

1. Experience reports from translators

During the week from 22nd to 26th of November, the Permanent Delegation of Translators (DPT) collected recent experiences from translators on standby duty in order to get the picture of ***what it entails to be on standby duty at DGT***. Here is the outcome:

- 19 experience reports from translators from the DE+FR departments
- several other experience reports from translators of the HR, IT, NL, EL, ET, SV departments
- miscellaneous comments on the system.

(Similar messages later from other departments (not included here).)

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A. French LD: 5 replies:

	Translators' report	Text for President / other not genuinely urgent text	Organizational issue	Too much pressure exerted	Waiting for an announced text to arrive (no compensation)
1	<p>“I was on duty in June 2021 and it was quite a busy week (especially the week-end). The requests were genuinely urgent (problems with COVID vaccines, Council Regulation Belarus etc.) and had extremely short deadlines: 1 text, 1,5 p [pages] to be translated between 20.00 and 21.00 / 1 text announced at 20.00 for the next morning which never arrived / 1 text for the President, 3 p to be translated from DE, arrival Saturday at 12.30 to be delivered on Monday morning / 1 text (FISMA) 17 p arrival on Sunday 1.30 am to be delivered on Tuesday morning.”</p>	X	X		4h
2	<p>“I was very lucky during my standby week because I had no work to do, but this was not the case for my predecessor (who has been called several times) and my successor. I hope they will reply to this survey.”</p>				
3	<p>“I am still aware of two cases : Last year, I had to start my duty on a Monday (from 6pm, as usual), but that very day, at 9 am, my HoU [head of unit] called me to translate as quickly as possible a text which had been refused by the unit that had been on duty during the weekend. In a way, my duty started at 9am instead of 6pm. I had received no information beforehand, the document had to be translated for 10am, it was rather long so it had to be translated by two persons. That same week, but on Saturday, I received a text message informing me that a document would soon arrive. I waited for a few hours, then informed my HoU, then learned from him later on that it had been cancelled and he didn't know. I had not been informed. Miscommunication somewhere....”</p>		X		6h
4	<p>“I had 2 or 3 missions during my standby week. One text had been announced for 20.00 to be delivered the next day at 8.00. It finally arrived at 6.00 the next day. One text was for the President, but could have been translated at 8.00 on Monday morning for 9.00, like a PP</p>	X	X		

	Translators' report		Text for President / other not genuinely urgent text	Organizational issue	Too much pressure exerted	Waiting for an announced text to arrive (no compensation)
	[press release]"					
5	"During my last week of standby duty, I didn't receive any work. Nonetheless, during the week, when I asked my HoU about details, what was expected from me in terms of availability, I didn't receive a clear answer and I found it very surprising that nothing was clearly defined. At the end, I was told that I "should" be able to go back home in 30 minutes..."			X		X

B. German LD: 14 replies

- Executive summary: A majority of the texts are for the President (13 out of 14), most are not genuinely urgent. Organisation and communication are often flawed (13 out of 14) and translators are sometimes waiting for announced texts for extended periods without any news (6 out of 14)

	Translators' report	Text for President / other not genuinely urgent text	Organisational issue	Too much pressure exerted	Waiting for an imminent text to arrive (no compensation)
6	<p>“Nothing had happened during Monday to Thursday. On Friday evening, just before cob [close of business], my superior warned me that a new version of a speech to be delivered by the President the following Tuesday (and on which the TFP [Task Force President] colleagues had worked during the day) would arrive during the evening <u>to be translated asap [as soon as possible] and, likely, another text would arrive, too.</u> I stayed close to my computer and duty phone the whole evening, but nothing happened. During these moments, there is nobody you can turn to in order to ask whether something is still supposed to come or whether you can go to bed. I finally went to sleep next to the duty phone. <u>Nothing happened during the whole Saturday either, but I still couldn't leave the house.</u> When I decided to get ready for sleep and turned on the shower at 23.45, the phone's SMS sound rang: The text would arrive in the next minutes. I got out of the shower and to my computer. I received a mail with an EN text and a DE text (the translation delivered by my TFP colleagues on Friday at lunchtime). My task was to adapt the DE text to the EN text and to deliver my translation on <u>Sunday morning</u> (knowing that the President was to pronounce the speech before Parliament on Tuesday, I wonder what this deadline was about). As the EN text did not have track changes and there was no way to do a “compare” of it with the previous version, I had to go through both texts side-by-side and delete or add text to the DE version as needed. The task was rather complicated because text parts had been moved around and this could not be seen in the text. I worked until late and delivered my translation at 3 am, in order to be able to sleep in on Sunday morning. When I checked my inbox later at 10 am, I found a message from the PresCab officer saying “Thank you for the translation, we are still waiting for the FR version”. I again wondered how this vague deadline (“in the morning”) had to be understood if, at 10 am they complained that they had not received the FR translation. When I</p>	X	X		30h

