if the regulations adopted by the Communities could be understood in the Member States. Hence, it was absolutely necessary that a small language like Dutch enjoyed the same status as large languages such as German or French. What all this meant was that the institutions had to adopt and operate a multilingual regime, and in order to do so they had to set up translation and interpretation services. The Member States themselves continued to be seen and treated – and probably saw themselves - as monolingual entities and societies, or as – in the case of Belgium - being comprised of monolingual regions. (Of course, Luxembourg must even back then have been a special case.) At the beginning of the European project, multilingualism was limited to the language regime put in place for and executed by the institutions.

Where are we now?

Leaving language mediation at EU level and the EU's communication with citizens aside for a moment, the current state of affairs and current trends can be described as follows.

The **European Union** - notably the Commission and the Parliament - regards the Union's **diversity of languages** as a value in its own right – a source of wealth -, which should be maintained and promoted. Respect for linguistic diversity is considered a core value of the Union. The Commission recognises that language is an expression of culture, and a crucial aspect of a person's identity. Unlike in the nineties, when it propagated an exclusive policy on multilingualism, limiting it to the EU's official languages, the Commission now follows an inclusive policy, which also recognises the EU's regional languages, languages spoken by migrant communities, and major world languages relevant to the Union.

The main thrust of this policy is directed at language learning. In line with the Conclusions of the Barcelona Council of March 2002, the Commission has set itself the objective to increase individual multilingualism “until every citizen has practical skills in at least two languages in addition to his or her mother tongue”.

Language learning and the ability to communicate in a number of languages are regarded as being beneficial to both the individual citizen and the European project as a whole. Individual multilingualism is thought to stimulate openness to and interest in other people's cultures and outlooks, to improve cognitive skills, and to enable people to exercise their right as EU citizens to work or study in other Member States. It is also considered to be of special importance to economic growth, competitiveness and social cohesion.

Following the Maastricht Treaty and the Lisbon Council, multilingualism is no longer solely or even primarily a matter for the EU's language services – multilingualism has moved from a European level to societies and residents in the Member States, or, to

put it differently, multilingualism now extends from the institution's language regime to the promotion of societal and individual multilingualism.

Of course, the EU's current language policy not only reflects milestones in European integration and policy formulation; it must also be seen as a response to developments in our societies and economies triggered by EU policies, as well as to more general developments.

The High Level Group identified a number of recent and current developments in and around the Union and in Member State societies which are of direct relevance to the issue of multilingualism:

- the EU enlargements of 2004 and 2007;
- increasing recognition and seizure, by individuals and organisations, of opportunities provided by the Single Market, notably increasing intra-European trade and mobility of workers;
- globalisation and internationalisation in many fields of human activity;
- a revitalisation of regions within Member States, and of cross-border regions;
- migration into the Union – to the extent that practically all the Member States are now migration countries;
- rampant developments in ICT, facilitating, among other things, instant communication from practically any place in the world to any other;
- creation of a European higher education and research area, including increasing student mobility, and an internationalisation of universities and research institutes;
- the advent of knowledge-based economies.

As a result of some of these developments, the linguistic landscape of the Union and of Europe as a whole has changed dramatically, and these changes continue. The number of official languages has more than doubled since 2004. Many Member States are now host to large communities of speakers of other EU languages, just as there are migrant language communities in all the Member States. The workforces of enterprises and the student bodies of universities across Europe are becoming increasingly multilingual. When I walk down the main corridor of the building which houses my Language Centre, I occasionally hear some German spoken. Regional and minority languages have experienced a remarkable revival. Overall, the number of languages spoken in Europe has increased beyond what anyone could have imagined only ten years ago. No fewer than 450 languages are now spoken in Europe. In other words, all the Member States have become multilingual and multicultural societies.

In view of these developments, the High Level Group came to the conclusion that the multilingual challenge the Union is confronted with has reached a completely new dimension – in terms of size, complexity, and policy relevance.

What is also clear is that the CLNS formula – one culture-one language-one nation-one state – is definitely a thing of the past. French young people are flocking to Berlin – not because they are attracted by Germany or German culture, but because they see Berlin as an exciting, vibrant multicultural metropolis, situated at the heart of Europe.

There is also clear evidence of changing patterns in language learning and language use. According to Eurobarometer, 50% of EU citizens can hold a conversation in at least one language other than their first language. English has been further gaining ground as a means of non-mediated intra-European and international communication. It has become the no. 1 foreign school language; 90% of all pupils in secondary education in the EU are now learning English.

