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<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/interpretation/en/introduction.html>



The European Parliament has one of the largest interpreting services in the world. Interpreters play an important role in ensuring effective communication in this unique institution which works every day in 24 languages.

The original official languages of the European Communities were the four languages of the founding states: German, French, Dutch and Italian. At that time there were 12 possible language combinations.

New languages were added with successive enlargements:

- 1973: English and Danish (plus Irish/Gaelic, but only for Ireland's act of accession and the basic texts), so 4 + 2 = 6 official languages and 30 language combinations.
- 1981: Greece = 7 official languages and 42 language combinations.
- 1986: Spanish and Portuguese = 9 official languages and 72 language combinations.
- 1995: Finnish and Swedish = 11 official languages and 110 language combinations.
- 2004: Estonian, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Czech, Slovak and Slovene = 20 official languages and 380 language combinations.
- 2007: Romanian, Bulgarian and Irish = 23 official languages and 506 language combinations.
- 2013: Croatian = 24 official languages and 552 language combinations.

In addition to the official languages, the languages of the candidate countries are also very often used, as well as Russian, Chinese, Arabic, Japanese, etc.

Interpreting enables Members of the European Parliament to understand and communicate with each other.

- **Active language:** target language (the language the Members hear);
- **Passive language:** source language (the language the Members speak);
- **Relay:** indirect interpreting into the lesser-used languages;
- **Retour:** also used for the lesser-used languages, where interpreters work both into and out of their active language.

An interpreter's language combination is made up of all their passive and active languages.

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