	Translators' report	Text for President / other not genuinely urgent text	Organisational issue	Too much pressure exerted	Waiting for an imminent text to arrive (no compensation)
	<p>asked back whether I had to expect something else on Sunday (remember that a second text had been announced) the answer was "I don't know. Maybe." Back in the office on Monday, just before lunchtime, another version of the same speech had landed on the desks of me TFP colleagues."</p> <p>In my humble opinion, my weekend mission could easily have been skipped and the work could have been done on Monday as everybody knew that the speech had to be pronounced on Tuesday before Parliament anyway."</p>				
7	<p>"Having to waste 4 evenings of a week waiting for a text that finally only arrives on the fourth evening: should this really be counted as only "1 translation mission?"</p> <p>"Also, there is a difference between texts which come with a deadline, where you don't have to be already in front of your computer when the SMS message arrives and texts which have to be translated in ¼ hour or asap. When texts of that nature are announced, you cannot even walk your dog during the whole standby duty period. Can they really ask for delivery within ¼ of an hour?"</p>	X	X	X	24h
8	<p>"I had to translate 4 texts for the President (2x asap, 1x 15 min and 1x 2h). In addition, there was another text announced twice but finally postponed. So <u>I was contacted on 6 days out of 7</u>. One of the texts was not announced but had to be translated within 15 minutes. <u>That means that it is no longer possible to leave the house</u>. I would therefore appreciate to get two days of compensation for the week."</p>	X		X	54h
9	<p>"I had a very stressful experience with the duty phone in March (15 March to 22 March), which highlighted that the communication processes should be improved to avoid misunderstandings and a duplication of work:</p> <p>The text (a statement by President Von der Leyen (VdL)) arrived early (around 6.30 pm or 7pm) and the instructions were not clear, which already caused a loss of precious time. I received an attached English text with plenty of track changes and 3 spots highlighted in yellow and an attached German version of the text without track changes. The instruction was to only insert the three changes highlighted in yellow in the German text, and this, of course, immediately!</p> <p>However, comparing the two language versions, I realised that all the track</p>	X	X-	XXX	

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	<p>changes of the English text had not been included in the German version. So the requester at DG COMM, who was getting extremely nervous because the cabinet of President Von der Leyen wanted the text immediately, asked me to introduce all changes as soon as possible in the German version, checking back on me regularly to see why the whole process was taking so long. Finally, a few minutes after having sent in the final translation in world record time, being extremely stressed and exhausted, I realised that the German version of the very same text reflecting all the changes had already been published on the Commission website 15 minutes before I handed in my translation!</p> <p>After talking to all the people involved, I finally found out that the very same translation request had already arrived during the afternoon via TFP. However, the TFP colleagues had translated the text freely from English as no other instruction had been given to them, while the President's Cabinet insisted that an internal version drafted by them in German be used as a basis for the text. So finally, work had been done on the same text twice. In the end, the very well-formulated translation of the TFP colleagues was (of course!) never replaced by my rushed translation based on the Cabinet's draft. So, in the end, these more or less 2 hours of absolute stress were completely in vain!"</p>				
10	<p>"During my standby week, I had only one translation mission which I would qualify as very badly managed. The issues were mainly due to communication problems inside my department and partly also on my side. But when I heard about experiences of other colleagues in the following weeks, my experience suddenly seemed insignificant ...</p> <p>My experience: I had to start work immediately on receiving the phone call (text arrived at around 18h30 on a Friday, work was finished by around 20.30). It was known at lunchtime that a new version was to be expected in the evening but I had not received this information (shortcoming in our department it seems). I had to translate about 3 pages with delivery asap. It was the final version of the speech delivered by the President at the occasion of the start of the Portuguese presidency."</p>	X	X		
11	<p>"I received a text message on Saturday at 1.55 pm, asking for translation of a text</p>	X	X	X	

