

EULITA - European Legal Interpreters and Translators Association

Liese Katschinka, President of EULITA

EULITA was founded in November 2009 at a conference in Antwerp, Belgium which was attended by 300 participants from some 30 countries and high-level officials of the European Union. This marked the end of a two-year project under the EU's Criminal Justice Program in which 3 associations of professional legal interpreters and translators, 3 universities training legal interpreters and translators and 2 experts (FIT, AIIC) cooperated to prepare the foundation of a European association of legal interpreters and translators.

Why a European Legal Interpreters and Translators Association?

First, a brief historical overview:

- 1) The Council of Europe adopted the European Human Rights Convention in the 1950s; its Article 6 stipulated the right to free assistance of an interpreter, in order to ensure a fair trial. This provision was invoked in many landmark decisions by the Human Rights Court in Strasbourg.
- 2) The EU launched the process for the protection of procedural safeguards in criminal proceedings with a consultation paper in January and February 2002, followed by a questionnaire to member states, a hearing, and an expert meeting.
- 3) In 2004 the EU published a "Proposal for a Council Framework Decision on Certain Procedural Rights in Criminal Proceedings throughout the EU", where 5 articles dealt with legal interpreting and translation. This was followed by lengthy negotiations. However, EU member states were unable to reach an agreement; the project was abandoned in 2007.
- 4) With the Stockholm Roadmap the EU pursued a "Salami tactic", i.e. it drafted a new proposal for a framework decision which only dealt with the right to interpretation and translation. The framework decision was adopted by member states in 2009, but the Lisbon Treaty went into force on 1 Dec. 2009, which meant that the European Parliament had no time to endorse the framework decision.
- 5) The Framework Decision had been accompanied by a Council Recommendation on its implementation ("Best Practice" recommendation), i.e. a "soft law", based on the final report of the Reflection Forum on the Training of Interpreters under the auspices of DG Multilingualism.
- 6) The EU Directive on the right to interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings was the next and – so far – final step in this development. It was adopted in October 2010

Where does EULITA fit into the picture?

The EU Justice Forum was set up in 2008 to involve the stakeholders in judicial processes in the negotiations and drafting of EU legislation. Legal interpreters and translators were also invited to join, in addition to judges, prosecutors, lawyers, etc. They were initially represented by the FIT Committee for Court Interpreting and Legal Translation on a temporary basis, because DG Justice urged the establishment of a European association → hence EULITA was founded.

Who are the EULITA members?

- full members → professional associations
- associate members → universities, organizations, individual persons

What is the EULITA structure?

- General Assembly (full members have the right to vote))
- Executive Committee (President, 2 Vice-Presidents, Secretary, Treasurer, 2 Members)

Current status

- The first general assembly was held in Hannover, Germany, on 27 March 2011
- The transitional Executive Committee was confirmed in its position
- EULITA has currently 17 full members (national and/or regional associations of legal interpreters and translators) and 33 associate members (university departments, organisations, individuals) in 19 EU countries and 5 other European and overseas countries.

What has been achieved to date?

The **Final Report of Reflection Forum on Multilingualism and Interpreter Training**, which served as a basis for the Council Recommendation (“soft law”) was translated into German and French. It is the background paper for the transposition/implementation of EU Directive on the right to interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings.

The ECBA (European Criminal Bar Association) and EULITA developed a **Vademecum**, i.e. a list of guidelines for more effective communication between legal interpreters and translators and other judicial stakeholders.

EU funding has been obtained for the **TRAFUT**” (Training for the Future) project, in the course of which EULITA and Lessius University College will organize 4 regional workshops. This will be EULITA’s contribution to the implementation of EU Directive on the right to interpretation and translation.

Brief overview of the main points of the EU Directive:

- right to interpretation and translation services (Articles 2, 3)
- the services by legal interpreters and translators must be of a good quality (defendants have the right to complain)
- registers of legal interpreters and translators must be made available to courts and judicial stakeholders (Article 5)
- training of other stakeholders (Article 6)
- interpreting and translation services must also be available to handicapped persons (sign-language interpreting)
- use of modern technologies (e.g. video-conference interpreting)

Main points of TRAFUT project:

- to develop a core curriculum for the training of legal interpreters and translators

- to develop guidelines for the certification and re-certification of legal interpreters and translators, based on an appropriate deontology
- to establish the main features of national and/or regional registers of certified legal interpreters and translators
- to develop best practices for the effective communication between train judges, prosecutors, lawyers, court and other judicial personnel on how to work with legal interpreters and translators

The TRAFUT project – Training for the Future – will comprise 4 regional workshops to which the judicial stakeholders (trainers of legal interpreters and translators, representatives of ministries of justices, judges, prosecutors, lawyers, police officers, office-holders of professional associations) will be invited.

www.eulita.eu
info@eulita.eu

Mission Statement of EULITA

EULITA is committed to promoting the quality of justice, ensuring access to justice across languages and cultures and thus, ultimately, guaranteeing the fundamental principles of human rights as enshrined in the European Convention of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

EULITA aims to bring together in its membership as full members the professional associations of legal translators and spoken or sign language legal interpreters in the EU member states as well as the general associations that include legal translators and spoken or sign language legal interpreters among their membership. As associate members EULITA welcomes all interested organisations, institutions and individuals that are committed to the improvement of quality in legal interpreting and translation.

EULITA aims to support the interests and concerns of the national associations of legal interpreters and translators and to represent the interests and concerns of these associations vis-à-vis European and international organizations and institutions; to promote the establishment of associations of legal interpreters and translators in member states where as yet they do not exist; to promote close cooperation with academic institutions in the field of training and research and to encourage the establishment of national and EU-wide registers of qualified legal interpreters and translators, while at all times respecting the diversity of judicial systems and cultures.

EULITA is further committed to promoting quality in legal interpreting and translation through the recognition of the professional status of legal interpreters and translators, the exchange of information and best practices in training and continuous professional development and the organisation of events on issues such as training, research, professionalism, etc. thus promoting judicial cooperation and mutual trust by the member states in each other's systems of legal interpreting and translation.

EULITA, finally, aims to promote cooperation and best practices in working arrangements with the legal services and legal professionals.