

## **The Conference of Translation Services of West European States**

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The Conference of Translation Services of West European States officially came into being at Berne, Switzerland, in October 1982, but its genesis goes back to the mid 1970s, when the European Communities inter-institutional terminology Group – Groupe inter-institutionnel de terminologie et de documentation (GIIT) first considered the possibility of cooperation on terminology and documentation with the government translation services of the member states.

The first practical step was taken when representatives of government translation services of Member States at that time (Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom) were invited to a meeting in Luxembourg in March 1977. The participants adopted a recommendation to be sent to the authorities responsible for translation services, but that first initiative petered out.

After some years, the idea of cooperation surfaced again, on the initiative of the Translation Division of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This time, the invitation to participate was sent to government translation services of all West European States, the European Communities being invited to attend as observers. This initiative bore fruit. All European Community countries, except Luxembourg, were represented in 1980 at The Hague conference, together with Spain, Norway, Austria, Switzerland and Sweden, plus observers from the European Communities.

The theme of the Conference was 'government translation services and rationalisation'. With the aim of looking into the opportunities for cooperation and rationalisation, a working party was set up which was charged with the following tasks:

- (1) it had to define conditions under which other services would be invited to participate;
- (2) it was to collect relevant information on these services and to record this information on a standard form to be determined by the working party;
- (3) it was to look into an ad hoc inquiry procedure for the participating services (for example a procedure whereby inquiries can be addressed directly to the service or services likely to have done the translation);
- (4) it had to examine the possibilities of making an inventory concerning information and documentation and terminology and to make sure that all participants have access to such information;
- (5) it had to determine the categories in which identical texts are being translated by more than one service on a scale that is frequent and important enough to justify the creation of an inventory and an exchange system;
- (6) the working party was asked to design and distribute a standard data card for translations, leading to an inventory of existing translations in various categories. These cards should mention, among other things, the date on which the original text was written, the date on which it was translated, the organisation for which it was translated, the source and the target languages, the length and the nature of the text and of the translations (for example official or otherwise);
- (7) it had to examine the possibility of making an inventory of the completed cards;
- (8) another task of the working party consisted in investigating whether the participating services and institutions of which they are part would agree with the principle that translation or revision work would be done on behalf of other participating services, that translators be made available to other participating services or that the names of freelance translators working for them be communicated. The working party was further to establish what priority should be given to such commissions;
- (9) the working party was also asked to investigate whether the institutions of which the services are part would agree to systematic exchanges of translations, and to look into the question of responsibility for translations exchanged in this way;
- (10) in addition, the working party had to examine possible forms of remuneration, financial or otherwise (for example for the exchanges between the participating services); and
- (11) finally, it had to evaluate the opportunity of studying at a later stage other matters of possible relevance to the services, for instance the use of modern equipment, the status of translators, training, continuous education, in-service training, exchanges, etc., and to make proposals along these lines.

Many people who had attended the 1977 meeting in Luxembourg also attended the 1980 meeting, so there was certainly some continuity of ideas and of personal contacts. As people got to know each other, they began to cooperate without waiting for a formal framework to emerge from the conference. If you know the person at the other end of the line when you pick up the telephone to call someone in Sweden or in Spain, things become much easier.

On a new three day session in The Hague in 1981 a number of decisions were taken which were of great importance for the further work of the Conference: the first decision was to accept an invitation from the translation services of the Swiss Federal Chancellery to hold the next Assembly in Berne. So the Swiss now held the Presidency. It was decided that the Presidency should rotate, that the working languages should be English, French and German and that one service should be asked to be permanently responsible for keeping the archives of the Conference.

The assembly of the Conference of Translation Services of West European States, meeting in Berne on 25 and 26 June 1981, decided:

- (1) to prompt the participating services to improve existing collaboration on the national level with a view to enhancing cooperation in Western Europe;
- (2) to identify the aims of such cooperation, for instance in the field of exchanging experience and that of rationalisation – both within and between services – with an eye to the limits of such cooperation;
- (3) to evaluate each year how much cooperation there has been and to submit the results to the general assembly;
- (4) to work out a method for studying the various themes, for instance by sending documentary material to a participating service before discussing a particular theme.

The Conference of Translation Services of West European States was formally founded in October 1982 in Berne, where twenty-two translation services were present at the Conference, representing eleven European countries. The Conference proposed to promote not only the exchange of information and experiments, but also mutual assistance, coordination and implementation of programmes and projects as well as cooperation in the field of professional training. By way of example, I will quote here some of the propositions made by the Conference:

- (1) The Conference proposes to work for the establishment of effective cooperation among the central government translation services of West European States;
- (2) To that end the Conference shall promote:
  - (a) the sharing of information and experience in the field of translation, terminology and documentation;
  - (b) mutual assistance in the field of translation, terminology and documentation;

(c) coordination and implementation of programmes and projects relating to translation and terminology;

(d) cooperation in the field of professional training and in all other fields affecting translators or terminologists in the public service.