	Translators' report	Text for President / other not genuinely urgent text	Organisational issue	Too much pressure exerted	Waiting for an imminent text to arrive (no compensation)
	<p>to be delivered at 2.30 pm the same day. Fortunately, my PC was already running, so I was able to start translation immediately after reception of the original by mail a few minutes later. <u>The deadline would have been impossible to deal with if I had had to start the computer and log into all of the systems first.</u> The text was about half a page, a speech that the President would give on Wednesday the week after. On Monday, a regular, more voluminous version arrived through the normal workflow. I certainly would not have translated “trillion“ by “billion“ if I had been given more than <u>30 min time for a speech to be given 4 days later.</u> This request was clearly not that urgent and could have been translated in better quality during normal working hours, or at least a more reasonable deadline. The day after (Sunday afternoon), I received another request for translation of a speech. This time, I got the whole night for translation. The speech was for Monday, but there was no indication that the original was in three languages (I actually realised that I was not translating from English any more when I started wondering about the accents in the English text). As my French is very good, this was not a problem for me, but it might have been for some colleagues and it certainly was for automated translation. The speech was intended for the Committee of Regions and could have been planned for earlier, but at least I got more than 12 hours (overnight) for translation. The duty officer had already consulted me a bit earlier for another two texts (versions for two press releases), but we agreed that those could still be dealt with on Monday morning during normal working hours.”</p>				
12	<p>“If I remember well, the request was announced by SMS on Sunday afternoon and arrived immediately afterwards. I happened to be at home at that time and could start working immediately. The deadline was not a problem.”</p>				
13	<p>“I was rather lucky during my standby week. A text was announced on Friday 19.30. It was to be a version of a PP which had already been translated during the afternoon. Some time later, I received a message saying that the DE version might not be necessary but only the FR version. At around 21.00 this was confirmed”</p>		X		1,5h
14	<p>“My duty week started on Nov. 1st, a European and Commission holiday, and coincided with COP26. When I took over the duty phone from my predecessor, it</p>	X	X (physical		20h

	Translators' report	Text for President / other not genuinely urgent text	Organisational issue	Too much pressure exerted	Waiting for an imminent text to arrive (no compensation)
	<p>was not working properly – no messages arrived at all, so we had to give our private GSM [mobile phone] number to be reachable. Apparently, a text was already announced to my colleague.</p> <p>I got a first phone call on Monday 16 pm that a text (speech outline, 1p, for vdL for COP26) was urgently needed, and started working at 16.30. The text was for the same day, asap. I worked until 18pm. There was a follow-up announced that day, (speech as pronounced, 1 page) which arrived on 2nd November 14.30 pm. On 1st November, also 2 more speeches for 2nd November (vdL, COP26) were announced. I started working on the first speech (as pronounced) at 15 pm. Right afterwards, the 2 other speeches (outlines, 1,5 pages each) arrived subsequently (17pm and 19.30pm, for the same day, asap). While I was working on the outlines, the final texts – speeches as pronounced - arrived (19pm and 20.30pm, both 1p). Both were still for the same day, asap.</p> <p>I finished at 22.30h, and there were no more versions. I didn't have to translate anything else that week. We managed to sort out the difficulties with the phone on 3rd November with colleagues from DGT (it took more than 1 hour), so messages arrived properly again.</p> <p>I understand that there was a need to translate speeches for the President for COP26; I don't know if they could have been planned before. At least there was no TFP on 1st and 2nd November.”</p>		phone)		
15	<p>“I had to translate a vdl speech for the EP [European Parliament] on 9 February (Tuesday evening), so nothing that was not foreseen. The text was announced to me in the evening and arrived quickly afterwards, at around 8.30PM, as a panache version. The deadline was midnight. There was one new version at 10.15PM, while the deadline remained at midnight. There was a translated reference text, but no compare version, so I had to keep searching the ref document. I did not manage to deliver on time, I delivered at around 1AM. I was called on duty just once during that week, but I remember being deeply stressed about possible other requests coming in (a period in which sleep was scarce anyway...)”</p>	X	X	X	
16	<p>“I was on duty in March 2021, when on 5th March, shortly after 18:00, I received a message via the duty phone that a “Statement by President von der Leyen</p>	X	X	X	

