

# The EP addressing the citizens in clear language

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As the only directly elected European Union institution, the European Parliament has a **special connection with its citizens**, especially when it comes to languages. As you know very well, the EU has 24 official languages and the Parliament's Directorate-General for Translation is one of the main actors in guaranteeing multilingualism. But making our work more accessible is about more than that. Our Directorate-General for Translation has embarked on a voyage of self-discovery into the realm of citizens' language.

## We know language matters

Multilingualism is in the European Parliament's DNA. Every citizen has the right to listen, read, speak or write in the official language of his or her choice when engaging with the work of the Parliament. Every five years, citizens elect Members of the European Parliament who enjoy the same rights.

The Directorate-General for Translation **makes multilingualism a reality** by ensuring that texts are translated into all official EU languages. And with 24 languages and 552 possible language combinations, our translators have their work cut out. The service we provide is unique, combining speed, quality and accuracy in our efforts to make the Parliament accessible to everyone. This makes the translation service and translators the most highly regarded linguistic authority within and outside the institution.

Let me describe now how we've extended our remit **from linguistic authority to point of reference for citizens' language**.

## Eurospeak

But before I explain our evolution, I need to start with the complex jargon that the EU has developed over the years, otherwise known as 'Eurospeak'. Eurospeak is characterized by:

- highly specific terminology
- long, convoluted sentences

- strong fluidity among languages, with a tendency towards lending and borrowing words.

It should therefore come as no surprise that Eurospeak has helped to widen the **perceived gap between the institution and the citizens** it represents. Gradually and insidiously, Eurospeak had been creeping into communication with citizens in their own language. Something had to be done.

## The future of reading is listening

In 2017, the Directorate-General for Translation launched an audio project. The main aim of the project was to establish an online European Parliament radio stream that would speak to citizens not only in their own language, but also in their own words. Alongside the radio station, we also created audio podcasts.

**Why audio?** Audio has three main advantages over the written word: it's quick, easy and accessible.

We began with a series of professional training sessions, where it became clear that if we were to make the European Parliament interesting and accessible for a wide audience in all EU languages, we would have to adapt existing written content to make it radio-friendly. Here, **the use of plain language was key**.

When writing scripts and narratives for the ear, we discovered the importance of **putting ourselves in the audience's shoes and making the message understandable at first listen**. We focused on storytelling, logic and creating images in the minds of our audience.

This project has been a reality check, drawing many of us out of our comfort zone and into new territory. We learnt to question our natural tendency towards Eurospeak. The new tasks forced us to accept that the texts familiar to us were neither clear nor interesting for our intended audience.

Two years on we have produced thousands of high-quality podcasts, published on platforms such as [What Europe Does for Me](#), the [Citizens' App](#), [My House of European History](#) and the [Audio Capacity](#) website.

## Citizens' language: clear language in three formats – text, audio and video

But why stop there? Our adventures in audio whet our appetite for **other citizen-friendly formats**.

We began developing formats that better correspond to our audience's needs and expectations. We initially focused on a package of **written and audio summaries**.

For example, rather than battling through a long, dense study on cardiovascular diseases, citizens, or indeed staff and Members of the European Parliament, can now read a written summary or listen to a 5-minute overview instead.

We're also thinking ahead. We're tackling a format less well known to us: video and the three multilingual linguistic tasks connected to it – **subtitling, voice-over and dubbing**.

We began with subtitling. Subtitling requires concise, clear sentences. One of the main constraints of subtitling is the need to convey the main message quickly, while leaving the viewer enough time to actually watch the video itself. Other formats will follow shortly.

We can't talk about citizens' language without cultural references that appeal to specific groups, in different EU countries for example. **Localisation** is the answer; it is crucial if our message is to be understood. Our adaptors and translators (now called intercultural and language professionals) have free rein to adapt their texts to their audience. We encourage culture-specific examples in order to make our audience feel comfortable, pique their interest and create a natural relationship with the material.

To summarize this relationship, citizens' language generates immediate understanding and puts citizens at ease. This in turn generates **trust** in the institution that represents them.

## A plain-language future

Let's be frank: making EU texts more palatable to the general public is a mammoth task. With this in mind, here are our **key takeaways**.

- Training is key to ensure the excellence of our language professionals.
- Specialisation is essential.
- Flexibility in learning and applying plain language is vital.
- Adaptability when establishing new roles is challenging but equally as rewarding.

**In a nutshell**, this bold new enterprise launched at the European Parliament in 2017 represents the first steps of a shift away from the complex language of the EU to the language of citizens in 24 languages. A degree of introspection, a good dose of professional training, the expertise of hundreds of intercultural and language professionals and a little courage have helped to pave the way for new formats that speak directly to citizens about the work of the European Parliament. The result? Text, audio and video, all in citizens' language.