

‘Moving towards greater collaboration in Europe’

– an interview with Liese Katschinka

‘Movers and Shakers’ is a series of interviews with the interpreting profession’s leading lights.

Liese Katschinka is President of EULITA as well as a freelance translator (German/English), interpreter (German/English/French), and certified court interpreter (German/English) with 30 years’ experience. She is a Member of the Court and Legal Interpreting Commission of the International Association of Conference Interpreters (since 1985), and Vice-President of the Austrian Association of Court Interpreters (since 1998). Liese was Chair of the FIT Committee for Court Interpreting and Legal Translation (1999-2005).

What was your route into interpreting?

I studied at the University of Vienna and graduated from the Institute for Translators and Interpreters. I then worked as a freelance conference interpreter, before I was approached by the Austrian Association of Court Interpreters (AACI) and was asked to become a court interpreter. At the time there were a number of tricky commercial cases going on and no qualified interpreters available. I went on to become a certified court interpreter and Member of the Court



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and Legal Interpreting Commission of the International Association of Conference Interpreters. Since 1998, I have also been Vice President of the AACI.

I’ve been working in the profession for 30 years with a focus on court interpreting. There has been a lot of growth in the sector in Austria as

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a result of the Iron Curtain falling. With a lot of people travelling to the country from Bulgaria, Syria and Africa, the demand for rare languages in court interpreting has grown.

In the absence of proper training and relevant courses people were translating without being properly qualified. People with rare language skills often feel they don't need to get training because there is a demand for their skills anyway.

I think there are two ways in which this could be tackled: by educating the users of court interpreters and ensuring they demand qualified interpreters and through the professional interpreting organisations. They have a role to play here.

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Can you tell us a bit about EULITA?

When the EU began thinking about adopting a directive on procedural rights they set up the Justice Forum and invited different European professional groups such as the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE) and the European Criminal Bar Association (ECBA) to join the discussion. At this point they realised that, while there was an International Federation of Translators (FIT), there was no equivalent European organisation for legal interpreters.

The European Association for Legal Interpreters and Translators was therefore set up. Project funding was applied for and obtained, resulting



in the establishment of EULITA (the European Legal Interpreters and Translators Association) in November 2009.

We have two types of membership: Full and Associate members. Full members are national or regional professional associations of legal interpreters and translators or professional associations that count amongst their membership legal interpreters and translators in EU member states. Associate members generally include associations of legal translators or interpreters from outside the EU; or other related organisations, such as CIUTI, AIIC, efsli, training institutes, research groups etc, which demonstrate that they support the objectives and goals of EULITA. In countries where there is no professional association, individual members can join as Associate members.

Our work began with negotiating on procedural safeguards in criminal proceedings. Sarah Ludford MEP was the European Parliament's draftswoman or rapporteur for the 2010 EU interpretation directive giving all suspects and defendants the right to free, good-quality interpretation and translation of criminal proceedings if they do not understand the language.

The Directive on the Right to Interpretation and Translation in Criminal Proceedings was formally

adopted on 26 October 2010. It had to be transposed (implemented) by EU Member States by 27 October 2013, so the focus of our work then became the transposition and advising our members on this. The European Commission closely monitors that transposition is timely, correctly done and implemented, so as to attain the results intended.

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What do you think are the main challenges to the interpreting and translation profession across Europe?

The lack of understanding on the part of the judicial authorities. They could save such a lot of money if they only used qualified interpreters.

We are seeing a lot of outsourcing of court interpreting across Europe. The impact of outsourcing contracts without adequate provision made for the use of appropriately qualified and experienced interpreters is an erosion of the standard of interpreting services supplied to the judicial authorities. This is ultimately damaging and costly.

Universities and professional associations are trying to improve knowledge and skills, and to move interpreting towards professionalisation. The problem is that the judicial authorities are pulling the other way. Their actions are only serving to de-professionalise interpreting.

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How has the EU Directive helped the interpreting profession?

The EU needed someone to consult with on the directive on procedural rights, which led to the establishment of EULITA.

There had been attempts to engage with the interpreting community before, but these had failed because there wasn't a single organisation representing the profession at a European level.

EULITA has provided the profession with the means to lobby at the highest level in Europe.

"Judicial authorities could save such a lot of money if they only used qualified interpreters."

How is cooperation in Europe helping to move the profession forward?

It has been easier to get certain stakeholders such as lawyers to listen to what we are trying to achieve with regards to the use of qualified interpreters and their working conditions.

It is difficult to talk to judges, prosecutors and police authorities, however, because they tend to pass responsibility for the current process to their Ministry of Justice. This will need to be addressed when a new European Commission is in place.

What we need to do is to educate the users of interpreters about the reasons for only using qualified interpreters when the time comes, and how to interact with them. In the case of judges, they might only need to use an interpreter for 10% of all the cases they handle during their careers. But when they do, they need to use a qualified interpreter.

We need to help users understand that cost shouldn't be their only consideration. Cost has been a key consideration for police authorities, so they have resisted using interpreters that initially appear to cost more money. However, they need to weigh this against the cost incurred when things go wrong.

How will the LIT Search Project help to overcome these challenges?

This is one step in the right direction of getting people to use qualified interpreters. By linking the national registers or lists of interpreters that exist, people will be able to compare systems.

It will also help to overcome the problem with rare languages, as it will allow for interpreters in other countries to be used using new technologies such as video conferencing.

We held our launch meeting at the beginning of May 2014. At this meeting we introduced the technical team we will be working with to develop the pilot database. Our next working session will be in September. The entire project to set up the pilot database will take two years.



Can you give us one or two examples of the different national systems of regulation and registration that exist in Europe?

The system of regulation in the UK is very good. What makes it different

from the regulatory system currently operated in some other European countries is that it is voluntary, whereas theirs are mandatory and backed by legislation.

In countries such as Germany, France, Austria, Poland and Czechoslovakia, interpreters must undergo an examination to become certified to work for the courts. It is a legal requirement that court interpreters are certified and by becoming certified they are automatically registered. Legal interpreters must make themselves available to work for the courts – and the courts must use legal interpreters. Only if they can't find a legal interpreter on the register can they call on someone else to interpret in court in a specific case or hearing.

Generally, certified legal interpreters must re-certify after a period of five years by providing random samples of cases they've worked on. If a judge is unhappy with the quality of an interpreter's work, they can ask for that person not to be re-certified.

In some countries the legislation not only extends to being certified and registered, but also governs legal interpreters' remuneration with regards to criminal cases. Certified legal interpreters can work in civil, arbitration and criminal cases, which is fortunate, as remuneration for civil and arbitration cases helps to offset the very mean income received for criminal cases. ■