	Translators' report	Text for President / other not genuinely urgent text	Organisational issue	Too much pressure exerted	Waiting for an imminent text to arrive (no compensation)
	<p>following her phone call with President of the United States Joe Biden” (COMM-2021-86-00-00) would be coming for translation. It was not announced before 18:00. Luckily, my computer was still on, so, when I received the text some minutes later per e-mail, I could start immediately. The problem was, that there wasn't a deadline, but the text was needed “asap”. So, instead of translating, I had to answer several questions – via e-mail forwarded from DG COMM and via Skype chat with the duty officer (as well as on the duty phone), what I thought how long it would take to translate it. I hadn't even properly seen the text and answered – just to answer something – “about an hour”. But that wasn't good enough, because I got a message, the French department would deliver in half an hour and why not me. I explained that I would do my best and translate as fast as I could. Of course, I used e-translation and had just enough time to correct the most obvious mistakes, check the most important references and adapt a little to Mrs von der Leyen's style, when the next message came – this time from DG COMM directly – that the French translator had delivered and why not me. I guess, I delivered maybe 8 to 10 minutes later than the French translator. If I would not have had to answer so many messages before and during translation, I could have delivered it faster and maybe also in even better quality. It was an urgent text and it is okay to have some stress with it, but it was completely unnecessary to make it a “race” between the translators. <u>If DG COMM had announced it a little bit before 18:00 and maybe set a deadline, there would have been much more time for the translation itself and all that messaging could have been avoided.</u> And DG COMM was very lucky that I hadn't shut down my computer yet, otherwise I couldn't have delivered it as fast as I did.”</p>				
17	<p>“During my week of duty I received two texts. The first arrived on a weekday shortly after 6pm. As it was the opening statement of our President for the European Council on 25 May it was not really an unforeseeable text. The length of the text was 4 pages and it had to be delivered asap. The only problem with the organisation around this request was that I was not able to send an answer to the initial SMS that I received from the Duty Officer. The second text of 3,5 pages came on Saturday around noon and had to be</p>	X	X (physical phone)		

	Translators' report	Text for President / other not genuinely urgent text	Organisational issue	Too much pressure exerted	Waiting for an imminent text to arrive (no compensation)
	delivered the same day. This time the urgency was justified because the text concerned the forced landing of a Ryanair flight in Minsk a few days before. The text was a Joint proposal for a Council regulation concerning restrictive measures in respect of Belarus. There were no organisational problems.”				
18	“At the beginning of my week, <u>I had a problem with the phone</u> , because the delivery of my answer to the test message of the duty officer failed. The first translation request <u>arrived still during core time, but it had to be translated as soon as possible and for this reason by the translator on duty</u> . Apparently, it had not been unforeseeable and <u>it wasn't that urgent either, because we received another version the following day</u> . Then, two texts were announced for Sunday with deadline ASAP. The second one arrived one hour later than announced. As we had to deliver it ASAP, I spent this time waiting in front of the computer. In the meantime, I saw that the press hadn't waited for our translation and cited parts of the original version translated by themselves. So it seems to me that our translation either was not needed or that we could have made it as well the following day. All three texts concerned subjects with which I am not familiar with. So I had to make many terminological searches.”	X	X (physical phone)		1h
19	“At the beginning of my duty week, I received two text messages without indication of the day and the hour. As I phoned one of the senders, he told me that he had sent this message 6 weeks ago and that it was outdated. Two days later, <u>I was woken up at 00.30 by the DO [duty officer] who then sent me a translation request concerning a press release and a memo for the following day</u> . The deadline for the press release was 10 o'clock. For the memo it was 12.30. My HoU, whom I had contacted, told me to only translate the press release because there was enough time for the memo the following day and this work would be done by the translator who was in charge of the previous version. Fortunately, my HoU had found out that this was a version of an already translated press release and informed me half an hour after I had already started translating the press release. So I created a new text, this time with “Perfect Match”. In this way, I could use the previous version for my translation and save a lot of time. <u>It is incomprehensible that requesters don't give this kind of information.</u> ”	X	XXX (physical phone)		