(3) As soon as these Rules come into force, central government translation services of West European States can apply for membership in the Conference by way of a written application. Upon receipt of such an application and within a period not exceeding two months, the Presidency shall notify all Member Services of the application. The application shall be deemed to have been approved unless, within two months of notification by the Presidency, a Member Service calls for the application to be referred to the Assembly, which shall then take a decision.

(4) The following services may take part in the activities of the Conference without a right to vote:

(a) central government translation services of States outside Western Europe;

(b) translation and terminology services of West European intergovernmental organisations;

(c) central government terminology services of Western European States.

The Rules of the Conference have been unanimously adopted. The Conference also unanimously adopted a recommendation about the principles governing cooperation in the fields of terminology and documentation. It decided to make a survey on the status of translators in public office and adopted a questionnaire for that purpose.

The linguistic services of the EEC have been granted the status of Member Services with the proviso that only the GIIT, which is an interinstitutional group for terminology and documentation will represent them, so that they will have only one vote in the Assembly. The GIIT will figure on the list of the founding services, which is an integral part of the Rules of the Conference.

The Conference further decided to charge the working party with a 'Survey on the status of translators in public office in Western Europe'.

The working party had to analyse the answers to the questionnaire, to make a summary report and to formulate possible proposals.

As a last point, the Conference decided to renew the mandate of the working party on 'Cooperation in the fields of terminology and documentation'. The task of this working party consists in studying ways for furthering cooperation in the field of terminology and documentation resources.

The Conference met again in Bonn in 1984 and made several decisions, including the following:

(1) the Assembly adopted a resolution about access to the careers of translators, revisors and terminologists;

(2) the Assembly decided to set up a working party on the specific work of 'revision'.

(3) the Assembly asked the working party on 'status of the translator' to enlarge on the following points in its report:

-- to identify possible forms of extended training;

- to make a survey of projects already undertaken and of the experience gained from such projects;
- to investigate possibilities and conditions for the exchange of staff between services.

(4) the Assembly adopted a resolution on terminology.

I should like to quote that resolution in full.

The Assembly,

Eager to ensure the most rational possible co-operation in terminology questions between the Member Services of the Conference,

Aware of the difficulties of setting up a computerised terminology system by individual services,

Wishing to achieve harmonisation of the methods employed in terminological activities in the Member Services,

Recalling the recommendation on the principles of co-operation in the fields of terminology and documentation, adopted at Berne on 19 October 1982,

1. Recommends that Member Services which do not yet have a computerised terminology system make use of one of the existing systems and supply information for that system, rather than setting up a system of their own, e.g. systems like Eurodicautom, LEXIS or Team;

2. Recommends that a co-ordinating body should be set up when cooperation between Member Services and a computerised terminology system is being established on a regular basis;

3. Encourages all forms of cooperation between computerised terminology services;

4. Recommends that Member Services which do not yet have any terminologists should train some of their translators as terminologists;

5. Invites the Working Party:

(a) to continue its work by establishing a set of guiding principles applicable to terminological activities

(b) to collect all useful information on the main computerised terminology systems.

Furthermore, the Assembly invited the working party on the 'status of the translator' to make a more detailed study about the conditions governing access to the functions of translators, revisors and terminologists which presently exist in the member services, with special reference to recruitment procedures.

To conclude this survey of the activities of the Conference of Translation Services of West European States, mention should be made of the Assembly meeting of the Conference in September 1986 in London with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office translation branch as president and host.

At that meeting, twenty-six services from ten countries were represented, mostly foreign affairs departments and central translation services, especially from countries such as Switzerland and Belgium, with two or three official languages.

The European Patent Office was admitted as a member.

The Assembly adopted a report of the working party on the 'status of the translator' and decided that it would be reconstituted as a working party on the 'application of new technologies'. The Assembly also instructed this working party to examine the use that is currently being made of new technologies in the member services and participating services and to report about it to the Assembly.

Upon reading the interim report from the 'terminology' working party, the Assembly instructed the working party to continue its work and to establish guiding principles for high quality work in the field of terminology. No absolute rules have been laid down, however. This working party was also instructed to report to the Assembly.

The Assembly further adopted the report of the 'Revision' working party and instructed it to try to identify guiding principles applicable to revision work for which the Swiss project on the methodology of multilingual communication could serve as a basis. The working party should also keep these principles in mind when examining possibilities and procedures for basic and advanced training of revisors and it should in its turn report to the assembly.

Finally, the Assembly looked into the possibility of producing a Conference Bulletin. It instructed the new president to examine the matter and to raise the matter again at the next assembly. It also considered the possibility of extending membership of the Conference to services that do not qualify under the present rules.

The various working parties will report to the next general Assembly which will be held in Brussels in September 1988. We especially look forward to the results of the working party on 'the application of new technologies', dealing with the use of computers and machine aids in translation. Their conclusions will have to be adopted by the Assembly which will try to identify the guiding principles that can be used in all member services.