Of course, there are considerable differences between Member States, regions within Member States, social groups, and age groups. Moreover, we are far from having a precise picture of citizens' language competences and of language use at different levels in the whole range of social, professional, political, economic and cultural contexts. Still, authorities in a number of Member States seem to believe that their societies have become bilingual, meaning that their citizens are able to function both in the official language and in English.

How does language mediation in general, and translation in particular fit into this new scenario of multilingualism?

In our latest Thematic Network projects in the area of languages, we addressed the question as to which languages and language-related skills and competences are today required by the language industries and for language professions other than teaching, testing, and certification. In seeking to identify changing and emerging new needs, we started off by looking at recent developments in the market. To this end, we prepared and synthesised national reports, conducted a Europe-wide online consultation among employers and graduates, and talked to employers, professional organisations, and graduates at three major European and four regional conferences.

As was to be expected, the picture varies considerably from country to country. However, we were able to identify some general trends.

There is clear evidence that the demand for language services has not diminished, but is, in fact, growing. Of course, we do not have any exact figures for freelance translators in the Union. However, overall, there are now more specialized language service companies in operation across Europe than ever before. This expansion of the language service sector is accompanied by a diversification of the market – of language mediation activities and products.

The growth and diversification of the language service sector is due to a variety of factors, among them some of the developments which I sketched before, such as increasing intra-European and international trade, globalisation, mobility, and migration. Moreover, the following factors seem to be particularly noteworthy.

- Multilingual technical documentation has resulted in the production of an increased amount of mediated text. This increase in volume has, however, only been possible because of significant productivity increases facilitated by the use of language engineering tools.
- These technology-driven changes have given rise to a range of new tasks and activities, including multimedia translation and localisation, multimedia content authoring and editing, and multimedia content management. As a result of these changes, traditional professional ring-fences are disappearing. Graduates trained as translators or linguists are frequently expected to take on

a whole range of multifaceted tasks, some of which require skills that go well beyond language expertise, such as database or project management. Also, as a result of outsourcing and the use of machine translation, the emphasis is, in many cases, shifting from translation proper to revision and editing.

Another growth factor is the increased demand for translation from and into so-called new languages. We were told, for example, that in Portugal language companies have to provide translation for such languages as Bulgarian, Czech, Polish, Mandarin Chinese, and Hindi.

What also became clear through our consultations was that there is a shortage of translators for certain languages. In other words, there is a direct link between language learning and professional translation. Learning English is fine – but in addition, we need diversified provision in our education systems, and we need higher education institutions that recognise their responsibility for lifelong language learning. Of course, we also need young people who are motivated to learn languages and to continue learning languages through upper secondary education and beyond.

This is why the High Level Group urged that ways be found of motivating young people to learn foreign languages to advanced levels. This is why it called on the Commission to encourage the launch of projects for the learning of major non-European languages to levels required of language professionals.

Clearly, language learning and language mediation are not alternative, but complementary and interrelated strategies for multilingualism.

The issue of language competence is just one indication of how important the human factor in translation is and will continue to be. I think it is fair to say that world wide, the supply of qualified graduates is not keeping up with demand. The shortage of translators is aggravated by the fact that very soon a whole generation of translators will be entering retirement. If I am not entirely mistaken, the issue of succession planning is an increasing concern for the organisations, and I strongly suspect that the Universities represented here today will be keenly interested too.

When I referred to some of the reasons for the growth of, and the growing demand for language services, I did not mention an important political growth factor: the revitalisation of the regions and the expansion of national and regional language policies, for instance in Spain and the United Kingdom. There are, however, clear indications that neither public authorities and institutions nor private enterprises are always fully aware of their need for professional language services and language professionals. In the recent German Initiative for Excellence, universities were invited to submit applications for graduate schools, clusters of excellence and institutional initiatives for internationalisation – in English. You may well ask yourselves, why in English? Be that as it may, one of the proposals submitted, anchored in the humanities, referred to the *ghost sciences*. Universities which want to become major international players would be well advised to invest in professional language support, either by hiring language professionals or by availing themselves of the services of language companies.

The High Level Group made a number of recommendations for new initiatives in translation, and in language mediation in general.