	Translators' report	Text for President / other not genuinely urgent text	Organizational issue	Too much pressure exerted	Waiting for an imminent text to arrive (no compensation)
	Three days later, I received two requests almost simultaneously. The first concerned only a link which I translated at once. The second concerned a longer text. Fortunately, my HoU found out that <u>two of my colleagues were already waiting for this text. It had been announced before and they were prepared to translate it during the weekend.</u> So I left it for translation by these specialists in the substance matter of the text. Again, this communication problem could have been avoided.”				

C. Non-procedural languages

- Executive summary:

C1: HR language department

Although there are bigger issues in DGT (at least for non-procedural languages), the Croatian department's opinion on stand-by duty is this (there was no survey as such, the prevalent opinion has been this for years - it was formulated by a few colleagues):

1. When you have the phone, you cannot do as you please in your free time (for example, you can't make a family outing to a cinema, concert, restaurant – if you have to run home, what are they supposed to do?) This is even more true for weekend trips. So, our right to free time is limited.
2. Voluntary? So it says on paper, but we all know it is not. Let's call this duty what it is – obligatory. Also, DGT should come up with an alternative to the phone making rounds.
3. Impact on holiday planning – it is unfortunate if your duty is during longer public holidays (Christmas, Easter, school holidays). This can even have financial consequences if you have to cancel trips – yes, there is an annual plan, but if somebody leaves the unit or is on sick leave, the plan can get seriously mixed-up.

We therefore think that all colleagues on stand-by duty should have some kind of compensation (this is usual in all jobs that run such schemes).

We know that financial compensation is out of the question, but there should be some time to be recuperated for the duty itself, not only for the actual hours spent on translation. If this were the case, it would be easier to find volunteers for less popular time slots from point 3.

C2: IT language department

Translators' report	Text for President / other not genuinely urgent text	Organizational issue	Too much pressure exerted	Waiting for an announced text to arrive (no compensation)
<p>Text TRADE-2021-800378 (concerning all LDs <u>[language departments]</u>) arrived on 28.1.2021 at 10 p.m.</p> <p>“Shortly before 6 p.m. units dealing with DG TRADE were informed that an urgent implementing act on vaccines would come after EOB [end of business], with deadline early the next morning. Since the arrival time was unknown, the DO would trigger the DO scheme. TUs <u>[translation units]</u> expected therefore translators on duty to deal with the document. When it arrived, at 10 p.m., the document was longer than expected (11 pages instead of the announced 3 pages), so the <u>deadline was moved to midday</u>.</p> <p>The handling of this document was messy: at about 9 p.m. the DO first sent a text to the HoUs concerned on their personal phones (HoUs did not even know who was writing!) and more than two hours later another text to the department duty phones. The text sent to the translators on stand-by duty did not mention that the DO had contacted translators on stand-by as well. In the best scenario, all HoUs knew which translator was on stand-by duty so that they could keep them informed on what was going on. In the worst scenario, HoUs and translators on stand-by did not know that the others had received the same information (especially if they did not belong to the same unit): HoUs might have contacted their own unit members and asked them to work on the document first thing the next morning, whereas the translators on stand-by might have thought they were in charge and started working at night in order to have 11 pages ready by midday the next day.</p> <p>(In the Italian department, the text was assigned to different translators of IT.2 (not on duty – DG Trade is handled by IT.2 while the unit on duty on that week was IT.1). After the HoU received the message on her private phone at 9 pm, she created a shared memory <u>so that the translators in charge could start working with it early the next morning</u>. Later, the HoU of IT.2 received a mail from Planning Unit about the text, so she contacted her HD and fellow HoU just to find out that the translator on duty (IT.1) was starting the translation. HoU of IT.2 then</p>	X	XXX		4h

informed that the text was being handled in her unit and asked the translator on duty to stop working.”				

