



Plenary sitting

B8-1230/2016

16.11.2016

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

to wind up the debate on the statement by the Commission

pursuant to Rule 123(2) of the Rules of Procedure

on sign languages and professional sign language interpreters
(2016/2952(RSP))

Ádám Kósa, David Casa, Algirdas Saudargas, Marek Plura, Csaba Sógor, Romana Tomc, Deirdre Clune, Jeroen Lenaers, Sofia Ribeiro, Verónica Lope Fontagné, Jérôme Lavrilleux, Anne Sander, Agnieszka Kozłowska-Rajewicz, Rosa Estaràs Ferragut, Róza Gräfin von Thun und Hohenstein
on behalf of the PPE Group

Vilija Blinkevičiūtė, Jutta Steinruck, Olga Sehnalová, Brando Benifei, Elena Gentile, Maria Grapini, Karoline Graswander-Hainz, Sergio Gutiérrez Prieto, Javi López, Georgi Pirinski, Costas Mavrides
on behalf of the S&D Group

Helga Stevens, Jana Žitňanská, Mark Demesmaecker, Roberts Zile, Arne Gericke, Ruža Tomašić, Geoffrey Van Orden, Angel Dzhambazki, Anthea McIntyre, Vicky Ford, Daniel Dalton, Raffaele Fitto
on behalf of the ECR Group

Marian Harkin, Sophia in 't Veld, Urmas Paet, Paavo Väyrynen, Marielle de Sarnez
on behalf of the ALDE Group

Terry Reintke, Philippe Lamberts, Helga Trüpel, Indrek Tarand
on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group

Laura Agea, Isabella Adinolfi, Rolandas Paksas
on behalf of the EFDD Group

B8-1230/2016

**European Parliament resolution on sign languages and professional sign language interpreters
(2016/2952(RSP))**

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Articles 2, 5, 9, 10, 19, 168 and 216(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and Articles 2 and 21 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU),
- having regard to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU,
- having regard to its resolutions of 17 June 1988 on sign languages for deaf people¹ and of 18 November 1998 on sign languages²,
- having regard to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and its entry into force in the EU on 21 January 2011 in accordance with Council Decision 2010/48/EC of 26 November 2009 concerning the conclusion, by the European Community, of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities³,
- having regard to its resolution of 7 July 2016 on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, with special regard to the Concluding Observations of the UN CRPD Committee⁴,
- having regard to General Comment No 4 by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on the right to inclusive education⁵,
- having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,
- having regard to Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation ('Employment Equality Directive')⁶,
- having regard to Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications⁷,

¹ OJ C 187, 18.7.1988, p. 236.

² OJ C 379, 07.12.1998 p. 66.

³ OJ L 23, 27.1.2010, p. 35.

⁴ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2016)0318.

⁵ <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/CRPD/GC/RighttoEducation/CRPD-C-GC-4.doc>

⁶ OJ L 303, 2.12.2000, p. 16.

⁷ OJ L 255, 30.09.2005, p. 22.

- having regard to its resolution of 12 April 2016 on Erasmus+ and other tools to foster mobility in VET – a lifelong learning approach¹,
 - having regard to the European Youth Forum policy paper on equality and non-discrimination²,
 - having regard to the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council of 2 December 2015 on the approximation of the laws, regulations and administrative provisions of the Member States as regards the accessibility requirements for products and services (COM(2015)0615),
 - having regard to the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council of 3 December 2012 on the accessibility of public sector bodies' websites COM(2012)0721),
 - having regard to Directive 2010/64/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 October 2010 on the right to interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings³,
 - having regard to the Learning Outcomes and Assessment Guidelines of the European Forum of Sign Language Interpreters (efsli) for equal training opportunities for sign language interpreters and quality services for deaf citizens across the entire Union⁴,
 - having regard to the efsli/EUD sign language interpreter guidelines for international/European level meetings⁵,
 - having regard to the AIIC guidelines for spoken language interpreters working in mixed teams⁶,
 - having regard to the efsli report on the rights to sign language interpreting services when working or studying abroad⁷,
 - having regard to Rule 123(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas, as full citizens, all persons with disabilities, in particular women and children, including deaf and hard-of-hearing people, including those who use sign language and those who do not, have equal rights and are entitled to inalienable dignity, equal treatment, independent living, autonomy and full participation in society;
- B. whereas the TFEU requires the Union to combat discrimination based on disability when defining and implementing its policies and activities (Article 10) and gives it the power to adopt legislation to address such discrimination (Article 19);

¹Texts adopted, P8_TA(2016)0107.

² http://www.youthforum.org/assets/2016/04/0099-16_Policy_Paper_Equality_Non-discrimination_FINAL2.pdf

³ OJ L 280, 20.10.2010, p. 1.

