Interview with

Rodolfo Maslias
Head of the Terminology Coordination Office (TermCoord) within the European Parliament

“IN THE FOLLOWING YEARS, TERMINOLOGY WILL BE A VERY IMPORTANT INSTRUMENT TO SUPPORT THE TECHNICAL EVOLUTION OF TRANSLATION AND OF MULTILINGUAL COMMUNICATION IN THE GLOBALIZED WORLD”

Rodolfo Maslias studied languages and law in Greece, Germany, Spain and Luxemburg. He joined the European Parliament in 1981, at first as a translator in the Greek language unit. Since 2008, he has been Head of the Terminology Coordination Unit (TermCoord). In November 2018, he attended the conference on the achievements and challenges of military terminology in the Slovenian Armed Forces with a lecture focusing on the terminology tools and efforts in the EU and the European Parliament. In the interview, he further elaborated on the terminology achievements and challenges and underlined possible terminological cooperation that could be developed between TermCoord and the Slovenian Armed Forces.
Mr. Maslias, you are Head of the Terminology Coordination Office (TermCoord) within the European Parliament. What is the role of terminology management in the EU and its member states?

Since the Lisbon Treaty, the latest one governing the EU, the European Parliament, has been the final legislator of the EU legal acts, which make up in some fields up to 80% of the national laws in the Member States. This means that our translations in the 24 official languages equal to originals, since they are transposed as such in the national legal systems and are used for the daily activities of the citizens. Even more important, they are used in the national and European courts and they need to be absolutely consistent. Terminology is therefore crucial for the quality of translations to ensure that the terms used in the various languages always correspond to the same concept. To meet this target, the field of terminology requires close cooperation between all EU Institutions to guarantee this quality and consistency in the whole legislative process.

Due to the size and scope of translation and terminology efforts within the European Parliament, the terminology management system is rather complex. How far back do terminology standardization efforts in the European Union date; how did they evolve and what is today’s role of TermCoord in this respect?

When TermCoord was created in 2008, we needed to launch awareness campaigns to explain to the translators, drafters and decision-making managers that terminology makes part of the translation process as an inherent task to ensure its quality. Furthermore, we could provide services that ease and increase the efficiency of the translation work. The evolution of the translation work with the use of the CAT-tools contributed to this effort, since nowadays we can download termbases directly from the databases related to the text to translate and access them in the CAT-tool while translating. The communication platform EurTerm that we created on the initiative of TermCoord and its language specific wikis now permit the online cooperation between all Institutions and a very advanced standardization of the EU terminology.

What is in your opinion the level of terminology awareness among your terminology users? Are there any special efforts or promotion initiatives in place to raise such awareness?

We managed in these ten years to raise the awareness about the importance of terminology mainly in two ways: with constant communication and trainings,
but also because we could provide very useful resources that we get from networks with the most important terminology organizations throughout the world. We have also benefited from the tools we developed for interlinking terminology and have also managed to include terminology in the workflow of the DG Translation with the support of our General Director, who had shown his devotion for terminology already as Head of the Slovene translation unit. On the occasion of our tenth anniversary, we are finishing these days our “tour” in all 24 translation units, where we give one-hour presentations of all resources, tools and services that we provide. Additionally, we constantly publish posts in the internal portal as well as communicate with the terminologists through an internal communication platform.

What are some of the terminology tools and services provided to translators and other users by TermCoord or other EU projects that could possibly be useful for the users in the Slovenian Armed Forces?

In the European Parliament, we have developed three search tools, which are available on our public website http://termcoord.eu. These include the searchable list of some 250 glossaries issued by all EU Institutions in the 24 languages; the tool GlossaryLinks in which you can search for terminology in more than 5000 public multilingual glossaries that we collect, evaluate and upload, and the DocHound where we collect and constantly update the links to all documents published by all EU Institutions translated in all 24 languages and thus ideal for a terminology research. Our website that is the only official public EU website on terminology, there are a lot of resources in all domains, such as language specific resources, and the content of the TermFolders that we prepare for our translators on various topics as a proactive terminology service. All these resources are easily accessible and can be used by the linguistic service of the Slovenian Armed Forces.

You visited Slovenia and the Slovenian Armed Forces as a guest speaker at the conference on the achievements and challenges of Slovene military terminology, where you presented your much valued experiences. From your point of view, what could be possible ways of cooperation of the Slovenian Armed Forces and TermCoord regarding the management of Slovene military terminology?

Let’s
The Slovenian Armed Forces are perhaps the unique Ministry in this domain having a so important linguistic service dealing with terminology. We already work very closely with the Terminology Service of NATO. Military terminology has a big advantage that it is normative terminology, meaning that there is always one established term. This is very important for the use of termbases for the CAT-tools and machine translation where you have to provide only one and correct solution. Furthermore, military terminology covers a lot of domains such as denomination of weapons, but also robotics, informatics, telecommunications and many others. We have already discussed and planned a terminology project with your services based on the rules applied to our numerous projects with universities. The idea is to create a bilingual database with English as source language and Slovene, possibly also in collaboration with NATO and to add afterwards all EU languages and insert it as a special collection in IATE, the EU terminology database.

In Slovene military terminology, there is an impression that time pressure and differing perspectives of linguists and “users” sometimes hinder the process of thorough development and management of terminology. The influence of foreign languages (mainly English) is therefore still overly present. What is your opinion and experience in this respect? What could be possible solutions to streamline the terminology development process and satisfy both requirements – language accuracy and time efficiency?

In the EU, we had for years dealt with a discrepancy between linguists producing terminology and the citizens using this terminology, which resulted in the phenomenon of Eurojargon, which uses often invented and incomprehensible terms. Now, after the national administrations have had a long contact with the EU legislation, a lot of terminology that we insert in IATE is produced in the Member States. We call this descriptive terminology instead of the prescriptive attitude of the past. Our database is multilingual and the good entries, the ones with three or four stars cover most languages. The usual source language is indeed English as it is also the language in which some 80% of the original texts are drafted, but we also have entries with a so called “problem term” as a starting point in another language. With the new interlinking possibilities, the efficiency of terminology work will constantly increase. To illustrate, we connect the new IATE that has been presented by my colleague Darija Brinc directly with EurLex for the references and definitions or with several databases through APIs or web-services. To conclude, in the following years, terminology will be a very important instrument to support the technical evolution of translation and of multilingual communication in the globalized world.

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