C3: NL language department

Translators' report	Text for President / other not genuinely urgent text	Organisational issue	Too much pressure exerted	Waiting for an announced text to arrive (no compensation)
<p>Another example of parallel translations: “On Friday (3.12.2021?) evening about 18:45 we received new versions for AGRI texts, <u>with deadline Monday 10 am</u>. One of two new versions (AGRI-2021-81074-04-00) counted for 20 pages, the other one 0,9. (This page count was exaggerated, as the changes consisted of changing an abbreviation into a number throughout the text. This was manageable on Monday morning.) The translator dealing with these texts planned already to work during the weekend for other reasons and immediately processed these new versions. BUT the Duty Officer also sent a message to translators on duty, <u>not exactly asking to translate these texts immediately, but with a warning to make sure that these texts can be delivered by 10 am</u>. Very unclear communication. So the translator on duty in the NL department (other unit) <u>also translated the new versions</u>. The workload was not that bad, but it still is unpleasant to have to work during the weekend, for nothing. Probably for the DO as well it might be difficult to assess if things will work out well on Monday morning if no action is taken, the page count was after all about 20 pages, with a remark that this would be “clearly much less work”. A simple file compare, however, would have helped to decide to leave things alone till Monday. At least it should have been mentioned that these versions were also submitted for translation via the ManDesk workflow.”</p>		XXX		

C4: EL language department

(3 contributions):

Translators' report	Text for President / other not genuinely urgent text	Organizational issue	Too much pressure exerted	Waiting for an announced text to arrive (no compensation)
<p>“My last time on stand-by duty was quite traumatic. It started relatively calm. On Thursday early afternoon I was informed by [the other unit’s] secretariat about a 2-3 p. TRADE document that would arrive in the evening. I was slightly taken aback because this had never happened to me before, and I was also confused because I received an e-mail rather than a phone call / SMS, but ok, since the expected page count was small. The document eventually arrived at around 11 pm (9p + an annex of 2p). I stayed up almost all night and managed to finish it (the deadline was 10 am). At 9 am and just as I had connected again (with very little sleep), I got a message that we would receive a version with an 11 am deadline. Instead, at 11 am I got a new message that the version would arrive at 12. This went on almost all day, until the version arrived at 4 pm (7p) with a deadline set an hour later. Obviously, I sent it late (as was the case with all languages) and I thought that I’d seen the last of it. However, in the evening I received a message that another version was imminent. That was my breaking point. Luckily, the version was only half a page long and I finished it quickly. Nevertheless, I would like to point out the following:</p> <p>a) The message that I received on the service phone for this last version included the following phrase: “this document will arrive in Mandesk/tradesk and will have to be delivered still today by all means [...] Absolute order from the president”, which I felt was insulting for all of us, both for the word “order” and for the overall tone, like we are often sending documents after the deadline. Especially since everyone who was on duty that week hadn’t slept the previous evening in order to deliver their translations.</p> <p>b) <u>For a 9p document that is so urgent that it must be translated during the night so that it can be ready in the morning, you can’t have a 7p version coming the next afternoon and keep colleagues on alert for almost 24h. I spent the entire night translating a document that changed almost completely the following day, with the highly urgent deadline being eventually moved back by 14 hours. In my opinion, working overnight was therefore in no way justified in this case.”</u></p>		XXX		5h 7h
<p>“I was called 2 times while on stand-by duty. I received the notification early in the evening and 1 document arrived early in the evening, the other the following</p>	X			

morning. They were 3 and 10 pages long. They were versions. In my opinion, they were not urgent enough to justify working during the night and/or weekend.”				
<p>“I was called once while on standby duty (19.40) and the document arrived ca. [around] 20 minutes later. It was 1 page to be delivered asap. The duty officer sent clarifications after the document arrived. I don’t know whether she was contacted by another colleague. In my opinion, the document was not urgent enough to justify working during the night and/or weekend, but I guess it was a political priority issue. In addition to the above, there was confusion regarding how the document was assigned the following day (under the normalisation process). The document arrived in our unit the following morning so that workload could be recorded. However, it was not properly indicated that it had already been translated (just a brief indication like “DO + date of day before” and only in the project’s description, with no other comments on Tradesk or anything else that would draw attention). <u>As a result, the document was assigned again to another colleague, was translated - and reviewed - all over again, it was never recorded in my statistics, and the requester ended up having two different translations of the same document!</u> I therefore believe that these documents should be better signalled during normalisation [...]</p> <p>Finally, let me also use this opportunity to repeat my suggestion: Since we all have Skype for Business which can be forwarded to our personal phone, why don’t we just use that instead of having to run around in order to deliver/receive phones?”</p>	X	XX		

C5: ET language department

(2 contributions):

Translators’ report	Text for President / other not genuinely urgent text	Organisational issue	Too much pressure exerted	Waiting for an announced text to arrive (no compensation)
“I just finished my stand-by week. Work alerts came in twice during the week -	X	XX		

<p>which is a huge increase compared to my previous experience, as in my previous 14 years of service I've only ever received work once or twice as stand-by. I had to work on one document; for the other, our units had made previous arrangements. <u>I was notified at 2 am.</u> It woke me up. By then, the text had been sent to me by e-mail. The text was a new version of a press release. However, as the <u>deadline was 10 am, it would have been sufficient to send it at 7 or 8 am and not to wake up people in the middle of the night.</u> Moreover, the version was actually forwarded through TraDesk so late that the deadline was extended till 12 o'clock, and then, in the course of the day, the press release got two more versions! So <u>the night alert was completely useless and essentially an abuse of the standby system.</u> I do not mind working in the evenings or weekends occasionally, when it is truly important, but in this case it was clearly not. The other alert came in during evening hours and I only had to alert the units; other people did the real work with the document.”</p>				
<p>“Thanks for your enquiry. I appreciate it. Unfortunately, I cannot precisely recall my last on Duty ‘incident’, except that it happened in 2020 at the start of the pandemic when such out-of-hours requests became a standard feature of our work. <u>Indeed, I remember translating such a document overnight only to learn the morning after that it had completely been rewritten and the deadline postponed ...</u> Usually, we would be notified of such requests during the day and the request itself would arrive either between 5 of 6 pm or even later, say round 8 pm. Given the exceptional circumstances, I didn't mind going the extra mile, but I did sometimes have the feeling that this practice was a bit abusive and not a result of real urgency, but lack of organisation and delayed decision making upstream. In earlier times, using the DO used to be considerably less frequent. I think it would be fair to say that working over the weekend became a recurrent practice already under Juncker, when we would regularly get the original on Friday and be expected to deliver the translation on Monday. Under von der Leyen, things have become even more frantic, as you no longer know what might happen from one minute to another. As a result, the DO procedure is also being exploited more than in the past. Different horses for different courses, you might say. But living with constant stress is not a very healthy perspective ... Sorry for not being more specific, but I imagine all of this will sound more than familiar to you.”</p>		XX		

C6: SV language department

Translators' report	Text for President / other not genuinely urgent text	Organisational issue	Too much pressure exerted	Waiting for an announced text to arrive (no compensation)
<p>“About the standby system, I would like to quote from the latest minutes from the SV department: <i>During the week, the Duty translator had been called out at 1.30 at night for a PP. It seems unlikely that a PP warrants calling out the non-procedural languages at such an hour, unless some major catastrophe is under way. It looks more as if DG COMM and the CABs are now seeing the Duty phone system as the normal workflow for VIP. If that is how the Commission wants it, DGT should, however, look over its duty system and build up a solid infrastructure and a system with clear compensations, instead of the current one based on "voluntarism". Of course, we would need the resources for that as well.</i> Also, I don't understand why they call it a voluntary system. In the Swedish department we are assigned a week. If you're unlucky you get a week with holidays (Easter, Ascension, Pentecost) - with no compensation!”</p>	X	X		

D. Proposals and comments:

“physical transfer of phone is generally an incredibly outdated and cumbersome procedure which is absolutely unfeasible during (Christmas) holidays.”

“In one case, when I was on duty (in 2020), the Duty Officer asked me and the other translators for our private mobile phone numbers anyway, because it was more convenient for him.”

“When I took over the duty phone from my predecessor, it was not working properly – no messages arrived at all, so we had to give our private GSM number to be reachable.”