Encouraged by our Commissioner's speech at last year's SCIC-Universities Conference, the Group called on national, regional, and local authorities in Member States to ensure the provision of professional translation and interpretation for mobile workers, migrants, and other language communities in their societies – in courts, hospitals, and for contacts with the public sector in general. The Group also called on the Commission to encourage the launch of European projects for the joint development of higher education programmes in legal and court, and in community translation and interpreting.

Finally, the Group called for the launch of a European research project for the identification of "new needs in language mediation in a changing multilingual environment". The project would seek to identify new needs at different levels and in different sectors and contexts resulting from the developments I referred to earlier.

Translation – including interpreting – is no doubt an important strategy for fostering social cohesion in Member States' multilingual and multicultural societies. Translation could and should also play a more prominent role in stimulating interest among EU citizens in the languages, cultures and political agendas of other Member States. In this context, the High Level Group expressed itself in favour of an increased sub-titling of television programmes. It also felt it worth considering how the fact that national TV programmes can be received via satellite across Europe can be exploited for the dissemination of EU languages and cultures. It would be ideal, for example, if select programmes were broadcast by national or regional companies with sub-titling available in a number of EU languages.

In discussing new trends and needs in translation, the High Level Group never lost sight of the fact that languages are more than a mere means of communication. It expressed its firm conviction that each language deserves to be seen and treated as a language of culture – on account of its semantic and grammatical peculiarities, and on account of literary and other works written in this language.

Looked at from this angle, translation is an indispensable means of enabling Europeans to read cultural products written in European languages they do not understand. The Group felt that more should be done to encourage the translation of such works. It suggested the creation of a European translation observatory, which would, among other things, seek to create synergies between different public and private actors, and to promote the publication of bilingual editions.

Furthermore, the Group recommended that the EU should establish a translation award for outstanding achievements in literary and non-literary translation.

I began my presentation by reminding you of Regulation No. 1, the cradle of the EU's policy on multilingualism. It is only right and fair that I should devote the final part of my presentation to the work done by the Directorate-General for Translation, DGT.

DGT and DG SCIC are in an unenviable position. Since the run-up to the 2004 enlargement, they have been confronted with repeated demands from Member State politicians, from journalists, and, I am sorry to say, even from academics to simplify the language regime. There is talk of mushrooming or spiralling costs, and of a need to reduce the costs of multilingualism. Only three weeks ago, Director-General

Lönnroth felt obliged to defend the EU's language regime yet again at a debate organised by a Brussels-based think tank.

At the same time, leading advocates of regional and minority languages have for some time now been calling for a change in the EU's language regime, whereby regional languages that enjoy official status in Member States would achieve the status of official EU languages.

And finally there are those who suggest that multilingualism should be replaced with trilingualism.

It would, of course, be very easy to simply refute all these calls for change by pointing out that any change in the language regime installed through Regulation No 1 requires a unanimous vote of the Council – something that is highly unlikely ever to happen.

Like the Director-General, I think, however, that it is sound policy to explain why there is no alternative to Regulation No 1.

- I hope that no one will ever seriously suggest that EU legal texts should be made available in one or a limited number of languages only. It is easy to imagine what the consequence would be: not unity in diversity, but chaos out of uniformity.
- Admittedly, there is now an élite of biliterate or multiliterate people - limited in number -, who, because of their family background or an exceptional education or both, have a high level of competence in a number of languages, normally including English. There are also an increasingly large number of people across Europe who can carry out demanding tasks in English – but I know from our projects that these people are apt to misunderstand key phrases even in English texts from their own academic fields. I may be wrong, but I happen to believe that it will take ages until every EU citizen is competent enough to read all the texts coming out of Brussels in English. I also happen to believe that what is particularly important – and will remain so for quite some time – is that (i) citizens and corporate entities come to realise that texts coming out of Brussels are directly relevant to them, to their rights, responsibilities, and duties, and that (ii) migrants and other speakers of non-official languages resident in Member States are enabled to access EU texts directly relevant to them.
- Of course, as proficiency in and the use of English become even more common, the Union's translation services will have to exercise their responsibility for regular reviews of their demand management strategies. How difficult decisions of this kind are is shown by a story I was told by a French colleague of mine, whose project proposal submitted under the Lifelong Learning Programme had been successful. He had to translate a section of the "Administrative and Financial Rules for cooperation projects", available in English only, for his registrar, whose English is not bad, but not good enough for this kind of text. And yet the text is important, in that it spells out the duties and responsibilities of contracting institutions. I leave it to you to draw your conclusions from this.
- The working modes introduced and the tools developed by DGT in anticipation of and in response to the increase from 11 to 23 official languages are

impressive. The High Level Group made the point that these changes must not result in a decline in quality. Any decline in quality would automatically give rise to critical comments from those very people who want to destroy the regime. Quality must take priority over quantity. At the same time, Member States have to understand that quality has its price.