⁴ <http://efsli.org/publications>

⁵ <http://efsli.org/efsliblu/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/SL-Interpreter-Guidelines.pdf>

⁶ <http://aiic.net/page/6701/guidelines-for-spoken-language-interpreters-working-in-mixed-teams/lang/1>

⁷ <http://efsli.org/efsliblu/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/R1101-The-right-to-sign-language-interpreting-services-when-working-or-studying-abroad.pdf>

- C. whereas Articles 21 and 26 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union explicitly prohibit discrimination on the grounds of disability and provide for equal participation of persons with disabilities in society;
- D. whereas there are approximately one million deaf sign language users in the EU¹ and 51 million hard-of-hearing citizens², many of whom are also sign language users;
- E. whereas national and regional sign languages are fully-fledged natural languages with their own grammar and syntax equal to spoken languages³;
- F. whereas the EU's multilingualism policy promotes foreign language learning and whereas one of its goals is for every European to speak two languages in addition to their mother tongue; whereas learning and promoting national and regional sign languages could support this goal;
- G. whereas accessibility is a precondition for persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully and equally in society⁴;
- H. whereas accessibility is not only limited to the physical accessibility of the environment but extends to the accessibility of information and communication, including in the form of the provision of content in sign language⁵;
- I. whereas professional sign language interpreters are equal to spoken language interpreters in terms of assignments and mission tasks;
- J. whereas the situation of sign language interpreters is heterogeneous among the Member States, ranging from informal family support to professional university-educated and fully qualified interpreters;
- K. whereas there is a lack of qualified and professional sign language interpreters in all the Member States and whereas the ratio of sign language users to sign language interpreters varies between 8:1 and 2 500:1, with an average ratio of 160:1⁶;
- L. whereas a petition⁷ has been lodged requesting that Parliament allow petitions to be submitted in EU national and regional sign languages;
- M. whereas the Brussels Declaration on Sign Languages in the European Union⁸ promotes a non-discriminatory approach to the use of a natural sign language, as required under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which has been ratified by the EU and all EU Member States except one;

¹ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-13-511_en.htm

² European Federation of Hard of Hearing People (EFHOH) http://www.efhoh.org/about_us

³ Brentari, D., ed. (2010) Sign Languages. Cambridge University Press.

Pfau, R., Steinbach M. & Bencie W., eds. (2012) Sign Language: An International Handbook. De Gruyter.

⁴ General Comment No 2, CRPD Committee, CRPD/C/GC/2, available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G14/033/13/PDF/G1403313.pdf?OpenElement>

⁵ United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Article 9.

⁶ Wit, M. de (2016, forthcoming). Sign Language Interpreting in Europe, 2016 edition.

⁷ Petition No 1056-16

⁸ Brussels Declaration (2010), European Union of the Deaf (EUD)

http://www.eud.eu/files/8514/5803/7674/brussels_declaration_FINAL.pdf

- N. whereas the level and quality of subtitling on public and private television differs considerably across the Member States, ranging from less than 10 % to almost 100 %, with highly varying standards of quality¹; whereas there is a lack of data in most Member States with regard to the level of sign language interpretation on television;
- O. whereas the development of new language technologies could benefit sign language users;
- P. whereas, according to the CRPD, the denial of reasonable accommodation constitutes discrimination and whereas, under the Employment Equality Directive, reasonable accommodation must be provided to guarantee compliance with the principle of equal treatment;
- Q. whereas there is currently no direct communication access for deaf, deafblind or hard-of-hearing citizens to Members of the European Parliament and administrators of the institutions of the European Union and, vice versa, to deaf or hard-of-hearing people from within the EU institutions;

Qualified and professional sign language interpreters

1. Stresses the need for qualified and professional sign language interpreters, which can only be met on the basis of the following approach:
 - (a) official recognition of national and regional sign language(s) in Member States and within EU institutions,
 - (b) formal training (university or similar, equivalent to 3 years of full-time studies, corresponding to the training required of spoken language interpreters)²,
 - (c) registration (official accreditation and quality control system, such as continuing professional development),
 - (d) formal recognition of the profession;
2. Recognises that the delivery of high-quality sign language interpreting services:
 - (a) is dependent on an objective quality assessment involving all stakeholders,
 - (b) is based on professional qualifications,
 - (c) involves expert representatives from the deaf community;
3. Recognises that sign language interpretation constitutes a professional service requiring appropriate remuneration;

¹ EFHOH (2015). State of subtitling access in EU. Available at:
http://media.wix.com/ugd/c2e099_0921564404524507bed2ff3648781a3c.pdf

² efsli (2013), Learning Outcomes for Graduates of a Three Year Interpreting Training Programme

Distinction between accessibility and reasonable accommodation¹

4. Appreciates that accessibility benefits certain groups and is based on a set of standards that are implemented gradually;
5. Is aware that disproportionality or undue burden cannot be claimed to defend the failure to provide accessibility;
6. Recognises that reasonable accommodation relates to an individual and is complementary to the accessibility duty;
7. Notes also that an individual may request reasonable accommodation measures even if the accessibility duty has been fulfilled;
8. Understands that the provision of sign language interpretation may constitute an accessibility measure or a reasonable accommodation measure, depending on the situation;