“Finally, let me also use this opportunity to repeat my suggestion: Since we all have Skype for Business which can be forwarded to our personal phone, why don't we just use that instead of having to run around in order to deliver/receive phones?”

“I would propose that translators on standby duty be allowed to telework during the whole standby duty week and to change their core hours so that they are free from Monday to Friday from 8:30 until 18:00. This would enable them to do their normal work during the time they are on duty.”

“Personally, I would be in favour of defining the core hours of the standby duty from Monday until Friday 18:00 to 22:00 (4 hours in total). This would be in the interest of the service insofar as it would increase the likelihood that the translator on duty is in fact at home when a request arrives. With the current rules, I don't feel obliged to stay home during the whole standby duty week.”

“Thanks for bringing this issue up. I think it's indeed important that the administration knows what this “permanence” entails, not in terms of work really, but of involvement and organisation.”

“Am I supposed to stay home every evening and during the whole weekend, next to my computer to be immediately ready as ALL translations are now always very urgent (it was not the case before)...? Or am I allowed to go out and in this case, how far can I go away from home (it could be a sunny weekend and I might want to do something outside with my kids!)? Do I have to be operational in the next 30 minutes following the call? In the next hour? In the next 2 hours? I think the rule should clearly state: You have to be operational XX minutes after the call.”

“In earlier times, using the DO used to be considerably less frequent. I think it would be fair to say that working over the weekend became a recurrent practice already under Juncker, when we would regularly get the original on Friday and be expected to deliver the translation on Monday. Under von der Leyen, things have become even more frantic, as you no longer know what might happen from one minute to another. As a result, the DO procedure is also being exploited more than in the past. Different horses for different courses, you might say. But living with constant stress is not a very healthy perspective ...”

“It seems unlikely that a press release warrants calling out the non-procedural languages in the middle of the night, unless some major catastrophe is under way. It looks more as if DG COMM and the CABs are now seeing the Duty phone system as the normal workflow for VIP. If that is how the Commission wants it, DGT should, however, look over its duty system and build up a solid infrastructure and a system with clear compensations, instead of the current one based on "voluntarism". Of course, we would need the resources for that as well. Also, I don't understand why they call it a voluntary system. We are all assigned a week. If you're unlucky, you get a week with holidays (Easter, Ascension, Pentecost) - with no compensation!”

“I understand that senior management does not perceive standby duty as burdensome. Hardly a surprise, since they shifted the whole burden to operational staff. Granted, standby duty is generally uneventful, as the most frequent occurrences illustrate: 1. A requester announces an urgent text, but eventually nothing happens, except that several translators' evenings were spoiled. 2. A requester announces an urgent text on an important matter, but at objective scrutiny, the actual job is neither urgent nor important and could just as well have been taken care of the next morning. However, that only goes to show that the whole exercise is unnecessary, as anyone capable of straight thinking would have assumed, since DGT is an administrative entity, not an emergency unit. In fact, 24/7 availability is an offer that merely creates its own demand, as it incites

our requesters to behave like some nutcase calling an ambulance only to ask for an Aspirin, which nobody in their right minds would do, considering the consequences – a dressing-down and a hefty bill. Thanks to senior management’s indulgence towards our “customers” though, there are no consequences for squandering translators’ efforts. I admit that this has been bugging me for years. After learning that yet another discussion on this matter remained fruitless, my conclusion is that I will no longer “volunteer” for standby duty under the current scheme. Moreover, this is what I would recommend to everybody. If a majority of colleagues adopted that stance, progress on the issue would be inevitable. 20 years ago, I have worked at the Council where all translators were taking turns at performing late-shift-duty during summits, which was widely perceived as both necessary and acceptable – especially since the following week we would recoup the hours worked with a bonus on top. I would therefore advocate a compulsory standby scheme in emergencies (such as the financial crisis or Brexit, not for trivial press releases!), but with adequate compensation. The latter is necessary in order to put a price on translators’ time, which currently is a commodity that anyone may waste at their leisure. Enough! Therefore, should we not draw inspiration from the Council’s scheme of over-proportionate compensation for extra hours worked at night – and seek the unions’ support for implementing such a scheme in DGT? After all, only a hefty price tag on our private lives can make DGT management lose their appetite for laying claim on it to an ever-increasing extent!”