- The High Level Group expressed the view that the creation of a portfolio for multilingualism and the appointment of a Commissioner for multilingualism highlight the horizontal nature of the issue of multilingualism. Multilingualism is relevant to a wide range of policy areas, especially policy areas at the heart of the Lisbon agenda. In a similar way, the policy fields DGT has to cover have expanded, as the Communities developed into a Union. DGT has a major role in maintaining all these domains in smaller EU languages, for example through updating terminology. This is also relevant to the big languages, though. A couple of years ago, I was invited to present the EU's policy on multilingualism at a conference organised by the Swiss Academy of Humanities and Social Sciences – in German. Without DGT's translations of key documents, I would have been lost. In other words, DGT sees to it that policies and developments at EU level find proper expression in all the official languages; it thereby makes a major contribution to the vitality of our languages.
- The High Level Group also reviewed efforts made by the Commission in the wake of the French “non” and the Dutch “nee” to improve communication with the citizen through novel means such as multilingual internet chats, multilingual web-streaming of European events, and web translation. The Group was convinced that improvements in communication with citizens are not just a matter of coping with multilingualism or of employing novel forms of communications technology. What is at least as important is that the Commission must speak and write a language that citizens can understand. For this, we need specialists in multilingual communication.

I am not an expert in the history of translation and of the translation profession. I am convinced, however, that DGT has written translation history – and will continue to do so. DGT has developed multilingual translation to an unprecedented level – in terms of the number of languages and language combinations, the methods and tools used, and the wide range of domains and text types covered. It has also given rise to the profile of the multilingual translator – a professional with one or two A languages, one or two B languages, and an increasing number of C languages, who can carry out a variety of mediation tasks and is familiar with the latest language engineering tools. As an academic, I can only say “chapeau”.

It is probably also fair to say that DGT, through its practices and advice, has done a lot in the past to encourage higher education institutions to adapt their programmes to professional needs, and, more generally, to enhance the status and prestige of translation studies.

In view of the specific professional profile developed by DGT, it is more than understandable that it decided to launch the EMT project. I am saying this as someone who was instrumental in the preparation and launch of the project for the development of EMCI. The Member States and higher education institutions in the Member States are and must remain responsible for the training of the highly qualified translators required in EU institutions and bodies, but for adjusting existing

and developing new training programmes they depend on DGT's advice and assistance.

It is not for me to comment on DGT's "Outline of the proposed EMT programme". I am confident that the launch of EMT will be another milestone in the history of translation. I note that later this morning Yves Gambier will be talking about competences required of EMT graduates. I think this is the right approach – an approach developed and promoted by the Tuning project, which can be summarised as follows:

Higher education programmes have to meet identified and agreed needs. They have to develop a well described professional and academic profile or profiles. The profile or profiles have to be reflected by the learning outcomes of the programme in question, expressed in terms of competences. Competences represent a dynamic combination of knowledge, understanding, skills and abilities. The set competences of a given programme have to be matched by appropriate approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment.

In all this, we have to make sure that our graduates acquire strategies for lifelong learning. The market and the profession have undergone dramatic changes in recent years – without any doubt, we are going to see further changes in years to come. With more states knocking on the door of the EU, the number of official languages is bound to increase further. University cooperation within EMT will allow participating institutions to offer a wider range of languages and language combinations.

The members of the High Level Group needed no convincing that translation constitutes an indispensable strategy for multilingualism. Translation is of vital importance to the functioning of a multilingual Union open to the world. Group members were further convinced that the fact that the multilingual challenge has reached a completely new dimension has given and will give rise to a number of new issues in translation and interpreting that require concerted action. Because of this, the Group urged the Commission to call a meeting of leading experts from higher education, pertinent institutions and organisations, and Member State authorities to consider what issues regarding translation, interpretation and multilingual communication need to be addressed at European level, and how this could best be done.

Without any doubt, translation is more important today as a strategy for multilingualism than ever before. This is why we have to find a way or ways of making sure that all concerned are fully aware of changing and emerging new needs and take appropriate action within their specific areas of responsibility.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION.