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**COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION**

of the Translation Centre for the Bodies of the European Union

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Executive summary of the evaluation of the Translation Centre for the Bodies of the European Union

This is the first overall Commission evaluation of the Translation Centre for the Bodies of the European Union (CdT). It assesses the Centre against the Better Regulation criteria of effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and EU added value, mainly for 2019–2023, with some evidence from preceding and subsequent years.

The Centre was created in 1994 to provide translation and related linguistic services to EU agencies and, under certain arrangements, to EU institutions and other bodies. Its rationale remains to centralise linguistic services, generate economies of scale, avoid duplication and support multilingual communication across the EU. Unlike most agencies, it is a service agency rather than a policy agency and has historically operated on a self-financing model based on client fees.

The evaluation is supported by an external study that used a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods and drew on both primary and secondary sources. Evidence was gathered from reviews of the Centre's management and monitoring documents, a previous 2017 study, European Court of Auditors reports on the Centre's financial operations, and stakeholder consultation.

On effectiveness, the Centre consistently exceeded work programme targets, with an average implementation rate of 91% in 2019–2023. Its 2019–2020 Transformation Plan, designed to embed a more sustainable and technology-based business model, reached a 98% implementation rate by the end of 2020 and was later integrated into normal operations. The Centre modernised workflows and expanded services such as automatic translation, post-editing, transcription and subtitling. It also improved client relations through single contact points and a more bespoke approach. The Centre remained fully operational during COVID-19 by moving rapidly to teleworking and continued adapting to technological change through investment in machine translation, AI-related tools, workflow systems and staff training.

On efficiency, the Centre made substantial efforts to control costs. Between 2018 and 2024, total expenditure fell from EUR 44.8 million to EUR 42.5 million despite inflation, salary indexation and higher energy costs. Savings came from automation, reduced outsourcing, streamlined administration and other cost-control measures. The share of administrative staff fell from 20.4% in 2018 to 11.6% in 2024. Outsourcing dropped from 90% of production in 2018 to under 50% in 2024, supported by greater internal productivity and stronger use of language technologies.

Yet these efficiency gains were not enough to offset declining demand. Translation and trademark translation accounted for 85% of demand, but both fell sharply. Net revenue across activity-based costing categories turned negative in 2022 and reached a deficit of EUR 5.67 million in 2024. The reserve for pricing stability was depleted in 2025, forcing the Centre to request EU budget contributions for 2025 and 2026, and to request another for 2027.

The evaluation also examined governance efficiency. The Centre's Management Board has over 70 members and is unusually large compared with other agencies. Although this has been seen as potentially cumbersome and as posing possible conflict-of-interest risks, the evaluation found no concrete evidence that decision-making had ever been blocked or delayed because of the Board's size.

On coherence, the Centre operates consistently within the EU institutional framework and maintains strong cooperation with the Commission's Directorate-General for Translation (DGT), its partner DG. The relationship is described as smooth, trust-based and conflict-free, despite the absence of a formal

service-level agreement or memorandum of understanding. There is no overlap in mandate between the Centre and DGT because they serve different client groups and work with different types and categories of documents.

The Centre also contributes strongly to interinstitutional cooperation. Since 2003 it has managed the IATE terminology database on behalf of EU institutional partners, one of the flagship achievements of EU language cooperation. It also contributes to multilingual policy development, shared training and knowledge exchange within the EU system and in international networks.

However, coherence is challenged by the fact that some agencies increasingly use alternative solutions, including in-house arrangements, private contractors and freely available translation technologies. In some cases, this appears contrary to the rationale of a centralised shared service and may also conflict with existing legal obligations on certain agencies to use the Centre.

On relevance and EU added value, the evaluation confirms that the Centre remains relevant. Although demand has declined, the need for a central, secure and specialised multilingual service provider has not disappeared, as the Centre continued to deliver on annual demand of around EUR 40 million. Stakeholders continue to value the Centre, especially for high-quality, specialised, secure and confidential translation services across all official EU languages.

Its EU added value is clear. A centralised translation service helps avoid duplication across agencies, provides access to language expertise and shared tools such as IATE, ensures a high degree of data security, and supports multilingual communication with citizens. This is particularly important for smaller agencies, which would otherwise need to build their own internal capacity or manage fragmented outsourcing arrangements.

At the same time, relevance is under pressure from two trends: growing use by agencies of cheaper or free technological alternatives for lower-risk content, and budgetary constraints that push clients to reduce translation expenditure even where the Centre's added value is recognised.

Overall, the evaluation finds that the Centre has been effective, coherent and relevant, and that it provides clear EU added value. It modernised its services, adapted to changing client needs, supported multilingualism across the Union, and built a strong reputation for quality, reliability, confidentiality and specialised expertise.

The self-financing model worked for almost 30 years, but falling demand from agencies, rising price sensitivity and the spread of low-cost or free machine translation tools have weakened its viability. At the same time, the Centre remains bound by the EU regulatory framework, which defines its high structural costs and limits flexibility in generating revenue or expanding its client base.

The evaluation finds that the core concept of a centralised translation service remains valid, but that the current financial setup is under strain. Without corrective action, there is a possibility that the Centre may continue requiring support from the EU administrative budget. This raises questions about whether the current arrangement is still the most efficient way to organise centralised linguistic services for EU agencies and bodies. Considering the constraints of the current and upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework, other potential solutions to provide centralised translation services would need to be explored, possibly through the ongoing Large-Scale Review of the Commission.