



Languages and interpreting at the Court of Justice of the European Union in Luxembourg

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“The language of a case shall be Bulgarian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Irish, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovak, Slovene, Spanish or Swedish.” (Article 29 of the Rules of Procedure)

Simultaneous interpretation at the public hearings of the Court of Justice, the General Court and the Civil Service Tribunal is provided by the Interpretation Directorate of the European Court of Justice, which currently employs about 70 permanent staff, as well conference interpreters from the EU register of some 3000 accredited freelance interpreters (also known as Auxiliary Conference Interpreters) who take on about 40% of the workload.

The interpreters work from the soundproof booths in each courtroom. Originally there were only four official languages (Dutch, French, German and Italian), but today the main courtroom in the new Court in Luxembourg is equipped with twenty-four interpreting booths.

To ensure communication in different languages between all the participants in oral proceedings, a team of experienced conference interpreters is assigned to each hearing. The interpreting team is tailored to the specific language requirements of the case being heard in the courtroom, which will be determined by the following:

- **The "language of the case", i.e. a language chosen by the parties from among the official languages of the European Union**
- **The language of the Member States intervening**
- **The language needs of the Judges hearing the case**
- **The language of any visiting groups attending the hearing**

The range of languages therefore varies from case to case. Only rarely does the Court require interpretation from all official languages into all official languages.

French is the internal working language of the Court, and the interpreters are not present at deliberations, since the rules of procedure state that the Court shall deliberate in closed session.

Good interpreters must have a thorough knowledge of all their working languages, but other skills are equally important. Conference interpreting is not a word-for-word translation exercise; analytical skills and the ability to understand the speaker's point of view are essential to the quality of the interpreter's performance, as is familiarity with the subject matter. At the Court of Justice precision is essential, and prior study of the case-file is an integral part of an interpreter's work. Conference interpreters must respect certain professional principles, above all confidentiality. Interpreters are bound by the strictest secrecy with regard to all the information disclosed before and during hearings. The interpreter works as part of a team both during the preparation stage and in the courtroom.

For more information visit **Curia**, the multilingual website of the European Court of Justice:
www.curia.europa.eu