



**Note for the attention of Mr Johannes HAHN,
Commissioner for Budget and Administration**

Subject: Use of unrevised machine translation for the RRF and unsustainable workload in DGT

Dear Commissioner Hahn,

We are all well aware of the political relevance and the sensitivity of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). Within this framework, the **Member States' Recovery and Resilience Plans** are of the utmost importance to ensure tangible benefits for the economy and citizens across the EU.

It is for this reason that we want to express our deepest concerns for the fact that parts of these plans are not being translated by our experienced professional translators at DGT, but only processed by eTranslation, i.e. **unrevised machine translation**. We were informed that DGT management chose unrevised machine translation because of short deadlines and - above all - lack of staff. We are convinced that this choice should be reversed as much as possible and, in particular, that it should not create a precedent for the future, as the use of unrevised machine translation can easily lead to serious (and often avoidable) mistakes entailing **serious reputational, legal and other risks for the Commission** in addition to the time and cost involved in correcting these mistakes.

What is more, this stated need to rely on machine translation for very sensitive political documents shows clearly that critical staff limits have been reached. However, DGT staff will continue to be reduced by 3% per year until 2027 despite a sizeable increase in demand.

Additionally, but no less importantly, **this way of dealing with translations is causing a general sense of frustration and helplessness among translators about the way they are forced to work**, leading to dissatisfaction at the way in which our job is evolving and to a **shared feeling of being regarded as unskilled workers rather than as language professionals and linguistic experts**.

In fact, translation demand was at record levels during the second half of 2020 and continues to be so in 2021, with more than 1 million pages translated between January and May (35% increase over the last year). Under these conditions: fewer staff and a constantly increasing demand, translators' workload is already beyond critical limits.

Outsourcing translation needs has also increased significantly (more than 80% this year) and has **reached or even exceeded capacity limits** so that it cannot compensate any further staff cuts either. External providers are frequently refusing to accept jobs and the freelance market - especially in smaller countries - is now saturated by the demand.

As regards new technologies, these are already factored into DGT working methods, and hypothetical gains from any future evolution of artificial intelligence (AI), machine translation and other technologies can neither be anticipated with any certainty nor compensate for further staff cuts. What is more, under no circumstances can technology replace professional, human translators.

Another worrying element is that for the coming years, as far as we know, DGT plans to **employ only temporary agents** in translator posts. No competitions for permanent staff are planned. It is not realistic to expect DGT to produce more with fewer translators, less-experienced translators and an increasing number of translators in precarious posts, while at the same time increasing the workload with more non-translation tasks.

The evolution of the working conditions at DGT described above is making translators' job less attractive, resulting in **increased difficulties recruiting new staff**. Translators working in understaffed departments are suffering from an excessive workload, resulting in stress, frustration and dissatisfaction for the job done. This can increase **psychosocial risks, including burnout, depression and other long-term illnesses, which** could in turn lead to lower numbers of staff available and of staff leaving DGT, creating a vicious circle.

Translation will continue to be essential in the coming years to deal with the **Recovery Plan** and related topics, on top of all normal business. Therefore, given that other DGs dealing with these new issues are being reinforced with additional staff, DGT also needs a sufficient level of experienced staff to do the job and continue to ensure the high quality required.

In light of the increasing Heading 7 budget in draft budget for year 2022 and the above statements, we ask that you urgently intervene to stop the DGT staff cuts and to push for translators leaving DGT to be replaced by permanent staff at a ratio of 1 to 1; acting otherwise will be a false economy and will pose serious reputational risk, both in terms of the Commission as a great place to work and in terms of DGT as a reference in the world of translation.

(signed)

Athanasios KATSOGIANNIS
President

Cc: Mr D. Mueller (Cabinet Hahn)
Ms G. Ingestad (DG HR)
Mr R. Martikonis (DGT)
Ms B. Pellistrandi, Mr A. Gonzalez (CSC)
Permanent Delegation of Translators - DPT