Accessibility

9. Stresses that deaf, deafblind and hard-of-hearing citizens must have access to the same information and communication as their peers in the form of sign language interpretation, subtitling, speech-to-text and/or alternative forms of communication, including oral interpreters;
10. Emphasises that public and government services, including their online content, must be made accessible via live intermediaries such as on-site sign language interpreters, but also alternative internet-based and remote services, where appropriate;
11. Reiterates its commitment to making the political process as accessible as possible, including through the provision of professional sign language interpreters; notes that this includes elections, public consultations and other events, as appropriate;
12. Stresses the increasing role of language technologies in providing equal access for all to the digital space;
13. Recognises the importance of minimum standards to ensure accessibility, especially in view of new and emerging technologies, such as the provision of internet-based sign language interpreting and subtitling services;
14. Notes that while the provision of health care is a Member State competence, it should cater for the needs of deaf, deafblind and hard-of-hearing patients, for example by providing professional sign language interpreters and staff awareness training, with particular attention to women and children;
15. Acknowledges that equal access to justice for deaf, deafblind and hard-of-hearing citizens can only be ensured through the provision of appropriately qualified and professional sign language interpreters;

¹ CRPD/C/GC/4, para. 28

16. Is aware of the importance of accurate and precise interpretation and translation services, especially in court and other legal settings; reiterates, therefore, the importance of specialised and highly qualified professional sign language interpreters, particularly in those settings;
17. Stresses the need to increase support and specific provisions, such as sign language interpretation and accessible real-time text-based disaster information, for persons with disabilities in situations of armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and natural disasters¹;

Employment, education and training

18. Notes that reasonable accommodation measures, which include the provision of professional sign language interpreters, must be taken to ensure equal access to employment, education and training;
19. Highlights that balanced and holistic information on sign language and what it means to be deaf must be provided so that parents can make informed choices in the best interest of their children;
20. Stresses that early intervention programmes are crucial for children in the development of life skills, including language skills; notes, furthermore, that those programmes should ideally include deaf role models;
21. Emphasises that deaf, deafblind and hard-of-hearing students and their parents must be provided with the opportunity to learn the national or regional sign language of their environment through pre-school services and in schools²;
22. Underlines that measures must be taken to recognise and promote the linguistic identity of deaf communities³;
23. Calls on the Member States to encourage the learning of sign language in the same way as foreign languages;
24. Stresses that qualified sign language interpreters and teaching staff competent in sign language and equipped with the skills to work effectively in bilingual inclusive education environments form an essential part of deaf children's and young adults' academic achievement, resulting in higher educational outcomes and lower unemployment rates in the long term;
25. Highlights the widespread lack of sign bilingual textbooks and learning materials in accessible formats and languages;
26. Urges that the principle of freedom of movement for deaf, deafblind and hard-of-hearing people within the EU be guaranteed, especially in the context of Erasmus+ and related mobility programmes, by ensuring that participants are not disproportionately

¹ United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Article 11.

² http://www.univie.ac.at/designbilingual/downloads/De-Sign_Bilingual_Findings.pdf

³ General Comment No 4, CRPD Committee, CRPD/C/GC/4, available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/CRPD/GC/RighttoEducation/CRPD-C-GC-4.doc>

burdened with having to take care of their own interpreting arrangements;

27. Welcomes the European Disability Card Pilot Project; regrets the exclusion of sign language interpretation in the project as this significantly hinders the freedom of movement of deaf, deafblind and hard-of-hearing workers and students within the EU;

European Union institutions

28. Recognises that the EU institutions must represent best practice examples for their staff, elected officials and interns and vis-à-vis EU citizens regarding the provision of reasonable accommodation and accessibility, which includes the provision of sign language interpretation;
29. Welcomes the fact that the EU institutions are already, on an ad hoc basis, providing for the accessibility of public events and committee meetings; takes the view that subtitling and speech-to-text should be considered an alternative but equal and necessary measure for hard-of-hearing people not using sign languages, and that this is also relevant to employees of EU institutions in terms of providing reasonable accommodation in accordance with Article 5 of Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation;
30. Recognises that the EU institutions have a system in place to provide sign language interpretation via their respective interpreting departments for accessibility purposes; urges the institutions to utilise such existing systems also when providing reasonable accommodation for staff and/or elected officials, effectively minimising the administrative burden on the individual and the institutions;
31. Strongly urges the institutions to formally grant sign language interpreters the same status as spoken language interpreters in respect of the interpreting services they provide for the institutions and/or their staff and appointed officials, including access to technological support, preparatory materials and documents;
32. Urges Eurostat to ensure that statistics on deaf, deafblind and hard-of-hearing sign language users are supplied to the EU institutions so they can better define, implement and analyse their disability and language policies;
33. Urges Parliament's visitors' service to cater for the needs of deaf, deafblind and hard-of-hearing visitors by directly providing access in a national or regional sign language and speech-to-text services;
34. Asks the institutions to fully implement the EU pilot project INSIGN, which is a response to Parliament's decision of 10-13 December 2012 on the implementation of a real-time sign language application and service and is aimed at improving communication between deaf and hard-of-hearing people and the EU institutions¹;
35. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.

¹ <http://www.eud.eu/projects/past-projects/insign-project/>